

STAFF REPORT



MEETING DATE:	February 23, 2023
SUBJECT:	Review Fiscal Year 2023/24 Annual Transit Needs Assessment and Preliminary Recommendations (Public Hearing)
AGENDA ITEM:	12
STAFF CONTACT:	Jennifer Pollom, Senior Transportation Planner

SUMMARY:

Each year SRTA assesses and makes determinations regarding unmet transit needs in the Shasta Region. The public review period began on February ##, 2023, when the [Transit Needs Assessment](#) (link in Attachment A) was posted on SRTA's website. The public review period will end on March 17, 2023. A public hearing is required. The final report and unmet transit needs recommendations will be presented in April, alongside the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023/24 Transportation Development Act (TDA) budget, for consideration by the board of directors.

Due to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on public transit ridership statewide, the state's focus for the annual unmet transit needs process temporarily shifted from efficiencies and farebox recovery to public safety and maintaining essential services. This shift in focus allowed the Redding Area Bus Authority (RABA) to maintain existing bus services despite four consecutive years (2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22) of performance below both the region's goal of 18% farebox recovery and the absolute minimum TDA requirement of 15% farebox recovery. At present, the farebox recovery minimum has been waived under state law until next year's unmet transit needs process which will analyze the 2022/23 operating year. Continuing from last year, SRTA will explore key strategies from the [2040 Long-Range Transit Plan](#) (link in Attachment B) and [RABA's 2014 short-range transit plan](#) (link in Attachment C) to address the region's transit performance. RABA is working on a 2023 Short Range Transit Plan currently.

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 2023/24 Unmet Transit Needs recommendations, as documented in the draft FY 2023/24 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 by March 17, 2023.

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 dollars 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 2023/24 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 2023/24 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 2021/22	FY 2021/22 vs. 2020/21	5-Year Average
Total Number of Trips	346,004	357,347	+11,343	517,301
Operating Cost/Passenger Trip	\$16.31	\$17.49	+\$1.18	\$12.08
Operating Cost/Service Hour	\$124.39	\$129.58	+\$5.19	\$111.38
Passengers/Service Hour	7.63	7.41	-0.22	9.89
Farebox Recovery	9.15%	9.80%	+0.64%	12.67%

Burney Express Service Performance

Performance Measure	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2021/22 vs. 2020/21	5-Year Average
Total Number of Trips	2,759	2,698	-61	4,340
TDA Subsidy Per Trip	\$109.42	\$137.29	+\$27.87	\$75.37
Farebox Recovery	4.70%	2.96%	-1.74%	6.90%

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

Performance Measure	FY 2019/20	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	3-Year Average	Contract Goal
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TDA Subsidy Per Trip	\$22.43	\$18.70	\$33.54	\$24.89	\$22.21
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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 2023/24 Unmet Transit Needs Cycle			
///In progress///			
Recurring Requests from Previous Cycles			
Whiskeytown Summer Service	Yes	Yes	The ‘Beach Bus’ service returned in summer of 2022 and operated between the Memorial Day and Labor Day holidays, excluding Sundays and Mondays of 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. - 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. - Extended service area:			

○ 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. ○ A new ShastaConnect weekday service for riders between the intermountain communities of Burney, Cassel, Fall River, and McArthur launched on January 24, 2022. ○ 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. ○ Extending on-demand transit to Shingletown will be explored over the next year. 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.			
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.
• 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.			

///In Progress. This is carryover from last year./// No new TDA-funded services are recommended at this time given the: 1) continued slow recovery in transit performance in the region for FY 2021/22; and 2) below the absolute minimum TDA requirement of 15% farebox recovery over multiple consecutive years. Transit 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, in partnership with RABA and DHCL, will explore key strategies from the [2040 Long-Range Transit Plan](#) (link in Attachment B) and [RABA's short-range transit plan](#) (2023 update in development) to address the region's transit performance. SRTA will consider plans to: ///In progress. The below list are carryover items from 2022/23 TNA.///

- 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 2023/24 Transit Needs Assessment was posted to the SRTA website on February ##, 2023, advertised in buses and on social media, and circulated to interested individuals and organizations. # qualifying requests for transit service were received, which are documented in Appendix 8 of the draft report (link in Attachment A). Another # non-qualifying survey responses were received. No further transit service requests or comments on the FY 2023/24 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 17, 2023, by way of email to questions@srta.ca.gov or by U.S. Mail to SRTA 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 from the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC), will be presented alongside the proposed FY 2023/24 TDA budget at the April 27, 2023, meeting of the SRTA Board of Directors.

ALTERNATIVES:

The board of directors may suggest modifications to the draft FY 2023/24 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 2023/24 Unmet Transit Needs Recommendation will be provided to the board of directors in April for consideration.

Sean Tiedgen, AICP, Executive Director

Attachments:

- A. Draft FY 2023/24 Transit Needs Assessment www.srta.ca.gov/146/Unmet-Transit-Needs-Process (Not Available by TAC)
- B. 2040 Long-Range Transit Plan can be found at www.srta.ca.gov/341/2040-Long-Range-Transit-Plan
- C. RABA 2014 Short-Range Transit Plan can be found at <https://www.cityofredding.org/home/showpublisheddocument/10264/636195761392270000>