

# STAFF REPORT



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| <b>MEETING DATE:</b>  | <b>February 24, 2022</b>                                                                                           |
| <b>SUBJECT:</b>       | <b>Review Fiscal Year 2022/23 Annual Transit Needs Assessment and Preliminary Recommendations (Public Hearing)</b> |
| <b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>   | <b>10</b>                                                                                                          |
| <b>STAFF CONTACT:</b> | <b>Jennifer Pollom, Senior Transportation Planner</b>                                                              |

## **SUMMARY:**

Each year SRTA assesses and makes determinations regarding unmet transit needs in the Shasta Region. The public review period began on February 16, 2022, when the [Transit Needs Assessment](#) (link in Attachment A) was posted on SRTA's website and advertised in the newspaper. A public hearing is required. The final report and unmet transit needs recommendations will be presented in April, alongside the FY 2022/23 Transportation Development Act (TDA) budget, for consideration by the board of directors.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of the annual unmet transit needs process shifted from efficiencies and farebox recovery to public safety and maintaining essential services last year. The pandemic highlighted trends in the region's transit systems, such as under-performing farebox recovery. In the coming year, SRTA will explore key strategies from the [2040 Long-Range Transit Plan](#) (link in Attachment B) and RABA's short range transit plan (in development) to address the region's transit performance.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that the SRTA Board of Directors:

1. Hold a public hearing to receive public comments on unmet transit needs findings;
2. Provide any further direction to staff regarding preliminary FY 2022/23 Unmet Transit Needs recommendations, as documented in the draft FY 2022/23 Transit Needs Assessment (available through Attachment A link at the end of this staff report); and
3. Direct staff to prepare responses to any additional public comments received.

## **DISCUSSION:**

**Background** – As a recipient of Local Transportation Funds (LTF), SRTA is required to administer the annual unmet transit needs process. The purpose of this process is to identify potential unmet transit needs and certify that all reasonable-to-meet transit needs have been met. This certification must be performed prior to allocating any remaining LTF to local streets and roads or other eligible uses. Key elements of the transit needs assessment include:

- An assessment of likely transit-dependent populations (i.e., location, distribution, and relative need) and the adequacy of existing transit services in meeting their transit needs;
- Public outreach to determine if there are any unmet transit needs; and

- A preliminary assessment to determine the identified needs are consistent with SRTA's adopted reasonable-to-meet definition (see Appendix 2 of the attached Transit Needs Assessment).

The draft FY 2022/23 Transit Needs Assessment has been prepared in accordance with the TDA. Key findings are highlighted below.

**Public Transportation Performance** – Select performance metrics and trends for the region's public transportation services are shown below. Note that ridership impacts due to the pandemic began in the third quarter of FY 2019/20. Additional detail and analysis are provided in the full FY 2022/23 Transit Needs Assessment report (link in Attachment A).

**Redding Area Bus Authority (RABA) Fixed Route & Demand Response Service Performance**

| Performance Measure           | FY 2020/21 | FY 2020/21 vs. 2019/20 | 5-Year Average |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Total Number of Trips         | 346,004    | -199,486               | 592,616        |
| Operating Cost/Passenger Trip | \$16.31    | +\$5.96                | \$10.05        |
| Operating Cost/Service Hour   | \$124.39   | +\$13.40               | \$104.04       |
| Passengers/Service Hour       | 7.63       | -3.10                  | 10.93          |
| Farebox Recovery              | 9.15%      | -2.19%                 | 14.1%          |

**Burney Express Service Performance**

| Performance Measure   | FY 2020/21 | FY 2020/21 vs. 2019/20 | 5-Year Average |
|-----------------------|------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Total Number of Trips | 2,759      | -2,465                 | 5,053          |
| TDA Subsidy Per Trip  | \$109.42   | +\$60.88               | \$54.65        |
| Farebox Recovery      | 4.70%      | -3.01%                 | 8.51%          |

**ShastaConnect Monday – Friday Service  
(Operated by Dignity Health Connected Living (DHCL) Under Contract with SRTA)**

| Performance Measure  | FY 2018/19 | FY 2019/20 | FY 2020/21 | 3-Year Average | Contract Goal |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------|---------------|
| TDA Subsidy Per Trip | \$24.04    | \$22.43    | \$18.70    | \$21.72        | \$21.71       |

**Service Recommendations** – The following table outlines transit service requests submitted to date under the current cycle, as well as recurring requests from prior cycles. SRTA and RABA have been successful in responding to these needs by using non-TDA grant funds to first test and evaluate services. Examples include ShastaConnect Sunday On-Demand Transit and expanded weekday service; Crosstown Express; and Cottonwood Express (discontinued due to low ridership).

### Unmet Transit Needs Requests and Recommendations

| Transit Service Requested                                                                                                                        | Unmet Transit Need? | Reasonable to Meet?                                                    | Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Current FY 2022/23 Unmet Transit Needs Cycle                                                                                                     |                     |                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Shingletown Service (7 responses with interest in transit service)                                                                               | Yes                 | No                                                                     | Shingletown service could be requested from DHCL as the Coordinated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA). See below about requests for extended service area. RABA services are not meeting the minimum farebox recovery ratio. A Shingletown van pool service operated from 1996 to 2002 when it was terminated due to low ridership. ShastaConnect service area could be expanded to include Shingletown.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Recurring Requests from Previous Cycles                                                                                                          |                     |                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Whiskeytown Summer Service                                                                                                                       | Yes                 | Yes                                                                    | The ‘Beach Bus’ service will return in summer of 2022 and operate between the Memorial Day and Labor Day holidays. SRTA and the National Park Service are working on the transit operating plan. After debuting June through August 2017, the Whiskeytown Lake 'Beach Bus' was approved for funding by the SRTA Board of Directors for the 2018 season but not implemented because the National Park Service (NPS) intended to charge an entry fee per individual (as opposed to per vehicle), thereby rendering the service noncompetitive. These issues were resolved, and the ‘Beach Bus’ service returned for summer 2021, when pandemic conditions allowed. |
| Extended Service Hours                                                                                                                           | Yes                 | Not at this time using traditional fixed route service delivery model* | RABA services are not meeting the minimum farebox recovery ratio. Even with the effects of the pandemic considered, ridership and revenue have been decreasing over multiple cycles while operating costs are increasing by about 7% annually. Without significant increases in ridership, major changes to the service delivery paradigm, and/or changes in TDA legislation, RABA will face reduced eligibility for funding.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| More Frequent Service                                                                                                                            |                     |                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Extended Service Areas                                                                                                                           |                     |                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| *The ShastaConnect on-demand service delivery model might be able to meet some of these needs and will be explored further over the coming year. |                     |                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extended service hours: Regional public transportation expanded from six to seven days a week with the introduction of the ShastaConnect Sunday On-Demand Transit service.</li> <li>Extended service area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In November 2020, using Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funding, the ShastaConnect Sunday On-Demand service was expanded to include the cities of Anderson and Shasta Lake.</li> <li>A new ShastaConnect weekday service for riders between the intermountain communities of Burney, Cassel, Fall River, and McArthur launched on January 24, 2022.</li> <li>Ridership eligibility for weekday ShastaConnect service was expanded in December 2020 from serving only seniors (60 years of age or older) and adults (18+ years of age) with disabilities, to anyone over 18 years of age and minors when accompanied with an adult.</li> <li>Extending on-demand transit to Shingletown will be explored over the next year.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>With these LCTOP-funded services, ShastaConnect was the only transportation service in the region to improve in performance over the last fiscal year. As the service matures and the pandemic subsides, this transit service delivery strategy could fill gaps in service areas, days and/or hours.</p> |     |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Sunday Service                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Yes | Yes | After repeated and consistent requests for Sunday service, SRTA developed a grant-funded Sunday service pilot program to serve urban areas in Redding. Service commenced in October 2019, discontinued March 31, 2020, due to the pandemic, and was reintroduced on November 1, 2020. It will continue through at least October 2022. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extended service area: In November 2020, using LCTOP funding, the ShastaConnect Sunday On-Demand service was expanded to include the cities of Anderson and Shasta Lake.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |     |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

No new TDA-funded services are recommended at this time given the: 1) drop in transit performance in the region for FY 2020/21; 2) downward performance over consecutive multiple years; and 3) ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Requests will continue to be tracked and alternative transit service delivery strategies considered. Despite downward performance trends, it is important to note that — in all jurisdictions except the city of Redding — there remains excess annual TDA funding that can only be used for public transportation that is building in a SRTA reserve account. This will be discussed in more detail when the TDA budget is presented for approval in April.

Key Strategies – In the coming year, SRTA will explore key strategies from the [2040 Long-Range Transit Plan](#) (link in Attachment A) and RABA’s short range transit plan (in development) to address the region’s transit performance. SRTA will consider plans to:

- Continue on-demand Sunday Service beyond October 2022;
- Continue expanded CTSA, including consideration of adding services on Saturdays;
- Explore on-demand service as an alternative to fixed route Saturday service and/or low performing routes and times;
- Explore consolidating Burney Express with ShastaConnect on-demand intermountain service and Modoc Sage Stage;
- Find efficiencies and reduce overlap between RABA demand response service (complimentary paratransit) and ShastaConnect;
- Implement low-income strategy from Long-Range Transit Plan (i.e., free fares); and

- Re-establish Airport Road/Knighton Road fixed route service to the Veteran's Administration (VA) Clinic and Home on Knighton Road.

**Public Involvement** – The draft FY 2022/23 Transit Needs Assessment was posted to the SRTA website on February 16, 2022, advertised, and circulated to interested individuals and organizations. Ten qualifying requests for transit service were received with seven from Shingletown, which are documented in Appendix 8 of the draft report (link in Attachment A). Another twelve non-qualifying survey responses were received. No further transit service requests or comments on the FY 2022/23 Transit Needs Assessment have been received as of the writing of this staff report. New requests and comments may be submitted during the public hearing or delivered to SRTA through March 20, 2022, by way of email to [questions@srta.ca.gov](mailto:questions@srta.ca.gov) or by U.S. Mail to SRTA offices at 1255 East Street, Suite 202, Redding, CA, 96001.

**Next Steps** – Unmet transit needs findings, including the results of technical analyses, documentation of public input, and recommendations of the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC), will be presented alongside the proposed FY 2022/23 TDA budget at the April 28, 2022, meeting of the SRTA Board of Directors.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

The board of directors may suggest modifications to the draft FY 2022/23 Transit Needs Assessment report, including preliminary unmet transit needs findings and recommendations.

**OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:**

The unmet transit needs process is developed in consultation with the county of Shasta, the cities of Anderson, Redding, and Shasta Lake, RABA, DHCL, and the SSTAC. Documentation of the unmet transit needs process is approved by Caltrans.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The unmet transit needs findings govern the use of LTF for public transportation and subsequent surplus allocations for other eligible non-transit uses (e.g., local streets and roads). The TDA budget, as well as the FY 2022/23 Unmet Transit Needs Recommendation will be provided to the board of directors in April for consideration.



**Keith R. Williams, AICP, Senior Transportation Planner**

**Attachments:**

- 2040 Long-Range Transit Plan can be found at [www.srta.ca.gov/341/2040-Long-Range-Transit-Plan](http://www.srta.ca.gov/341/2040-Long-Range-Transit-Plan)
- Draft FY 2022/23 Transit Needs Assessment [www.srta.ca.gov/146/Unmet-Transit-Needs-Process](http://www.srta.ca.gov/146/Unmet-Transit-Needs-Process)