HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
Regional Transportation Planning Agency
Humboldt County Local Transportation Authority
Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies
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Citizen Participation Process for Transit Needs Assessment

Transportation Development Act

The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) is responsible for allocating Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds within the region. The TDA provides two major sources of funding, Local Transportation Funds (LTF) derived from a ¼ cent of the general sales tax and State Transportation Assistance Funds (STAF) derived from a tax on diesel fuel. Together, these TDA funds provide a significant revenue source for public transit in Humboldt County. The "Unmet Transit Needs" process is carried out annually to identify and evaluate the adequacy of existing public transportation services. HCAOG is required to assess transit needs prior to allocating LTF money for non-transit purposes, while STA is programmed to the Humboldt Transit Authority and Arcata and Mad River Transit.

Each jurisdiction has their own LTF account. Eureka and Arcata use the entirety of their LTF allocation for transit purposes. The County of Humboldt, Cities of Fortuna, Rio Dell, Blue Lake, and Trinidad have funds remaining after paying their share for eligible transit uses. In these cases, the TDA allows LTF to be applied to local streets and roads budgets, including pedestrian and bicycle projects. In Ferndale, there are no eligible public transit services and the LTF allocation is applied to non-transit purposes.

Public Process to Make a Finding

HCAOG's Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) leads the process. Although only one hearing is required, public meetings are held to ensure residents in each jurisdiction are heard. The SSTAC considers all public testimony and input, determines if the suggestions meet the adopted definition of an unmet transit need and applies adopted criteria to determine if the need is "reasonable to meet". Public comments are accepted throughout the year and close on December 31st.

The SSTAC will consider the draft Transit Needs report and forward one of the following findings to the HCAOG Board for consideration:

(a) there are no unmet transit needs; or
(b) there are no unmet transit needs which are "reasonable to meet"; or
(c) there are unmet transit needs, including those that are "reasonable to meet"

Potential Impacts to Local Transportation Funding

If HCAOG adopts finding (c), then the unmet transit needs shall be funded before any allocation is made for non-transit purposes (i.e. streets and roads) within the jurisdiction. Funds for new or expanded transit services can be set-aside from sources other than TDA funds. For instance, in 2018 the HCAOG Board voted to set aside Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funds for late-night weekday service on the Redwood Transit Service. The service was found based on ridership at that time to be an unmet transit need reasonable to meet, but could not be funded due to insufficient Local Transportation Funds available to all required entities. When COVID hit and ridership fell dramatically, these LCTOP funds were repurposed to support free fares.

Examples of Past Public Input and Findings

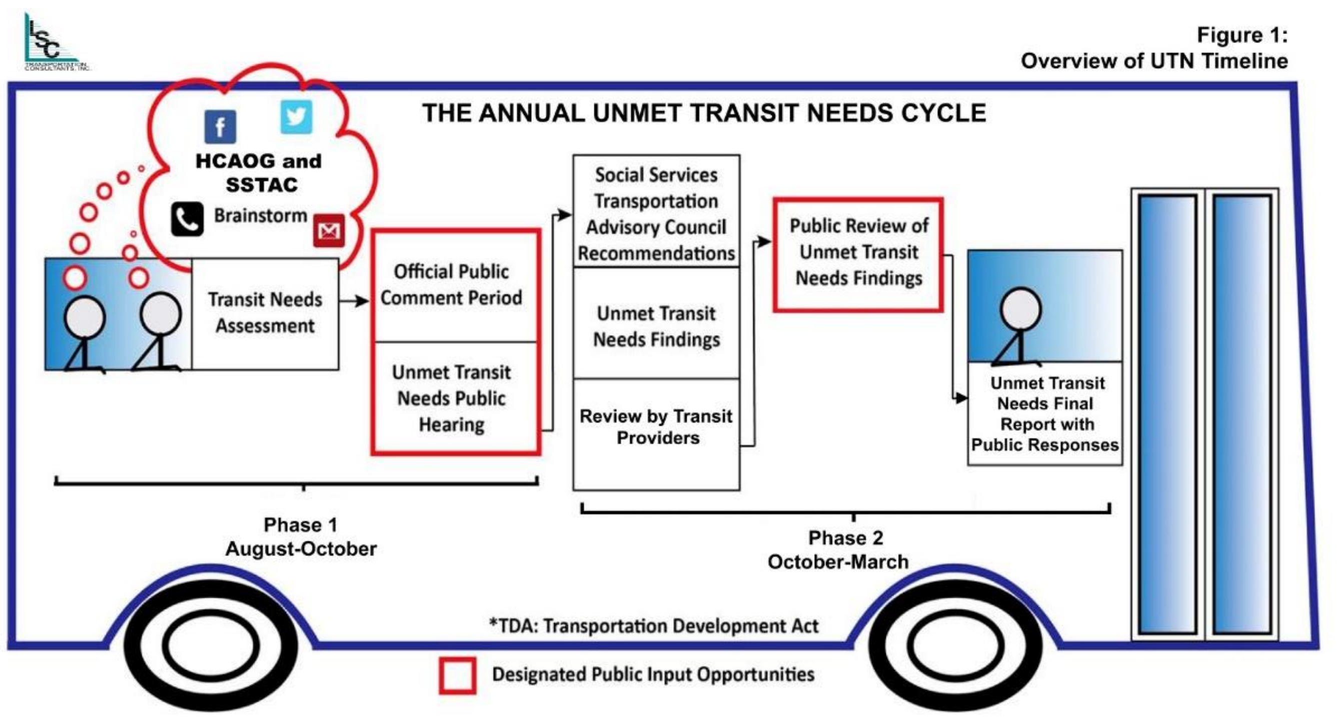
The FY 23-24 transit needs report found that Redwood Transit System (RTS) Sunday service and Saturday night service between Arcata and Eureka were transit needs reasonable to meet. These services cannot currently be funded by the Local Transportation Fund, as the Cities of Arcata and Eureka use all their LTF on existing transit. HCAOG is working with HTA to identify funding to dedicate toward meeting these needs prior to allocating any of next fiscal year's TDA funds to streets and roads.

Prior findings in 2015-16 led to new transit services to Tish Non-Village (Bear River Rancheria) and Old Arcata Road. Both services were discontinued after two years because not enough people used the new services. The SSTAC will consider modifying the "reasonable to meet" criteria to require meeting certain performance measures such as operating subsidy per passenger and riders per hour. These metrics provide other ways to consider the cost and projected performance of new transit service, with the intention to avoid starting new service that will not be viable.

Comments received through this annual process can provide valuable feedback to transit operators. Not all operational requests can be accommodated, but agencies make every effort to respond. In addition, public comments are beneficial as a record of community need and can help to secure competitive grant-funded opportunities such as first-last mile mobility solutions to expand access to transit.

Opportunities for Public Comment on Unmet Transit Needs

- The form linked at the project page or by visiting the survey directly at this link.
- At one of the advertised public meetings;
- Written comments and/or feedback gathered from staff during direct outreach;
- Comment submittals by email or telephone: stephen.luther@hcaog.net/444-8208



UNMET TRANSIT NEEDS
DEFINITION & REASONABLE TO MEET CRITERIA

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 identified in the following, but not limited to: a Transportation Development Plan, Regional Transportation Plan, Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan.

HCAOG Plans can be found at: http://hcaog.net/library

Additionally, unmet transit needs do not include:

- ❖ Improvements funded or scheduled for implementation in the next fiscal year. Two potential new services that will be reevaluated this year are:
  - Express bus service between McKinleyville and Eureka during peak hours
  - Late Night Weekday Service on the Regional Transit System
- ❖ Minor operational improvements or changes such as bus stops, schedules, and minor route changes. 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.
- ❖ Trips for primary or secondary school transportation
- ❖ Sidewalk improvements or street and road needs

Reasonable to meet criteria:

(1) To be considered "reasonable to meet", a service must be operationally feasible and financially sustainable, as defined below:
   a) The service must have adequate roadways and must be safe to operate.
   b) Enough money should be available from identified sources of funding to pay for the marginal operating costs of the service continuously for three years.

(2) The service must be projected to meet a minimum "marginal farebox-return-ratio" of 10 percent within 2 years. If multiple competing services are requested, other factors may also be considered such as estimated subsidy per passenger trip and passengers per vehicle hour of service. For new service, ridership and farebox-return-ratio thresholds will be considered.

(3) Pursuant to the requirements of TDA Statutes (Public Utilities Code Section 99401.5c, 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.

(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-return-ratio. If the service is being adequately promoted and fails to be within 60 percent of the identified standards after six months, 90 percent with 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.