



HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
Regional Transportation Planning Agency
Humboldt County Local Transportation Authority
Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies
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AGENDA ITEM 7a
HCAOG Board Meeting
November 16, 2017

DATE: November 6, 2017
TO: HCAOG Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)
FROM: Oona Smith, Senior Planner
SUBJECT: **Presentation and Review of Transit Development Plan (TDP) Update**

STAFF REPORT

Contents:

- Staff's Recommended Action
- Staff Summary
- Draft Final *Humboldt County Transit Development Plan 2017-2022* (prepared by LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.) *
- TDP 2017-2022 Appendices *
- Final Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) Strategic Plan *

* available online at <http://www.hcaog.net/calendar/date/hcaog-board-meeting-62>

Staff's Recommended Action:

1. Introduce the item as an action item;
2. Allow staff to present the item;
3. Receive public comment;
4. Consider making the motion, "I move that the PAC recommend the HCAOG Board approve and adopt the 5-year TDP update: *Humboldt County Transit Development Plan 2017-2022.*"

Staff Summary:

This fiscal year HCAOG is due to update the short-range (5 years) Transit Development Plan (TDP). For this update, HCAOG is incorporating two additional components into the TDP. The first is a 5-year Strategic Plan for the SSTAC, which will facilitate their primary duty to annually conduct the Unmet Transit Needs process. The second is a transit marketing plan, which will be informed by the recommendations approved in the TDP update. (The transit marketing plan is scheduled to be finished in the spring/summer of this fiscal year.)

HCAOG hired the consultant firm LSC Transit Consultants, Inc. to prepare the TDP, including the SSTAC Strategic Plan. Selena McKinney, Project Planner for LSC, will present the final draft to the Board. The LSC consultants have been working with the Service Coordinating

Committee (SCC) and the SSTAC in developing these drafts (originally presented to and reviewed by the SSTAC and SCC as Draft Technical Memos #1 and #2).

The *Humboldt County Transit Development Plan 2017-2022* describes and analyzes the following transit topics:

- Existing transit conditions in Humboldt County, including ridership patterns and transit performance, and results of on-board and on-line transit surveys.
- Service alternatives that analyzes different alternatives that could potentially address stakeholders' most common requests.
- Transit operators' short-term capital requirements.
- Financial considerations for transit operators and contracted services.
- A strategic plan to clarify definitions, duties, criteria, and reporting for the unmet transit needs process carried out by the SSTAC.

The SSTAC recommends the Board approve the recommendations of the *SSTAC Strategic Plan*, which are described in the TDP Chapter 10 of the same name. (The full report, *SSTAC Strategic Plan*, is a stand-alone document that describes the background and process of the SSTAC's strategic planning efforts in developing the plan.) Below is the text, from Chapter 10, of the recommended goal, policies, and definitions for the unmet transit needs process. If the HCAOG Board elects to adopt one or more recommendations in the Strategic Plan, the next step would be to adopt applicable changes in HCAOG's TDA Rules (Transportation Development Act).

SSTAC Strategic Plan: Recommended Definitions, Mission Statement/Goal, and Policies:
(excerpt from TDP Ch. 10)

SSTAC Strategic Plan recommends that HCAOG formally adopt policies and definitions for "Unmet Transit Need" and "Reasonable to Meet", along with a mission statement. The definitions derived at by the SSTAC are presented below. For a deeper understanding of the definitions, the reader is referred to the full SSTAC Strategic Plan report.

Definition of "Unmet Transit Need"

Unmet Transit Needs shall be defined as:

Unmet transit needs are, at a minimum:

(1) *Trips requested from residents who do not have access to public transportation, specialized transportation, or private transport services or resources for the purpose of traveling to medical care, shopping, social/recreational activities, education/training, and employment; or*

(2) *Proposed public transportation, specialized transportation, or private transport services that are identified in the following (but is not limited to): a Transportation Development Plan, Regional Transportation Plan, Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan.*

Additionally, the HCAOG TDA Rules stipulate that, for this process, unmet transit needs do not include the following:

- Improvements funded or scheduled for implementation in the next fiscal year.*

- Minor operational improvements or changes such as bus stops, schedules, and minor route changes.*
- Trips for primary or secondary school transportation.*
- Sidewalk improvements or street and road needs.*

“Minor operational improvements” are changes to service which do not affect the operating cost of the transit service either by requiring additional staff and/or additional vehicle hours of service or miles of service. As most of the costs associated with transit service are tied to the hours of service (such as driver wages) rather than the miles of service, the cost implications are minimal for service modifications that change miles but not hours of service.

Furthermore, the SSTAC agreed to drop “trips for purposes outside of Humboldt County” as an exclusion to unmet transit needs, and will in the future consider trips outside of the county as a potential unmet transit need.

Definition of “Reasonable to Meet”

The SSTAC has identified the following criteria for determining “Reasonable to Meet” transit needs.

Unmet transit needs may be found to be reasonable to meet by means of the following criteria:

- (1) To be considered reasonable to meet, a service must be operationally feasible and financially sustainable, as defined below:*
 - a. To be considered operationally feasible, the service must have adequate running time, adequate roadways, and must be safe to operate.*
 - b. To be considered financially sustainable, enough money should be available from identified sources of funding to pay for the marginal operating cost of the service continuously for three years.*
- (2) Additionally, to be considered “reasonable to meet” the service must be projected to meet a minimum “marginal farebox return ratio”¹⁰ of 10 percent within two years. If multiple competing services are requested, other factors such as estimated subsidy per passenger trip and passengers per vehicle hour of service may also be considered. Ridership and farebox return ratio thresholds will also be considered for continuing¹¹ newly-introduced services.*
- (3) Pursuant to the requirements of Transportation Development Act (TDA) Statutes (Public Utilities Code Section 99401.5 (c)), a determination of needs that are reasonable to meet shall not be made by comparing unmet transit needs with the need for streets and roads, for the allocation of TDA funds.*

¹⁰ The marginal farebox return ratio is determined by dividing the marginal fare revenue (that fare revenue collected specifically for the new service) by the marginal operating cost (the operating cost of the additionally provided service).

¹¹ Thresholds for services introduced as a means of meeting UTNs are discussed in the Policy Discussion of the SSTAC Strategic Plan.

(4) Once a service is determined to be “reasonable to meet” and is implemented, it can be expected that the ridership in the first 1-2 years of the new service will be less than the projected optimal ridership. Ridership should be evaluated at 6-month intervals to determine if service is meeting performance standards adopted by the transit provider, and specifically, whether the service meets a minimum 10 percent marginal farebox ratio. If the service is being adequately promoted and fails to be within 60 percent of the identified standards after six months, 90 percent within the first year, or 100 percent within two years, the service may be cancelled and deemed “no longer reasonable to meet.” An exception to this rule is when a community or group is willing to participate in sharing the ongoing cost of the new service.

Policy Review

Several policies were also reviewed and acted upon as described below.

- 1) Upon review of the options, the SSTAC decided to remove the exclusion and determine out-of-county trips as “reasonable to meet” on an equal footing with other identified, in-county requests.
- 2) At present, the SSTAC does not have any established goals or policies. Establishing goals and policies may help guide future discussions, particularly with regard to prioritizing between competing unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet. The SSTAC determined language found in the *Regional Transportation Plan (VROOM ... Variety in Rural Options in Mobility)* provides policy statements appropriate for Humboldt County, as follows:

GOAL: Achieve an integrated and sustainable multimodal transportation system that provides public transportation options for all users traveling in Humboldt County. Transit and paratransit users have options for affordable, reliable and efficient transit service that effectively meets their local and regional mobility needs.

Specific Public Transportation Objective: Expand and improve local and interregional transit services to improve mobility for people in Humboldt County.

Policy PT-1: To grow and meet transit demand, fund programs to increase trip frequency. Prioritize programs with the highest potential to increase ridership and reduce the number of single occupancy vehicle trips made in Humboldt County.

Policy PT-7: HCAOG shall evaluate and consider requests for extending service hours, expanding service area, and adding service frequency, based on the potential of the new service(s) to achieve minimum productivity standards.

- 3) Policy for Prioritizing New Service Requests: First, the SSTAC will use steps outlined in the Strategic Plan to verify claims of unmet need (see “Verifying Claims of Unmet Need” below). The

SSTAC will also use the clarified definitions in this Plan to better evaluate whether service requests are reasonable to meet, and will apply service standards to determine such. In particular, the new service will need to have a projected farebox ratio of 10 percent or better (based upon realistic analyses of potential ridership and costs).

In comparing the new service against other newly requested and existing services to determine which services as a whole will be funded, the SSTAC will use additional service standards (calculated by HCAOG with the assistance of operators) to formulate a service comparison. The SSTAC will then deliberate to recommend whether a service (1) meets the definition of “reasonable to meet” and (2) is prioritized for limited available funding.