

STAFF REPORT



MEETING DATE:	April 30, 2025
SUBJECT:	Adopt the North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan and Provide Direction to Staff Regarding Near-Term Activities
AGENDA ITEM:	8
STAFF CONTACT:	Jennifer Pollom, AICP, Senior Transportation Planner

SUMMARY:

The North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan (attached) was developed to coordinate and plan for better intercity bus options and improved passenger rail transportation in the long-term between the Shasta Region, the North State, and large metropolitan areas. The plan is complete and presented for the board of directors' consideration.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the board of directors:

1. Receive a presentation on the final North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan;
2. Adopt the North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan; and
3. Direct staff to engage in the following near-term activities:
 - a. Work with Redding Area Bus Authority (RABA) on near-term funding – using non-regional transit funds for the Interstate 5 service, on implementation of the proposed service, and on interagency agreements between RABA, Glenn Ride, San Joaquins Joint Powers Authority (SJJA), and Amtrak to fund and implement the service;
 - b. Support North State regional partners in making progress on the North State Express service proposal concepts;
 - c. Provide, as needed, input on Caltrans' San Joaquin Valley federal Corridor ID project and share the plan with state and federal agencies, highlighting needs in the Shasta and North State regions; and
 - d. Communicate regional concerns on existing Amtrak passenger services, including lack of available capacity and request exploration to increase reliability and seat availability.

DISCUSSION:

Background – SRTA was awarded a competitive Caltrans Strategic Partnership grant to develop the North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan, which focuses on improving intercity bus and rail transit options across the North State. The SRTA Board of Directors awarded a contract to AECOM in May and work commenced in July 2024.

Stakeholder and Community Involvement – A project website was created for sharing of project documents, posting questionnaire links, and community engagement throughout the project (<https://srta.ca.gov/373/North-State-Intercity-Bus-to-Rail-Plan>). Outreach activities have included:

- Two advisory committee meetings (July 30 and November 6, 2024).
- A questionnaire for Shasta County residents on intercity travel needs. The questionnaire was initiated on August 22 and stayed open during the 30-day public comment period for the draft plan. There were 160 total responses submitted by March 24, 2025.

- Similar county-specific questionnaires were sent to North State residents on December 1, 2024, and stayed open during the 30-day public comment period. There were 100 total responses submitted by March 24, 2025.
- A community workshop was held on January 16, 2025, to update residents and gather feedback for the draft plan.
- The Draft North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan was available for a 30-day public review from February 21, 2025, through March 24, 2025. Five emails with comments were received after the community workshop and during the 30-day public review.

North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan and Recommendations – The project team has completed the final North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan (see attachment) after posting the draft plan for public feedback.

The final plan changes little from the draft recommendations and suggests that future efforts should focus primarily on coordination and improvement of bus-related intercity services over the next 10–15 years, while supporting state efforts to improve passenger rail services where possible, with further exploration of rail passenger services 15+ years from now, should the appropriate set of circumstances warrant (e.g., completion of North Valley Rail service from Chico to Sacramento, increased population and job growth, etc.). The plan provides recommendations such as 1) general strategies and 2) hub and route specific strategies. All are summarized in the Executive Summary of the plan and below.

General Strategies:

1. Support the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor ID Program for the San Joaquin Valley Corridor, which is being conducted by Caltrans Division of Rail.
2. Encourage Caltrans to increase their role in supporting the planning, funding, and operation of intercity transit service, including a connected and reliable statewide intercity bus service.
3. Conduct or support initial planning to designate and strengthen Redding as the central hub for all existing and proposed North State intercity bus and rail services.
4. Engage Amtrak (national) to determine if there is any way to improve capacity, seat availability, or reliability for the Coast Starlight long-distance service to address local and regional passenger rail transportation needs.

Strategies for Hubs and Routes:

Redding – Chico Hub (bus and rail)

- Work with RABA to continue operating the current bus service between Redding and Chico utilizing existing funding and service agreements.
- Coordinate with Caltrans on the San Joaquin Valley Corridor ID planning efforts and advocate for exploration of a future rail extension to Redding.
- Work with RABA, SJJPA and other partners to support Caltrans in the Corridor ID process.

Redding – Sacramento Hub (bus) – Salmon Runner

- Support RABA with the near-term funding and implementation of the proposed Salmon Runner service and consider the possibility of utilizing RABAs Route 99X buses for this service initially.

- Facilitate or support interagency agreements between RABA, Glenn Ride, SJPA, and Amtrak to fund and implement initial Salmon Runner service.

Redding – Eureka – Arcata Hub (bus)

- Collaborate with partner agencies to confirm consensus on the elements of the North State Express proposal produced by Humboldt Transit Authority and support the near-term implementation of an initial service phase.
- Support establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to implement elements of this proposal.

Redding – Eugene Hub (bus and rail)

- Engage in discussions with regional partners and with Caltrans and Oregon DOT staff to explore in the near/mid-term a phased implementation of the proposed bus service along I-5.
- Continue to support Caltrans and Oregon DOT efforts to improve Amtrak service between Redding and Eugene.

Redding – Reno Hub (bus)

- Support long-term efforts to develop intercity bus service between Redding and Reno, coordinating with Caltrans and Nevada DOT on future planning.

Staff and the AECOM team will present the final plan today for adoption.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Caltrans, CalSTA, Redding Area Bus Authority, San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority, transportation planning agencies and transit operators across the North State and the Oregon Department of Transportation have provided technical review, stakeholder input, and helped with community outreach. *///The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) met on April 9, 2025, and received a verbal update from staff.///*

FISCAL IMPACT:

This project is programmed in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024/25 Overall Work Program (Work Element 707.10 – North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan). Near-term activities can be carried out within other work elements in the FY 2025/26 Overall Work Program as needed. If significant activities are desired, SRTA may consider pursuing competitive grants with North State partners.

Sean Tiedgen, AICP, Executive Director

Attachment: North State Intercity Bus to Rail Plan (available on SRTA's website: <https://www.srta.ca.gov/373/North-State-Intercity-Bus-to-Rail-Plan>, and hard copies are available at SRTA's office, 1255 East Street, Redding, CA, 96001, during business hours) – *Hardcopies will be available when final plan is done.*