

## **Chapter 9: Downtown Transit Hub Alternatives**

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This chapter evaluates Bangor’s current transit hub location at Pickering Square and examines whether other sites might be more suitable for Bangor’s future. Seven locations were assessed, including the current Pickering Square transit facility.

The consultants found that the current site is superior in most respects to the six alternative locations. Instead of moving the transit hub, they recommend that the city of Bangor take steps to enhance the Pickering Square facility by developing the unfinished space underneath the adjacent parking garage. This might involve a public market with a variety of commercial vendors. Federal transportation funds may be available to construct a larger and more comfortable public area for use by bus riders, shoppers, and other pedestrians.

The chapter includes four sections:

- Section 9.1 Selection criteria
- Section 9.2 Evaluation of current site
- Section 9.3 Review of six alternate locations
- Section 9.4 Recommendations

### **9.1 Evaluation Criteria**

The consulting team identified a list of features that are important for a successful downtown transit hub facility. These features include:

1. A central location within easy walking distance of downtown store, restaurants, and offices
2. Space for at least six buses, with room for future expansion
3. Easy, safe, and convenient transfers between buses
4. Minimum disruption of existing traffic flows
5. Minimum loss of existing parking
6. Opportunities for efficient routing and scheduling of buses
7. Opportunities for developing a heated waiting area with restrooms
8. Convenient wheelchair and pedestrian access
9. Suitability within the downtown urban landscape

These criteria are used in Section 9.1 to evaluate the existing Pickering Square location. The six alternate sites are addressed in Section 9.2.

## 9.2 Evaluation of Current Site

1. Central location – The Pickering Square transit hub is located within easy walking distance of West Market Square, downtown Main Street, and banks and offices on both sides of the Kenduskeag River. While city hall, the library, and the post office can be reached on foot, this involves a walk of several blocks. A free downtown shuttle proposed in Chapter 7 is designed to provide improved access to these Harlow Street destinations.
2. Space for buses – Pickering Square has room for the existing vehicle fleet. A downtown shuttle route could be added, with a bus stop on Water Street.
3. Easy transfers – A key feature of the Pickering Square facility is the ability for buses to wait in adjacent lanes. Passengers have a shorter distance to walk between buses. Waiting passengers can see the location of different buses. And they can transfer between buses without crossing busy traffic lanes. On a less positive note, cars approaching the entrance to the Pickering Square parking garage use the same travel lane as buses, and this can cause delays for automobiles and a safety hazard for transferring bus passengers.
4. Minimize traffic disruption – Buses at Pickering Square are separated from major traffic flows on nearby urban thoroughfares. Buses do share travel lanes with cars approaching the downtown parking garage. This can result in confusion for some visitors, occasional delays for cars that arrive when buses are departing, and some pedestrian/auto safety concerns.
5. Minimize loss of existing parking – While the existing bus facility uses space that could be used for parking, there is ample parking available in the adjacent downtown parking garage.
6. Efficient bus routing – Some scheduling delays result from the fact that buses must travel via Water Street from either Main Street or Washington Street to reach the Pickering Square hub. In particular, this location adds time to the Center Street and Mount Hope routes. This study proposes changes to both of these routes to improve their ability to arrive and depart Pickering Square in a timely fashion.
7. Heated waiting area – A heated waiting area with passenger restrooms is available for bus passengers in the adjacent parking structure. This facility is small, and it is not particularly comfortable or visually appealing.
8. Pedestrian and wheelchair access – Pedestrian islands and curb cuts provide pedestrians and wheelchair users with relatively easy and safe access to waiting buses.
9. Impact on the urban landscape – Although it is located next to a small park, the current bus depot includes minimal visual enhancements. The predominant landscape feature is concrete. The unfinished underside of the adjacent parking garage is particularly

problematic. The raw concrete and gravel is inhospitable, and feels more like a highway underpass than a passenger-friendly terminal. The setting, coupled with the fact that many bus users are low-income residents, may discourage some middle-class residents from taking advantage of the bus service.

### **9.3 Review of Six Alternate Locations**

In addition to the current site, six alternate downtown Bangor locations were evaluated:

1. Current Pickering Square transit hub
2. State Street, between West Market Square and Exchange Street
3. Harlow Street, in front of Bangor City Hall
4. Central Street, between Harlow Street and West Market Square
5. Harlow Street, adjacent to the Bangor Library
6. A city-owned lot near Exchange and Washington Streets
7. May Street, near Main and Union Streets

A map showing these seven locations is presented in Figure 9.1. Strengths and weaknesses of the six alternative sites are summarized in the following tables.

## 2. STATE STREET

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
1. Central location	Buses used this location prior to moving to Pickering Square. It is within walking distance of downtown destinations on both sides of the Kenduskeag River.	There are few pedestrian-friendly destinations or accommodations along this stretch of State Street.
2. Space for buses	Buses will fit.	But a long single-file line of buses will result.
3. Easy transfers		Buses form a long single line, which results in long walks and potential confusion for some transferring riders
4. Traffic impact		State Street is a wide and busy downtown thoroughfare, with heavy and relatively fast-moving traffic.
5. Parking impact		Parking would be lost along the east side of State Street
6. Bus routing	For some routes, access and egress would be easier and faster than Pickering Square.	
7. Waiting area		There are no obvious options for a permanent passenger shelter.
8. Access		Wheelchair access may be difficult due to narrow sidewalks.
9. Urban landscape		In the past, a temporary passenger shelter was constructed on the Kenduskeag bridge. This detracted from the visual landscape.

### 3. HARLOW STREET / CITY HALL

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
1. Central location	This location is closer to the library, the post office, and city hall, with reasonable pedestrian access to West Market Square.	
2. Space for buses	Six buses will fit.	But a long single-file of buses will result, and there does not appear to be room for expansion without extending beyond City Hall on Harlow Street.
3. Easy transfers		Buses form a long single line, which results in long walks and potential confusion for some transferring riders
4. Traffic impact		This section of Harlow Street is part of a busy downtown thoroughfare. Some departing buses will need to cross multiple lanes to turn left on Central Street.
5. Parking impact		A significant amount of parking would be lost in front of City Hall. There are few available alternatives for residents who need to transact business with city departments.
6. Bus routing	Center Street, Mount Hope, and Old Town routes would be shortened somewhat.	
7. Waiting area	Bus passengers could use public facilities available at City Hall.	Waiting bus passengers may be disruptive to regular city business.
8. Access	Sidewalks around City Hall are accessible.	Pedestrians crossing Harlow Street may cause traffic delays and potential safety hazards.
9. Urban landscape	Buses would become a central feature of Bangor's landscape. More middle-class people might use buses based at City Hall.	

#### 4. CENTRAL STREET

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
1. Central location	Buses used this location as a hub prior to State Street. It provides easy pedestrian access to downtown locations on both sides of the Kenduskeag River.	
2. Space for buses	Buses will fit.	But a long single-file line of buses will result.
3. Easy transfers		Buses would form a long single line, which results in long walks and potential confusion for some transferring riders
4. Traffic impact		Central Street forms part of Bangor's central downtown rotary. Traffic is fairly heavy. In addition, vehicles typically shift lanes as they approach the intersection with Hammond Street.
5. Parking impact		Parking would be lost along one side of Central Street.
6. Bus routing	Access and egress would be better for some bus routes than the current Pickering Square site.	
7. Waiting area	It may be possible to purchase or lease a storefront facility for use as a passenger waiting area.	
8. Access		Narrow sidewalks may cause problems for wheelchairs and passing pedestrians.
9. Urban landscape	This site would underscore the significance of the bus program by making it a central feature of the downtown landscape.	Large transit buses will block the view of the adjacent park and nearby businesses. Buses may too visually imposing next to the neighboring structures.

## 5. HARLOW STREET / BANGOR LIBRARY

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
1. Central location	This location is close to City Hall, the post office, and the library.	It requires longer walk to West Market Square, banks, and other downtown offices
2. Space for buses		It may be necessary to use both sides of the street.
3. Easy transfers		Using both sides of the street will cause pedestrian safety issues as transferring passengers cross this busy roadway.
4. Traffic impact		This busy downtown thoroughfare is relatively narrow.
5. Parking impact		Parking would be lost along a portion of Harlow Street
6. Bus routing		<b>Caphart, Hammond Street, Hamden, and Brewer buses cannot exit this location without following a circuitous route via Cumberland and Broadway.</b>
7. Waiting area		There are no obvious locations for a new waiting area. Passengers would likely use library restrooms and may be disruptive of regular library functions.
8. Access		Narrow sidewalks may cause problems for wheelchairs and passing pedestrians.
9. Urban landscape		Harlow Street may be too narrow to comfortably accommodate loading zones for large transit buses.

## 6. EXCHANGE AND WASHINGTON STREETS

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
1. Central location		<p>While this city-owned land is adjacent to the downtown, it would require significantly longer walks to most downtown destinations.</p> <p>It may prove difficult to include this site on the route of a downtown shuttle linking the waterfront with the downtown center and destinations on Harlow Street. A resulting route would likely be longer, more circuitous, and more expensive to operate.</p>
2. Space for buses	It should be possible to develop an off-road bus terminal at this location.	
3. Easy transfers	A new facility could be designed to accommodate easy transfers.	
4. Traffic impact		Buses would be subject to delays at the intersection of Exchange and Washington, especially if multiple buses use this intersection to exit the new facility.
5. Parking impact		
6. Bus routing		This location would add time to the Capehart and Hammond Street routes. Inbound routing for the Center Street bus will be problematic, because traffic at the foot of Center Street must turn right into the downtown rotary.
7. Waiting area	It should be possible to construct a passenger waiting area on this site.	
8. Access	Fully accessible boarding areas could be constructed.	It may prove difficult for persons in wheelchairs to travel between this site and central downtown destinations.
9. Urban landscape		

## 7. MAY STREET NEAR MAIN AND UNION STREETS

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
1. Central location		<b>This site would result in significantly longer walks to most downtown destinations. It is too far from the downtown center, and it is located on the wrong side of busy Union Street.</b>
2. Space for buses		
3. Easy transfers		
4. Traffic impact		
5. Parking impact		
6. Bus routing		This location would add too many minutes to the Center Street, Mount Hope, and Old Town routes. Access and egress would be difficult, with delays caused by the traffic signal at Union and Main Streets.
7. Waiting area		
8. Access		
9. Urban landscape		The bus hub would no longer be a visible feature of the central downtown landscape.

## 9.4 Recommendations

Review of alternate locations suggests that Bangor's regional transit system should continue to use the current Pickering Square hub facility.

While the Central Street and City Hall sites are somewhat more centrally located, Pickering Square has a number of distinct advantages. The location is removed from busy downtown thoroughfares, and provides convenient transfer opportunities for passengers without interfering with vehicle and pedestrian traffic and without disrupting an already limited supply of downtown parking. Added features include an existing waiting area with public restrooms, and pedestrian islands that safely accommodate wheelchair passengers.

The main problems with the existing location appear to involve its proximity to the unfinished underside of the adjacent parking garage. The raw appearance of the site is aggravated by the fact that collections of low-income bus riders congregate alongside the parking structure while waiting for departing buses.

(A separate issue involves confusion caused by the fact that cars approaching the parking garage share travel lanes with buses.)

The alternative hub locations reviewed in this study appear to create more problems than they solve. Instead of moving to a less advantageous location, the consultants suggest that Bangor and its transit partners look for ways to improve the Pickering Square facility. Ideally, this would involve three related efforts:

- Find commercial uses for the space beneath the parking garage deck adjacent to the transit hub. This could take the form of a public market, with space leased to a variety of vendors.
- Obtain Federal Transit Administration funding for construction of a larger and more comfortable passenger waiting area as part of this development. This public space should be designed for use by shoppers and other downtown pedestrians, in addition to bus passengers.
- Develop a plan to improve the landscaping around bus loading areas, with more attractive walkways, benches, lighting, and related amenities.

The largest obstacle to this proposed strategy is likely to be the economic viability of the suggested commercial development. It may be possible to reduce the financial risk by obtaining a federal transportation grant to develop an improved transportation hub. Vendors could perhaps become tenants of an enhanced transportation facility – similar to the way shops and vendors are tenants of railroad terminals in larger urban centers.

Another way to improve the appearance of Pickering Square and its potential as a commercial center is to continue efforts to upgrade and enhance the overall Bangor bus

program. Just as an improved transit hub will influence more middle-class residents to take advantage of the bus service, an enhanced bus system with more middle-class riders will influence more potential commercial tenants to consider locating a business in a Pickering Square facility.

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