

STAFF REPORT



MEETING DATE:	February 23, 2021
SUBJECT:	Review Fiscal Year 2021/22 Annual Transit Needs Assessment and Preliminary Recommendations (Public Hearing)
AGENDA ITEM:	11
STAFF CONTACT:	Daniel Wayne, Senior Transportation Planner

SUMMARY:

Each year SRTA assesses and makes determinations regarding unmet transit needs in the Shasta Region. The Draft Fiscal Year (FY) 2021/22 Transit Needs Assessment was posted to SRTA's website on January 22, 2021, (see link at the end of this report) and advertised in the newspaper. A public hearing is required. Written public comments will be accepted through March 2, 2021. The final report and unmet transit needs recommendations will be presented in April, alongside the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021/22 Transportation Development Act (TDA) budget, for consideration by the board of directors.

Due to ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of the annual unmet transit needs process has shifted from efficiencies and farebox recovery to public safety and maintaining essential services. Although the pandemic has negatively affected ridership and revenue, present services provide essential mobility for transit dependent populations and should not be discontinued without an alternative in place. Options and recommendations for improving performance, including possible alternative public transportation service delivery strategies, are included in the 2040 Long-Range Transit Plan (see [Agenda Item #14](#) of this agenda for project status).

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 2021/22 Unmet Transit Needs recommendations, as documented in the Draft FY 2021/22 Transit Needs Assessment (available through the 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 residual LTF funds to local streets and roads or other eligible uses. Key elements of the transit needs assessment include:

- An assessment of likely transit-dependent populations and the adequacy of existing transit services in meeting their needs;
- Public outreach to determine if there are any unmet transit needs; and
- A preliminary assessment to determine if any such needs are consistent with SRTA's adopted reasonable to meet definition (see Appendix 2 of the attached Transit Needs Assessment).

The Draft FY 2021/22 Transit Needs Assessment has been conducted 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 is provided in the full FY 2021/22 Transit Needs Assessment report (available through the link at the end of this staff report).

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

Performance Measure	FY 2019/20	FY 2019/20 vs. 2018/19	5-Year Average
Total Number of Trips	545,490	-79,657	666,830
Operating Cost/Passenger Trip	\$10.35	+\$1.45	\$8.32
Operating Cost/Service Hour	\$110.99	+\$10.62	\$97.96
Passengers/Service Hour	10.72	-0.56	11.88
Farebox Recovery	11.34%	-2.37%	15.5%

Burney Express Service Performance

Performance Measure	FY 2019/20	FY 2019/20 vs. 2018/19	5-Year Average
Total Number of Trips	5,224	+243	5,696
TDA Subsidy Per Trip	\$48.54	+\$3.57	\$38.97
Farebox Recovery	7.71%	-1.02%	10.08%

ShastaConnect

(Operated by Dignity Health Connected Living (DHCL) Under Contract with SRTA)

Performance Measure	FY 2017/18	FY 2018/19	FY 2019/20	3-Year Average	Contract Goal
TDA Subsidy Per Trip	\$17.15	23.90	\$23.08	\$21.38	\$21.20

Service Recommendations – The following table outlines transit service requests submitted to date under the current cycle, as well as recurring requests from prior cycles. Where non-TDA grant funds can be acquired, SRTA and RABA have been successful in responding to these needs. Examples include ShastaConnect On-Demand Transit, Crosstown Express, and Cottonwood Express (discontinued due to low ridership). Intercity bus service is also in development using grant funds.

Unmet Transit Needs Requests and Recommendations

Transit Service Request	Unmet Transit Need?	Reasonable to Meet?	Response
Current FY 2021/22 Unmet Transit Needs Cycle			
No qualifying unmet transit needs requests received.			
Recurring Requests from Previous Cycles			
Whiskeytown Summer Service	Yes	Yes	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 this specialty service is set to return for summer 2021, as long as pandemic conditions allow.
Extended Service Hours	Yes	Not at this time	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 4-5% 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. SRTA's ShastaConnect is testing a new on-demand service delivery model. In November 2020, using LCTOP funding, service was expanded from Sunday-only service in parts of Redding to now include Monday through Friday service in all requested areas, save Platina. Ridership eligibility was also expanded and reverse trip service (i.e., grocery home delivery) was added. With these LCTOP-funded services, ShastaConnect was the only public transportation service in the region to improve in performance over last fiscal year. As the service matures and the pandemic subsides, this transit service delivery strategy may continue to be considered when filling gaps in service areas, days and/or hours. If portions of conventional fixed route service become ineligible for TDA funding due to low rider demand or high cost per service hour, on-demand service may still be a viable option.
More Frequent Service			
Extended Service Areas			
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 in late March 2020 due to the pandemic, and was reintroduced in November 2020 with expanded service to Anderson and Shasta Lake. It will continue through at least June 2022. Continuation of services are dependent on ridership and funding availability.

No new TDA-funded services are recommended at this time given the: 1) drop in transit performance in the region for FY 2019/20; 2) lack of FY 2021/22 unmet transit needs cycle public requests; 3) downward performance over consecutive multiple years; and 4) ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Requests will continue to be tracked and alternative transit service delivery strategies will be presented as part of the 2040 Long-Range Transit Plan (see Agenda Item 14).

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.

Public Involvement – The Draft FY 2021/22 Transit Needs Assessment report was posted to the SRTA website on January 22, 2021, advertised, and circulated to interested individuals and organizations. One non-qualifying request for transit service was received prior to publication, which is documented in Appendix 8 of the draft report (available through the link at the end of this staff report). No further transit service requests or comments on the FY 2021/22 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 2, 2021, by way of email to 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 2021/22 TDA budget at the April 27, 2021, meeting of the SRTA Board of Directors.

ALTERNATIVES:

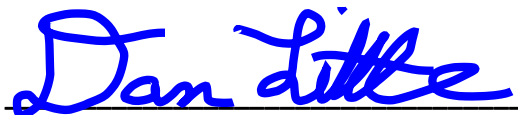
The board of directors may suggest modifications to the Draft FY 2021/22 Transit Needs Assessment report, including preliminary unmet transit needs findings and recommendations.

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, Dignity Health Connected Living, and the SSTAC. Documentation of the unmet transit needs process is approved by Caltrans. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) reviewed the Draft FY 2021/22 Transit Needs Assessment.

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 2021/22 Unmet Transit Needs Recommendation will be provided to the board of directors in April for consideration.



Daniel S. Little, AICP, Executive Director

Attachments:

A: Draft FY 2021/22 Transit Needs Assessment www.srta.ca.gov/146/Unmet-Transit-Needs-Process