

MENDOCINO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Approved MINUTES

Transit Productivity Committee - TPC
May 12, 2023

Primary Location:

Mendocino Transit Authority
Conference Room, 241 Plant Road, Ukiah

Teleconference Locations:

Redwood Coast Senior Center, 490 N. Harold St., Fort Bragg
Harrah Senior Center, 1501 Baechtel Road, Willits

General Public Teleconference by Zoom

PRESENT:

MCOG Board Members: Dan Gjerde, Mike Carter
MTA Board Members: [Note Director Gjerde doubles as MTA Board Member]
Senior Centers Rep.: Richard Baker, Willits Seniors; Jill Rexrode, Redwood Coast Seniors (Alt.)
Staff & Others: Nephele Barrett, Janet Orth, and Jody Lowblad, MCOG
Jacob King and Mark Harvey, MTA

ABSENT:

Bruce Richard, MTA

1. Call to Order. Chair Gjerde called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Participants on the call were identified: Mike, Jacob, Janet and Jody in Ukiah; Richard in Willits; Dan and Jill in Fort Bragg; and Nephele and Mark joining by Zoom. It was determined that a quorum of three voting members was present, representing all parties (MCOG, MTA and Senior Centers).

3. Review and Recommendation on MTA's Analysis and Prioritization of 2023/24 Unmet Transit Needs.

Janet reviewed the annual process, current status and the recommended action. Included in the agenda packet was MTA's analysis of the list of all testimony compiled by MCOG from the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC), Mendocino Transit Authority (MTA) and the February public hearing. The report was ranked by five categories: *High Priority* (2), *Medium Priority* (3), *Low Priority* (3), *Already Exists* (2), and *Not Feasible* (2) for a total of 12 needs. Jacob then reviewed each need on the list, with group discussion. He noted "priority" did not mean the needs were not important, only less feasible at this time.

- "High Priority–Consider for FY 2023/24" – **#S-3**, for service to/from Humboldt County, MTA is working on developing with Humboldt Transit Authority (HTA) and Caltrans. There are no bus stops yet in Leggett or Piercy, and MTA is looking for a new bus stop location in Laytonville. The cost would be covered by HTA from grant funds, with no cost to MTA. This could serve more connections than Route 65, which is funded by FTA 5311(f) Intercity program. Current Greyhound service is not affordable for many riders. **#P-2**, for later work-shift service between Mendocino and Fort Bragg, can be served as MTA is reinstating another Route 65 round trip, to depart Mendocino at 7:30pm. Estimated cost for the full route is \$246,000, already in MTA's Operations budget for 2023/24.
- "Medium Priority–Consider for FY 2023/24" – **#S-4** would be premature for these five communities currently under review by MCOG's Mobility Solutions feasibility study, with a report of options due out in August; some service could start in FY 2024/25. These are being tracked on the list as important needs that are brought up each year. **#M-3** is of great need locally for the transit dependent to have service on Saturday in Willits; MTA will continue to study feasibility and ridership demand. **#M-4**, Brooktrails commuter connection can go in the same category as Mobility Solutions needs.
- "Low Priority– Consider for FY 2023/24" – **#S-2**, Westport/North Coast limited service requires more study of potential ridership; MTA will meet with Westport Municipal Advisory Council to consider various options. **#S-5**, to restore Ukiah Valley evening service for workers, could be feasible next fiscal year, though not yet due to the driver shortage. MTA is actively recruiting. **#S-6**, Anderson Valley to the coast with same-day return, would be very costly and just one person is known to have requested this; MTA will continue to study feasibility and demand.

- “Already Exists” – #S-1, Wednesday service for Senior Center transportation is served by MTA’s fixed route and Dial-a-Ride (DAR). Jacob brought this back on the list, recognizing the differences between needed door-thru-door service as compared to DAR’s curb-to-curb. He encouraged Ukiah Senior Center to apply for FTA 5310 program funds. #M-2, Ukiah to Willits, is served by Route 65 and will have more trips in FY 2023/24.
- “Not Feasible” – #M-1, bus stop at Waugh Lane and Talmage Road, MTA has studied at length and determined to be unsafe for pedestrians. #P-1 addresses fare pricing issues; MTA is reviewing its fare policy, anticipating results in 2024/25. This is not an unmet need by definition.

Questions and discussion included:

- How did the Westport/North Coast need come up at the November SSTAC workshop? No one was sure. Are we hearing fewer requests post-pandemic in outlying areas? Yes. This need may have originated from people in the Leggett area, who lack transportation to government services. One idea is a loop that uses Branscomb Road, though might not be feasible. Population is aging there as in much of the coastal area; many have medical appointments in Fort Bragg and Ukiah. Potentially there could be a dispatch center on the coast. (Nephele, Jacob, Dan)
 - Earlier this week, the SSTAC met and recommended a finding that the top two “High Priority” needs are reasonable to meet. Would it be appropriate to budget the entire cost of reinstating a Route 65 trip at \$246,000/year, or a portion to meet that local need? MTA would estimate \$50,000 for that need to be met. (Janet, Nephele, Jacob)
 - The SSTAC had noted that #S-3 to Humboldt County is contingent on HTA receiving grant funds to pay for it, with action by HTA. Is it reasonable to meet in 2023/24 without bus stops ready? The HTA General Manager has confirmed that if they can hire enough drivers, they plan to start service January 1, 2024. (Nephele, Richard, Dan, Jacob)
 - If that need were met, it would provide the added benefit of new service for Laytonville, as HTA’s trip would pass through not only north, but also south to Ukiah and back. (Mike, Jacob)
- Chair Gjerde called for any public comment, with no one present requesting to speak to the matter.

Recommendations:

Upon motion by Carter, seconded by Baker, and carried unanimously by roll call vote (3 Ayes – Gjerde, Carter, and Baker; 0 Noes; 1 Absent), the TPC recommended a finding that “there are unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet” for Fiscal Year 2023/24, as identified on the FY 2023/24 list:

- #S-3 Affordable public transit link to Humboldt County, stopping in Piercy, Leggett, Laytonville – *contingent on grant award to Humboldt Transit Authority*
- #P-2 Fixed route timing that coincides with retail workforce shifts in the Fort Bragg/ Mendocino coast area.

4. Review and Recommendation on Fiscal Year 2023/24 Transit Claim. Janet summarized her written report, noting a lower revenue estimate for Local Transportation Funds (LTF) than for FY 2022/23, which was very high. Also a shortfall of \$185,956 is projected for 2022/23, which is proposed to be made up from 2023/24 revenues (new money), by reducing the funds for allocation. Also there is an audited surplus from 2021/22 available (old money), after flowing through the LTF Reserve calculation. The Executive Committee recommended a reserve of \$735,000, releasing for allocation up to \$425,024, depending on extend of shortfall in 2022/23. The proposed budget shows a Balance Available for Transit of \$4,353,031 from LTF, a decrease of 6.5% from the previous year. She expressed caution that this figure might come down slightly to help cover the shortfall. Actual revenues will be known in August, perhaps requiring a budget amendment. Fortunately, the State Controller’s estimate of State Transit Assistance (STA) from fuel taxes continues to rise.

A copy of MTA’s claim was included in the agenda packet. MTA claimed the full balance available. The senior centers receive the same percentage LTF increase or decrease as for MTA Operations, to fund their contracted transportation program. The total claim from both LTF and STA funds comes to \$6,502,064, less than one-half percent below the previous year’s total.

Assuming the recommended Unmet Transit Needs finding is made by MCOG’s Board, MTA would revise its LTF claim to show a separate amount for that. Discussion and questions included:

- How much to set aside for unmet needs? As discussed under Agenda item #3, MTA’s estimate of the coastal portion from Mendocino to Fort Bragg is \$50,000 to meet that need. This figure does not need to be exact, as it would be under the same PUC code section as Operations. (Janet, Nephele, Jacob)
- Moving this amount from Operations to Unmet Needs is not intended to impact the amount claimed for Senior Centers Operations. (Group)
- MTA expects to need the full amount claimed, as costs have risen. (Jacob)
- Capital Reserve funds are slated for projects in MTA’s five-year program, mainly to match grants for zero emission vehicles in the fleet. (Jacob)
- If the claim must be revised due to a revenue shortfall, would it also proportionately revise the Senior Centers portion? Review of latest report from County’s sales tax consultant, HDL, indicating revenues down six percent in third fiscal quarter in unincorporated area. Actuals fiscal year-to-date have fallen from February projections. (Nephele, Dan, Janet)
- Discussion of recommended action. What would be the process for a budget amendment? Not enough is known today to make an adjustment. MCOG’s board would address in October. (Group)

Recommendation:

Upon motion by Baker, seconded by Carter, and carried unanimously by roll call vote (3 Ayes – Gjerde, Carter, and Baker; 0 Noes; 1 Absent), the TPC recommended that MCOG identify \$50,000 of Local Transportation Funds for reasonable-to-meet Unmet Transit Needs in MTA’s FY 2023/24 allocation.

Local Transportation Fund (LTF)		
MTA Operations	3,621,782	
Unmet Transit Needs	50,000	
Senior Center Operations	681,249	
Total LTF		4,353,031
State Transit Assistance Fund (STA)		
MTA Operations	1,443,571	
MTA & Seniors Capital	0	
Transit Capital Reserve	0	
Total STA		1,443,571
Capital Reserve Fund (CRF)		
MTA Capital, Current Year	0	
Senior Capital, Current Year	0	
Long-Term Capital Reserve	705,462	
Total CRF		705,462
Total Recommended FY 2023/24 Transit Allocation		6,502,064

5. Review and Recommendation on MCOG Standards. Janet recapped her staff report, with staff’s recommendation that no revisions are needed this year to the adopted Transit Performance Standards. Passengers per Hour standards were adjusted last year. The performance review will show that none of the service types met that standard over the past three years; however, it would be premature to revise it again, while ridership is still recovering from pandemic conditions, across the entire public transit sector. Discussion included:

- Senior centers are starting to see more people coming out for activities and programs, across all services they provide including transportation. Numbers are not as high as expected, but are trending upward. (Richard)
- MTA reached a 50 percent mark in ridership for local Route 9 in Ukiah yesterday (4,500); while there is still more work to be done, this is a huge milestone. (Jacob)
- Cost per Hour standards are working well, due to past work to implement a routine. Farebox recovery ratio is ten percent for all service types, consistent with State law. The last of four standards is Cost per Passenger, a calculation of Passengers per Hour and Cost per Hour. (Janet)

Recommendation:

Upon motion by Baker, seconded by Carter, and carried unanimously by roll call vote (3 Ayes – Gjerde, Carter, and Baker; 0 Noes; 1 Absent), the TPC recommended keeping the existing standards, with no changes needed.

6. Annual Review of MTA Performance Reports Against MCOG Standards. Janet presented findings of her analysis, as documented in the written staff report, and recommended several actions to consider. In summary, the three-year average compared with last year’s review indicates no change in overall results. Her main observations were that 1) costs have dropped noticeably from the highest cost year in 2021, and 2) results indicate the ongoing need to rebuild ridership. Performance was good across the three-year period.

Service Type	2022 *	3-Yr Average
Dial-A-Ride (DAR) met one more standard in 2022 (Cost/Hour), maintained same 3-year average	2 of 3	2 of 3
Short Distance Bus Routes maintained the same 1-year and 3-year average	1 of 4	2 of 3
Long Distance Routes met one in 2022 (Cost/Hour), compared to one in 2021 (Farebox), maintained same 3-year average	1 of 4	3 of 3
Senior Centers maintained the same 1-year and 3-year average (Farebox, Cost/Hr)	1 of 4	2 of 3

* Note fourth standard applied where 2 of 3 not met; however, none met the fourth (Cost per Passenger.)

Discussion included:

- A typo in MTA’s raw data that skewed results for one of the senior centers was explained. (Janet)
- Applause for Redwood Coast and Willits senior centers for low cost and high ridership. Both met the standards in 2022 individually; quarterly internal reviews confirm these outcomes. Unfortunately, this annual review combines the data for all five centers. (Nephele, Janet)
- Expecting better numbers for Passengers per Hour in 2023. (Richard)
- Farebox ratio is allowed to include contributions such as advertising revenue. Willits seniors center has had Adventist Health advertisements for years. The recent performance audit confirmed that AB 149 now allows any non-state funds to be counted toward Farebox, such as FTA 5310 grants. (Dan, Richard, Janet)
- The latest CHP inspection of Redwood Coast Seniors vehicles informed for the first time that they must have the same information on each side of their busses, so now there is a cost for new skins. This will result in no space for advertising, due to number of seats classification for the bus; they have 11 seats. Willits center is not subject to same rule, with nine seats and no CHP inspection required; also drivers only need a standard license. (Jill, Richard)
- All agreed results showed good performance under current conditions. Discussion of possible productivity improvements. MTA is advertising to increase ridership, also has started contactless payment that accepts various payment methods such as phones and credit cards to help entice riders; still working through issues with the new technology. The Short Range Transit Development Plan update will do a better job of reviewing services for productivity improvements; the consultant is already working on this project, with results due a year from now. (Group)

Recommendation:

Upon motion by Baker, seconded by Carter, and carried unanimously by roll call vote (3 Ayes – Gjerde, Carter, and Baker; 0 Noes; 1 Absent), the TPC reported good performance while emerging from two years of the COVID pandemic.

– Annual Transit Performance Reviews (one year and three years) are attached

7. Miscellaneous / Members’ Concerns / Announcements. In brief discussion, it was agreed there was no need to meet again this year, having conducted all annual business today. Staff is able to deal with a budget amendment as needed, directly with the full board.

8. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.