



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 8a
HCAOG Board Meeting
March 19, 2026

DATE: March 11, 2026
TO: HCAOG Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)
FROM: Stephen Luther, Associate Regional Planner
SUBJECT: **Dial-a-Ride (DAR) Analysis Report**

DISCUSSION ITEM
STAFF REPORT

Staff Summary:

In 2024, HCAOG enlisted the support of researchers at the Western Transportation Institute (WTI) to analyze the Dial-a-Ride (DAR) system. WTI is based at Montana State University and provided technical assistance through funding received by the National Association of Development Organizations' Research Foundation. (The WTI team may sound familiar as they led and prepared the McKinleyville Transit Study in 2020).

DAR is the ADA-required paratransit service required within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of fixed-route transit. A&MRTS and ETS are the only two fixed-route systems, as RTS is classified as a commuter line. Therefore, the paratransit service mandated by the ADA is within the Arcata and Eureka boundaries. The region has historically funded additional non-mandated (also referred to as supplemental or premium) service zones that include Samoa, Humboldt Hill, Fields Landing, King Salmon, College of the Redwoods, Old Arcata Road, McKinleyville, Ridgewood Heights, and Elk River.

The report recommends the current funding split (currently 58% Eureka/HTA, 10% Arcata/HTA, 18% County, and 14% HCAOG) be switched to a mileage and hours-based allocation. According to the WTI analysis that looked at 3 months of DAR data from 2023, completed trips that began and ended within Eureka accounted for **45% of completed rides** but only 23% of total hours and 15% of miles. Together with rides within Arcata, the **service within the mandated areas accounts for 50% of the total rides and just 20% of the total hours/miles**. That leaves 80% of the hours/miles coming from trips that go between mandated zones (i.e. Eureka to Arcata) or begin/end in supplemental zones (i.e. Eureka to McKinleyville). The number of hours and miles is a primary driver of costs, so the recommendation of the report is to adjust the cost allocation to reflect where the hours and miles are coming from.

With regard to HCAOG contributing funds to supplemental DAR, the report proposes to remove HCAOG from the funding agreement for several reasons. It is uncommon for an RTPA to directly

contribute to transit operations. Disbursing funding directly to operators is a better practice, especially as the funding HCAOG uses for supplemental DAR is coming off the top of the region’s LTF funds which would otherwise go to general transit operational funding. Specifically, HCAOG’s share comes from Priority 4 of the LTF for Community Transit Services which is reserved for the Consolidated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA) and supplemental DAR. This priority is capped at 5% of the funds remaining after funding higher priorities. In recent years, the combined share for CTSA and supplemental DAR expenses have exceeded 5%. At the same time, HTA staff have noted that the administrative costs of serving as the CTSA often exceed the amount the contract amount.

The 2025-26 LTF estimate has \$5,286,512 remaining after funding HCAOG & AC, and the 2% Bike/Ped fund. The CTSA contract is \$141,361 and DAR \$132,639 for a total of \$274,000. Based on estimated LTF, this exceeds the 5% cap by close to \$10,000. In the FY 24-25 year, the actuals found the CTSA/DAR payments were \$16,000 over the 5% cap. Operating costs continue to rise while sales tax is trending flat or down, indicating that the funding need would continue to outpace the available revenue.

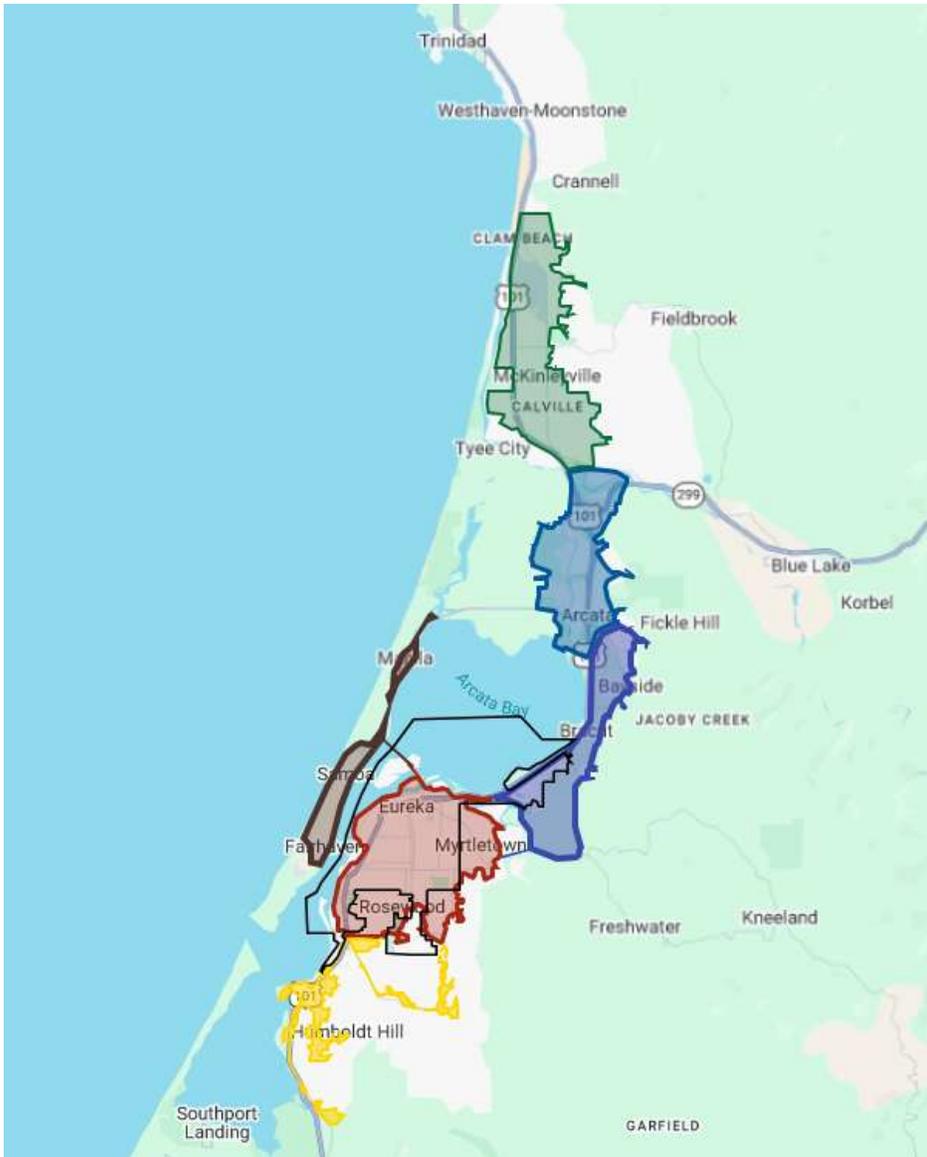
In terms of operations, HTA aims to provide the best service to as many riders as possible. Regularly occurring long-distance trips (i.e. Humboldt Hill to Mad River Hospital) tend to make DAR service less efficient due to the routing challenges it creates. In addition, the cost of funding the premium DAR service with the current allocation means that \$600,000 of Eureka’s LTF fund goes to DAR every year. This kind of structural funding impediment means that HTA needs to use grant funds just to maintain the Eureka Transit Service and has no funding to improve ETS.

The table below summarizes the conclusion of the report with respect to the cost share allocation based on hours and miles with the removal of HCAOG. It should be noted that the County does not have available funds to cover those additional costs and this is not a feasible recommendation. The prospect of reducing costs by reducing service to supplemental zones is not currently being considered, though service in supplemental zones may need to be scaled back in the future.

Entity	Existing Allocation	DAR Cost	WTI Allocation	Revised Cost
HTA	70%	\$ 661,731.00	21%	\$204,358.35
County	18%	\$ 178,765.00	79%	\$768,776.65
HCAOG	14%	\$ 132,639.00	0	0

Two other potential avenues to explore are 1) setting DAR policy to limit long-haul rides (those crossing two zones) and 2) setting fares higher for long distances. In discussions with HTA staff, the HTA Board, and the County, it was suggested that a positive step could be hiring a third-party consultant to provide more concrete solutions based on granular analysis. While much of this data is available from HTA and could be further analyzed with the assistance of HCAOG staff, we recognize the value in having changes to funding structures come from an outside source.

The item today is for discussion purposes to receive input from the PAC, and for the PAC to provide any thoughts on the next steps for staff. No action is required at this time.



Pictured above are the various zones for DAR and microtransit. Only the red around Eureka and blue around Arcata are required paratransit. The other zones shown are supplemental service zones that have been part of the region's DAR service since the 1990s.