

STAFF REPORT



MEETING DATE:	February 23, 2023
SUBJECT:	Review Fiscal Year 2023/24 Annual Transit Needs Assessment and Preliminary Recommendations (Public Hearing)
AGENDA ITEM:	14
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 17, 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 well 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 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 ¹	4.70%	2.96%	-1.74%	6.90%

¹ The Burney Express bus service – a rural intercity service – has a minimum TDA requirement of 10% farebox recovery. In recent history, the service has been fully funded with Federal Transit Administration competitive grant awards.

**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
TDA Subsidy Per Trip	\$22.43	\$18.70	\$33.54	\$24.89	\$22.21

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			
Veteran’s Administration (VA) Clinic/Veterans Home/Knighton Road (34 requests)	Yes	TBD	ShastaConnect currently provides M-F on-demand service to the VA Clinic. New education materials are being developed and SRTA is working with DHCL on researching if hours can be extended to 4:30-5 p.m. when the clinic closes. RABA services are not meeting the minimum farebox recovery ratio. SRTA and RABA are discussing options for subsidizing fare revenue for a fixed route service in the future.
Redding Regional Airport (4 requests)	Yes	TBD	ShastaConnect currently provides M-F on-demand service and Sunday Service. Rides to the Redding Regional Airport can be booked via ShastaConnect Sunday through Friday during services hours. New education materials are being developed, and SRTA will work with airport administration on studying new service in the future. RABA services are not meeting the minimum farebox recovery ratio. SRTA and RABA are discussing options for subsidizing fare revenue for a fixed route service in the future.
Country Heights (1 request)	Yes	No	RABA Route 3 serves the base of the hill. RABA complementary paratransit services are only available to a portion of the neighborhood. There is no service along the section of Buenaventura Blvd. between Placer St. and SR 273. See below about requests for expanded service area.

			Country Heights is within ShastaConnect service zone Sunday through Friday whereby trips could be provided.
Mary Lake (1 request)	Yes	No	There are no fixed route services west of Buenaventura Blvd. See below about requests for expanded service area. Service area could be added to ShastaConnect exceptions as part of the Coordinated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA).
Old Alturas Rd./Shasta View Dr./Ravenwood (1 request)	Yes	No	RABA morning School Express serves area during the school year at two distinct times only. See below about requests for expanded service area. Service area could be added to ShastaConnect exceptions as part of the Coordinated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA).
Tarmac/Shasta View Dr.			
City of Shasta Lake direct (2 requests)	Yes	No	RABA Route 1 serves the City of Shasta Lake and Buckeye/North Redding. A City of Shasta Lake commuter like the Anderson commuter could be considered traveling through Buckeye for more direct service. See below about requests for expanded service area.
Buckeye/North Redding (1 request)			
Old Oregon Trail/Wonderland Blvd/Mountain Gate (1 Request)	Yes	No	See below about requests for extended service area. Service could be requested from DHCL as the Coordinated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA). ShastaConnect service area includes Mountain Gate and Cottonwood. See below about requests for expanded service area.
Lakehead (2 requests)			
Cottonwood (1 request)			
Shingletown (2 requests)			
More rural service (1 request)			
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. Ridership for summer 2022 increased ridership over summer 2021 by 123%. SRTA and the National Park Service are working on the transit operating plan for summer 2023. 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. RABA will face reduced eligibility for funding without pursuit of other grant funds to try expanded services for a two-to-three-year period during which the expanded service doesn't count against farebox ratio; significant increases in ridership; major changes to the service delivery paradigm; and/or changes in TDA legislation.
More Frequent Service			
Expanded 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: In October of 2019, ShastaConnect began Sunday On-Demand Transit service to fill the Sunday service gap in RABA services in a portion of the city of Redding only. Sunday On-Demand Transit service compliments RABA public transportation bus service that operates six days a week (M-Sat). - Expanded service area: - In November 2020, using Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funding, the ShastaConnect Sunday On-Demand Service area was expanded to include all of the cities of Anderson, Redding, and Shasta Lake. - In December 2020, M-F or weekday ShastaConnect service increased ridership eligibility to allow anyone over 18 years of age and minors when accompanied with an adult. Previously, CTSA service restricted ridership to only seniors (60 years of age or older) and adults (18+ years of age) with disabilities. - On January 24, 2022, a new ShastaConnect weekday service for riders between the intermountain communities of Burney, Cassel, Fall River Mills, and McArthur was launched. - Expanding on-demand transit to the following areas will be explored over the next year: - Shingletown - Lakehead - Additional rural communities With these LCTOP-funded services, as ShastaConnect service in the region matures, this transit service delivery strategy could fill gaps in service areas, days, and/or hours in the region.			
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 2023/24.

SRTA and RABA are in discussions to consider possible options (fixed route or regularly scheduled on-demand service) to re-establish an Airport Road/Knighton Road transit service that would include stops at the Veteran's Administration (VA) Clinic, the Redding Veterans Home, and the Redding Regional Airport. Other than an Airport/Knighton Road service, 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 over the prior three years; and 2) farebox recovery of RABA services being 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 continues to be 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 explore efficient and cost-effective options that have the highest likelihood to boost ridership and increase the farebox ratio, including:

- Continue Sunday On-Demand Service through 2023/24, evaluating administration and operations in the subsequent year (2024/25).
- Continue expanded CTSA, including options for Saturday services (carryover).
- Explore on-demand service as an alternative to fixed route Saturday service and/or low performing routes and times in coordination with RABA and DHCL (carryover).
- Consider incorporating summer 'Beach Bus' service permanence as part of the RABA service, as a special, seasonal route.
- Find efficiencies and reduce overlap between RABA demand response service (complimentary paratransit) and ShastaConnect.
- Explore options to implement the Long-Range Transit Plan's low-income strategy (i.e., reduced or free fares) in the near-term.
- Consider a city of Shasta Lake commuter service traveling through Buckeye for more direct service like the Anderson commuter.

Public Involvement – The unmet transit needs survey was released January 11, 2023. It was advertised in buses, on social media, and circulated to interested individuals and organizations, including the VA Clinic and Veterans Home.

A total of 51 qualifying survey responses with requests for transit service were received and another 12 requests for transit service were received through other means (e.g., email, phone calls, local agency staff). All qualifying requests are documented in Appendix 8 of the draft Transit Needs Assessment (link in Attachment A). Six non-qualifying requests were received regarding intercity bus and train service to areas outside of Shasta County. 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 any additional technical analyses and recommendations for items to further study, 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:

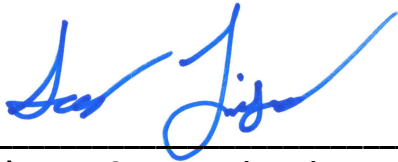
The board of directors may suggest modifications and other ideas for consideration to the draft FY 2023/24 Transit Needs Assessment report, including preliminary unmet transit needs findings and recommendations.

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
- 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>