



DATE: August 25, 2017
TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Barrow Emerson, Planning & Development Manager
**SUBJECT: ACCEPT AND FILE METRO SERVICE PLANNING STATUS REPORT –
COMPREHENSIVE OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS ONE YEAR LATER**

I. RECOMMENDED ACTION

This report is for informational purposes only. No action is required.

II. SUMMARY

- It has been almost one year since the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) service reduction of September 8, 2016.
- Transit industry standards suggest there is a minimum level of per trip ridership (10-15 boardings per trip), which is considered effective and not all of METRO routes achieve this level. At the same time there are services without necessary capacity to meet demand levels comfortably.
- The METRO Planning Department has identified priorities for additional service (specific routes and increased daily span of service) when, or if, additional recurring operating funds were to become available.
- The Planning Department has established specific routes and geographic areas that will be the focus of service planning activities for the next four quarterly service changes, including consideration of limited reallocation of resources from low performing routes to ones in need of additional capacity and/or span of service.
- In addition to ongoing service modifications, the Planning Department has a number of other significant initiatives it is managing during the next fiscal year, as identified in this report.
- Staff requests the Board accept and file this Service Planning Update.

III. DISCUSSION/BACKGROUND

Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA)

Almost a year ago, on September 8, 2016, METRO implemented a significant fixed-route service reduction.

As a reminder, to address a structural operating budget deficit, METRO reduced weekday trips by 13% and weekend trips by 31%. In most cases entire routes were

not eliminated, but daily spans of service and/or frequency were reduced. Although it was unfortunate that METRO had to reduce service, the drop in ridership (6% on weekdays and 18% on weekends) suggests a relatively accurate approach to selecting which trips to eliminate. Staff also believes that had we not experienced the severe inclement weather of January and February 2017, the ridership loss would have been even less.

Current Route Performance

Quarterly, including on this August 25th agenda, the Planning Department provides the Board with a ridership report, including an analysis of route performance as expressed by the average boardings per trip on each route. (See Exhibit A)

In the transit industry, a rule of thumb is that there needs to be an average of approximately 10-15 boardings per trip for a service to be considered effective, depending on the type of service (rural, local, regional, intercity). In general, most METRO routes perform well, which suggest that generally the level of service is correct, relative to demand and financial capacity to provide service.

METRO has a small number of routes that don't achieve these transit industry standards. There are also some routes that, although they have reasonable overall boardings per trip averages, have segments with extremely limited boardings, which suggest possible realignments or truncation of the route(s). Among these are:

- Routes 33 and 34, which are school oriented trips in the San Lorenzo Valley with extremely low ridership.
- Route 79, which although its has a somewhat acceptable level of boardings per trip for a local lifeline service, has a loop segment to Pajaro with almost no boardings.
- Route 55, which has a segment that only runs a few times a day, again with limited boardings.

Conversely, as shown in Exhibit A, in terms of average boardings per trip, there are three routes (69A, 69W, 71) that have average boardings per trip of around 30, which gets close to the seated capacity of a bus. These routes are good candidates for higher frequency service.

Now that the performance of METRO's routes has generally stabilized, the Planning Department sees an opportunity to recommend consideration of the reallocation of trips from low performers to services in need of additional capacity.

Priorities for Additional Service

As is standard transit industry practice, the Planning Department maintains a prioritized list of service needs, sometimes referred to as "unmet needs", so that if at anytime there is additional recurrent operating funds available for the introduction of

additional effective service, the priorities are clear. Currently, the Planning Department sees the following needs as the most important:

- Route 71 frequency – The additional Bus Operator the Board recently directed be added using Measure D funds is committed to Route #71 weekend frequency to address overcrowding issues, in part caused by demand for access to the Flea Market. Additional frequency increases in the Watsonville – Santa Cruz corridor would include consideration adjustments to Routes 69A and 69W service as well.
- Route 35/35A evening frequency – As this San Lorenzo Valley (SLV) route alternately serves two legs beyond Boulder Creek, the limited evening frequency makes for extremely poor level of service on these legs.
- Span of service across the system - In a number of corridors service starts too late in the morning or ends too early in the evening to meet work trip commute needs, particularly for those in the service industry; as well as general mobility needs of County residents.
- Rural routes with limited daily trips.

Fiscal Year (FY) 2017-18 Service Planning Activities

As shown in the recently adopted 5-year budget, METRO has stabilized its fixed-route service level at a financially sustainable level for the near term. Within this context of limited expansion capacity, METRO will still work to improve services where possible, through re-allocation of resources from poor performing services to those in need of additional capacity, to avoid adding additional operating costs.

METRO service changes occur four times a year; through the Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer Bids.

The Summer 2017 Bid consisted of only the suspension of school oriented services for the summer and minor trip travel times to address summer specific traffic conditions.

The only significant service change for the Fall 2017 Bid is the introduction of Route #22, which will provide service between the Long Marine Lab/Coastal Science Building and the UCSC Main Campus, also providing much needed capacity along the Western Drive corridor.

The following are the focus areas for service planning efforts over the next year:

- Winter 2017-18
 - UCSC Articulated Bus Pilot project – Introduction of a six-month pilot project using three leased buses to address capacity issues on existing routes.
 - Poor performing routes

- Routes 33/34 – Staff is working with the SLV school district to inform parents of the risk to these services. METRO staff will be monitoring the performance of these routes during the Fall school semester to determine whether to continue these services beyond that time.
- Route 55 – Staff will be monitoring ridership on the Via Pacifica variant leg of this route which operates 3 times per weekday and on both Saturday and Sunday two trips.
- Route 79 – As part of planning for introduction of the new electric bus on a Watsonville Circulator route in 2018-19, METRO will consider modifications to this route, including elimination of the Pajaro loop, which is also served by Monterrey-Salinas Transit (MST).
- Highway 17 Express – Staff will consider changing the mix of trips serving Scotts Valley and those providing only San Jose to Santa Cruz express service (with NO Scotts Valley service).
- Spring/Summer 2018
 - Routes 35/35A - There are a number of issues related to Scotts Valley/San Lorenzo Valley service including:
 - Limited evening frequency.
 - Service on Scotts Valley Drive is in only one direction (outbound from Santa Cruz).
 - Opportunities related to the repopulation of the former “Borland” campus by UCSC and other increases in employment, housing, and commercial properties in the area.
- Summer/Fall 2018
 - Watsonville Circulator –METRO received a 2016 Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) grant for an electric bus from the State to operate as a Watsonville Circulator, intended to link common origins and destinations around Watsonville at a convenient frequency. Outreach for planning of this initiative will start soon with instigation of the service to be based on the delivery date of the new electric bus.
 - Preliminary information suggests that the Monterey Bay Air Resources District will soon award METRO with \$200,000 in funding for the initial year of operation of this service.

METRO has also received a 2017 LCTOP grant for \$240,000 which can be used for, along with future year grants, towards an additional electric bus or continued operating subsidy for the Circulator.

Other Planning Department Initiatives

In addition to the basic ongoing service modifications, the Planning Department is developing the following significant planning initiatives:

- Fare Restructure – In December 2017, staff will initiate a discussion with the Board related to fare structure and opportunities for fare payment technology improvements and then work with the Board Finance and Budget Committee Standing Committee in the first quarter of 2018 to explore fare restructuring recommendations.
- On-board survey – a dearth of data about our rider’s demographics, travel patterns, customer satisfaction, and technological capacity impacts our ability to make effective improvements. An on-board survey, METRO’s first since 2012, will be implemented this fall to learn more about these issues, along with issues related to fare payment methods.
- Pacific Station long-term planning – Staff will continue to investigate, in conjunction with the City of Santa Cruz, downtown service planning protocols and opportunities for cooperative facility development strategies.
- Transportation Network Companies (TNC) – Many transit districts are starting to use TNCs such as Uber and Lyft to supplement their fixed-route and paratransit services. Staff will investigate opportunities for METRO to use these types of services.
- American Public Transit Association (APTA) Universities Conference – METRO is committed to hosting this significant 2018 APTA event, at which METRO can highlight its working relationships with UCSC, Cabrillo College, and San Jose State University.
- Hwy 1 Bus On Shoulders – Staff will continue to investigate opportunities for transit priority in this corridor. The feasibility report should be ready for Board review in mid-2018.
- Ongoing coordination with UCSC and Cabrillo – UCSC will be holding a student transportation fee ballot measure in May 2018 and Cabrillo’s two-year initial student bus pass program concludes this time next year, at which time METRO will need to negotiate a new contract with the College.
- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) – Staff is working with the City of Santa Cruz on concepts for a downtown employee bus pass as part of a TDM program.
- Marketing – Staff will promote growing initiatives, including the employer/employee commute tax benefit program.

- Unified Corridor Study – Staff will continue to participate in, this critically important planning analysis, led by the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), on the future transportation uses of the Highway 1, the Soquel/Freedom corridor, and the rail right-of-way.
- Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) and Automatic Passenger Counting (APC) - The Planning and Information Technology (IT) Departments will continue to investigate opportunities to introduce this technology to improve operational efficiency, data gathering and analysis, and provide a customer facing Predictive Arrival and Departure System (PADS).

IV. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS/IMPACT

There is no financial impact related to this status report

V. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

There are no alternatives to consider.

VI. ATTACHMENTS

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Exhibit A: Quarterly Average Ridership by Route Report

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