



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
April 17, 2025

DATE: April 9, 2025
TO: HCAOG Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)
FROM: Michelle Nielsen, Contract Planner
SUBJECT: **FY 2025-26 Unmet Transit Needs (UTN) Report of Findings**

STAFF REPORT

Contents:

- Staff's Recommended Action
- Staff Summary
- FY 2025-26 Unmet Transit Needs Report of Findings

Staff's Recommended Action:

1. Introduce the item as an action item;
2. Allow staff to present the item;
3. Receive public comment;
4. After receiving public comment and discussing, make the following motion:
"The PAC recommends the HCAOG Board adopt the FY 25-26 Unmet Transit Needs Report of Findings determining there are unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet but cannot be funded."

Staff Summary:

As the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Humboldt County, HCAOG is responsible for the administration of Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds. Local Transportation Funds (LTF), which are funded through ¼ percent of the statewide sales tax and apportioned based on population, are the primary funding source for most transit systems. As part of its TDA duties, HCAOG is required to implement an annual unmet transit needs process which has three key components: soliciting testimony on unmet transit needs; analyzing needs in accordance with adopted definitions of unmet transit needs reasonable to meet; and adoption of a finding regarding unmet transit needs that may exist for the upcoming fiscal year. The Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) leads the unmet needs process. Unmet transit

needs findings (UTN) ensure that transit needs found reasonable to meet are funded prior to jurisdictions expending TDA funds on non-transit purposes.

Unmet Needs Reasonable to Meet Analysis:

HCAOG’s adopted definitions and criteria for unmet transit needs are on pages seven through nine of the attached Report of Findings (ROF). The criteria include the adopted standard for a minimum of two comments to demonstrate community support, and to include an analysis of performance measures including subsidy per trip and ridership per hour of new services.

For each comment that was determined to meet the criteria of an unmet need, staff analyzed if it would be “reasonable to meet” and made a recommendation. The attached ROF provides an analysis of the unmet needs and recommended findings for each. Table 7 (on page 15) provides a summary analysis of estimated performance of unmet needs including the estimated subsidy per trip and ridership per hour of new services. In addition, where the 2023-2028 Transit Development Plan (TDP) included estimated performance of the same or similar new services considered as UTNs, the TDP analysis was included as a row in the table to provide an additional data point.

In November and December 2024, HCAOG and its member jurisdictions held public hearings to gather comments on unmet transit needs. HCAOG collected public comments also via email, phone, and mail, and attended the Independent Living Expo to identify potential unmet needs. An online survey, in English and Spanish, released as another means to obtain transit need input from the public. The English survey received 77 responses, while the Spanish survey received none. Fifty-two responses were provided to the open-ended question about service improvements, with results included in Appendix A.

The SSTAC reviewed the unmet transit needs comments and the draft ROF at their March and April 2025 meetings and recommended the HCAOG Board adopt the Report. For each comment that was determined to meet the criteria of an unmet need, staff analyzed if it would be “reasonable to meet”. The report also includes the allocations of Local Transportation Funding (LTF) by jurisdiction for fiscal year 2025-26, and how each jurisdiction used its allocation of LTF funds for fiscal year 2024-25. In the preparation of the draft report staff requested input from the transit providers, i.e., Humboldt Transit Authority (HTA) and Arcata and Mad River Transit System (A&MRTS).

Many of the transit requests received in 2024, have been shared by the public as part of previous UTN cycles. Staff’s recommendation to the SSTAC was to update the findings from FY 24-25 and to find the following:¹

- (A) The following requests do not meet the definition of an unmet need:
 - 1. Later service in the evening on weekdays on RTS.
- (B) The following requests are unmet needs and are reasonable to meet but cannot be funded:
 - 2. More frequent service on RTS.
 - 3. Provide express service on RTS.
 - 4. More frequent service on A&MRTS.
 - 5. Later night Saturday service on RTS
 - 6. Sunday service on RTS.
 - 7. Expanded ETS service to Greater Eureka, specifically Myrtle town.
 - 8. Expanded service in Blue Lake

¹ Note: the numbering of the requests below correspond to how they are numbered in the draft Report of Findings.

9. Expanded A&MRTS service to South Arcata
10. A&MRTS Service to Bayside
11. Later service on Southern Humboldt Intercity

(C) Comments concerning dial-a-ride and paratransit service: The Report's recommendation on these comments is for that paratransit providers reach out to social service providers and their clients to obtain specifics on Dial A Ride (DAR) service gaps and how best to address them. Fixed-route transit operators are required to provide paratransit service pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As such, this is not an unmet need.

In the March 5 draft ROF, the needs for more frequent service and express service (number 2 and 3 in the above list) on RTS were combined. Based on SSTAC input provided at this meeting, these needs were separated and made into stand-alone requests for the April 2 draft ROF. The analysis for the request for more frequent service on RTS, reports that during peak hours (on weekdays) RTS headways between McKinleyville and Arcata are 60-minutes. HTA will pilot a microtransit service between McKinleyville and Arcata beginning in the next fiscal year. While this will be an on-demand service, and not a fixed route service, it will increase frequency of service while also meet the estimated farebox return ratio. However, the funding that supports operation of this microtransit service is short-term and temporary, and HTA does not have other available and appropriate funding at this time. HCAOG received two requests to increase frequency from Arcata to College of the Redwoods. Although this segment of the RTS route has 30-minute headways during peak hours, these two requests indicate a need for increased headway (e.g., 15-minute headways). Again, there is no funding available to increase frequency of service. As such, the request for more frequent service on RTS was found to be an unmet need that is reasonable to meet but cannot be funded.

As reviewed in the report, while requests to provide express service on RTS is estimated to have farebox return ratio of 17%, an additional \$463,400 funding per year and the provision of two buses would be necessary to implement. At this time HTA does not have funding that is available and appropriate to operate an express service.

The SSTAC also discussed the request for more frequent service on A&MRTS. While A&MRTS has implemented the Green/Gold route, with Cal Poly Humboldt (CPH) providing funding, Green/Gold is not a full implementation of the Green route described in the TDP. Also, there is the potential that CPH could reduce or pull the route's operational funding. Similar to HTA, A&MRTS does not have funding available to increase frequency of service.

The staff report to the SSTAC included a discussion of how the farebox findings for late-night Saturday service on RTS and Sunday service on RTS were dependent on operating costs. While commenters specifically requested Sunday transit on the RTS service, the SSTAC discussed the 2023-2028 TDP's recommendation that implementing Sunday service would perform better by implementing Sunday service on ETS and A&MRTS as well because, in part, riders would have improved connectivity in comparison to implementing Sunday service on only RTS.

The SSTAC discussed whether the unmet transit needs sufficient broad-based community support threshold of two persons may be too low (see page 8 for the full description of this criterion). It was stated that a ridership increase of two persons is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the overall performance metrics of a transit provider. The SSTAC also discussed the fare-box ratio requirement which has been paused by the State since COVID-19, and there is consideration for removing the fare-box ratio requirement. As indicated on page 8 of the attached report, the reasonable to meet criteria includes a marginal farebox return ratio of 10% standard. Should the

State update its requirements, the SSTAC discussed revising HCAOG's requirements to be updated accordingly.

The PAC is being asked to recommend the HCAOG Board adopt the Draft FY 24-25 Unmet Needs Report determining there are unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet but cannot be funded.