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Lyons: C&J parking and sustainable transportation on the Seacoast

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Guest Columnist

AI-assisted summary

- C&J bus terminal at Pease will begin charging for parking to address overcrowding, with potential for some revenue to support transportation initiatives.
- The new parking fees present an opportunity to improve alternative transportation options to the terminal, such as bus connections, bike access, and ride-sharing.

As a longtime loyal C&J bus rider to Logan and commuting to Boston, I noted the Jan. 13 shift to [replace free parking](#) at the Portsmouth Pease terminal with a \$4 daily charge; valet parking is \$8 per day, and a round trip to South Station is \$38 (discounts for regular commuters).

While the new charges should solve the immediate problem of overcrowded lots, this is a good time to consider how to improve convenient, affordable, and safe alternatives to reach the C&J terminals. And more broadly, what are forward-looking opportunities for a more sustainable Seacoast multimodal system, including C&J as a major public transit provider, to reduce traffic and carbon emissions, improve air quality, and provide affordable mobility?



Under a new 30-year lease, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation and Pease Development Authority provide 14 acres to C&J at Pease for parking, C&J will pay \$32,465 in rent, rising annually, with 6% of gross parking sales divided between NHDOT and PDA. C&J will use parking revenues to improve parking and other facilities and: “A portion will go directly to the state, PDA, local municipalities, and other State and local Transportation programs....” (Seacoastonline 12/18/24 and 1/12/25, C&J website).

According to principles of transportation planning, free parking can lead to overuse of this scarce public resource, including what C&J describes as misuse by non-riders. Parking fees will incentivize Pease

parkers to find alternatives to driving to the terminal if there are convenient, affordable and safe options.

C&J is a private company under contract to NHDOT to provide public transit. Along with COAST, UNH Wildcat, and the Downeaster train, C&J receives a large share of federal funds available for public transit on the Seacoast, in addition to use of the publicly owned parking lots and terminal at Pease. Under the most recent multi-year contract available on-line, NHDOT provided C&J with \$4,620,867 in Section 5307 and other federal funds to “... support daily commuter bus service between Dover and Portsmouth and Boston ... the public has come to value and rely on these transit services for commuting to work and for leisure travel, and the service provides the added environmental benefit of reducing single-occupancy vehicle usage, thus significantly reducing traffic congestion...and carbon emissions.” (NHDOT/C&J contract 2/15/24).

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There is great potential to build on the low level of public transit use and biking in the Seacoast; in Portsmouth each is only 1% of total trips (Census data Bike and Pedestrian Plan analysis). As with public transit nationally, C&J’s Boston commute ridership appears to have declined significantly following the pandemic and remote work trend as reflected reductions from about six trips each in the a.m. and p.m. peaks, some with double-decker buses, to two to three trips.

Last year the Portsmouth City Council approved a Climate Action Plan with ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, identifying transportation as the major source of community emissions at 60%.

The CAP's carbon reduction strategies include expanded walking, biking, and public transit, and exploring innovative forms of public transit to provide attractive options to personal vehicles.

[\(Portsmouth's Climate Future\)](#)

As a step in implementing the CAP, the council included a study in the upcoming capital improvement plan of feasibility of "microtransit" (buses with flexible schedules and routes) or a shuttle loop bus directly connecting major Portsmouth locations – C&J, downtown, schools, and jobs and housing on major corridors. These initiatives support the council's priority goals, which include integrating sustainability and climate change mitigation throughout the community and exploring opportunities to support all modes of transportation. (City of Portsmouth.)

The following is "food for thought" on C&J's valuable role in a more sustainable Seacoast multimodal system:

NHDOT, COAST, and the Rockingham Planning Commission, Portsmouth and other cities and towns, could partner with C&J to identify opportunities to enhance convenient and affordable options to reach Pease without driving and parking.

To expand use of public transit for a range of purposes, NHDOT, the PDA, and C&J could consider investing some parking revenues on:

- More frequent bus connections to the Pease terminal, expanding incrementally based on ridership increases.
- Safer bicycle access to the terminals – improved bikeways, signage and maps, storage, possible future bike sharing.

- Reduced fares for children, students, and seniors for single day trips to Boston.
- Include discounted or free parking on single day round trips to Boston.
- Explore combined tickets and fares from Logan, South Station, and New York City for seamless transfers between C&J and COAST or ride share providers using app platforms.
- Explore options with partners and hospitality industry to invest in and market “car-free tourism” from Logan and South Station to Pease and downtown Portsmouth.
- C&J could coordinate with COAST, the Rockingham Planning Commission, and Portsmouth on the microtransit/shuttle loop feasibility study on options to directly connect major Portsmouth corridors to C&J.
- Enhance information on C&J, COAST, and other websites on access to Pease terminal without driving and parking, including first-mile, last-mile connections to COAST.

William Lyons is a Portsmouth resident, transportation planner, and volunteer on New Hampshire and city sustainability, climate change and transportation initiatives.