



HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
Regional Transportation Planning Agency
Humboldt County Local Transportation Authority
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AGENDA ITEM 6d
SSTAC Meeting
March 6, 2024

DATE: February 26, 2024
TO: Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC)
FROM: Stephen Luther, Associate Regional Planner
SUBJECT: **FY 2024-25 Unmet Transit Needs (UTN) Comments and Reasonable to Meet Recommendations**

STAFF REPORT

Contents:

- Staff's Recommended Action
- Staff Summary
- 2023 Transit Needs Recommended Findings and Comment Matrix
- Online Survey Results
- Blue Lake Survey Results
- Draft FY 23-24 Unmet Transit Needs Report of Findings

Staff's Recommended Action:

1. Introduce the item as an action item;
2. Allow staff to present the item;
3. Receive public comment;
4. After receiving public comment and discussing, make the following motion:
"The SSTAC directs staff to update the UTN comments matrix and proceed in preparing the FY 24-25 Report of Findings based on which needs are reasonable or not reasonable to meet as discussed."

OR

"The SSTAC recommends the HCAOG Board adopt the FY 24-25 Unmet Transit Needs Report of Findings determining that Saturday night short-distance service on Redwood Transit System (RTS), Sunday service on RTS, and more frequent service on RTS beginning with an express route from Cal Poly to Eureka are unmet needs that are reasonable to meet but cannot be funded."

Staff Summary:

The purpose of this agenda item is for the SSTAC to review all unmet needs comments received for the 2023 calendar year, consider the attached comment analysis, and provide direction to staff based on a preliminary analysis of whether a need is or is not reasonable to meet. Alternatively, if ready to make a decision based on the current level of analysis and discussion in the Draft Report of Findings, the SSTAC may choose to make a recommendation to the HCAOG Board. The recommendation from staff would be to update the findings from FY 23-24 and to find (1) late-night Saturday service on RTS, (2) Sunday service on RTS, and (3) more frequent service beginning with an express route from Cal Poly to Eureka as unmet needs that are reasonable to meet but not able to be funded.

As the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Humboldt County, HCAOG is responsible for the administration of Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds. TDA funds (funded through ¼ percent of the statewide sales tax) are the primary funding source for most transit systems. As part of its TDA duties, HCAOG is required to implement an annual unmet transit needs process, which has three key components: soliciting testimony on unmet transit needs; analyzing needs in accordance with adopted definitions of unmet transit needs reasonable to meet; and adoption of a finding regarding unmet transit needs that may exist for the upcoming fiscal year. Unmet transit needs findings ensure that transit needs found reasonable to meet are funded prior to jurisdictions expending TDA funds on non-transit purposes.

Public process

HCAOG, member jurisdictions, and the McKinleyville Municipal Advisory Committee held public hearings in October and November 2023, for the purpose of soliciting public comments on unmet needs. The hearings were legally noticed in the North Coast Journal. HCAOG staff requested jurisdictions call the agenda item the “Transit Needs Assessment” in an attempt to move away from framing the annual discussion as “unmet” transit needs. The name was adopted by some jurisdictions but not all. The attempt did not seem all that successful, in part because the legal term “Unmet Needs” must be used in certain circumstances. Any discussion or direction from the SSTAC on the name is appreciated.

To introduce the public hearing item, Associate Planner Luther presented updates on overall transit ridership trends and recent actions by transit agencies designed to expand service and improve customer satisfaction (e.g. microtransit pilots, Redwood Coast Express, fare consolidation, branding). The presentation content led to several good conversations.

HCAOG accepted comments by email, phone, and mail. HCAOG tabled at the Independent Living Expo to gather information on unmet needs. Feedback was gathered through a game where participants could spend money on various needs. The results from a total of 13 participants each spending his/her/their \$500 allocation were the following ranking:

1. More frequent service \$2,200
2. Earlier/later service: \$2,100
3. Sunday service: \$1,450
4. Express service: \$750

In addition to posting on social media (Facebook), HCAOG created an online survey soliciting public input. A total of 13 survey responses were received. While too low of a sample size to provide actionable results, the results are interesting. The survey results are included as an attachment.

The Blue Lake Community Resource Center ran a survey to collect input from the community on transit needs. The survey results are informative as to the desires of the Blue Lake community for public transit.

Unmet Needs Reasonable to Meet Analysis:

HCAOG’s adopted definitions and criteria for unmet transit needs are on pages four and five of the attached draft report. The criteria include the newly adopted standards for a minimum of two comments to demonstrate community support, and to include an analysis of performance measures including subsidy per trip and ridership per hour of new services.

For each comment that was determined to meet the criteria of an unmet need, staff analyzed if it would be “reasonable to meet” and made a recommendation. The attached draft Report of Findings provides an initial analysis of the unmet needs and a basis to guide the SSTAC discussion. The direction from the SSTAC during last year’s review of unmet needs was that it would be helpful for HCAOG staff to provide the recommendations based on an initial review of farebox performance.

The largest number of comments (thirteen) were some variations of needing earlier or later service on the RTS during weekdays. HTA began operating a new weekday RTS schedule, on February 19, that meets this need. Sunday service continues to be a common request. While Sunday service on RTS is reasonable to meet based on farebox, my recommendation is for transit operators and HCAOG to look at a roll-out of Sunday service that would include all lines (ETS, RTS and A&MRTS), rather than any in isolation, in order to provide better access. In addition, the Saturday late night service would be reasonable to meet based on farebox; however, the finding should be updated to note that it is a need that cannot be funded. A more frequent service on RTS is reasonable to meet, but similarly cannot be funded. Past efforts sought to save regional funding sources such as LCTOP to apply toward increased operations, however this is not a sustainable funding mechanism.

The other unmet needs are not reasonable to meet, including ETS expanded weekday hours, ETS expanded weekend hours, ETS expanded frequency and coverage area, and A&MRTS service to Bayside.

Comments and direction from the SSTAC and public at this meeting will be incorporated into the Final Draft Report of Findings which will be brought back to this Council on May 1 to review and make a recommendation to the HCAOG Board. Alternatively, if the SSTAC is satisfied with the conclusions in the attached draft Report of Findings, the Council could make a recommendation to the HCAOG Board today, in which case HCAOG staff would complete the unfinished sections of the Draft Report and bring the recommendations directly to the Board, without bringing the Final Draft back to the SSTAC.