



**HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS**  
**Regional Transportation Planning Agency**  
**Humboldt County Local Transportation Authority**  
**Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies**  
611 I Street, Suite B  
Eureka, CA 95501  
(707) 444-8208  
www.hcaog.net

**AGENDA ITEM 6a**  
**SSTAC Meeting**  
**March 5, 2025**

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DATE: February 27, 2025  
TO: Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC)  
FROM: Michelle Nielsen, Contract Planner  
SUBJECT: **Draft FY 2025-26 Unmet Transit Needs (UTN) Report of Findings**

### **STAFF REPORT**

#### **Contents:**

- Staff's Recommended Action
- Staff Summary
- 2024 Transit Needs Recommended Findings and Comment Matrix
- Online Survey Results
- Draft FY 25-26 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 finalizing the FY 25-26 Report of Findings based on which needs are reasonable or not reasonable to meet as discussed."  
OR  
"The SSTAC recommends that the HCAOG Board adopt the FY 24-25 Unmet Transit Needs Report of Findings determining that there are no unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet."

#### **Staff Summary:**

The purpose of this agenda item is for the SSTAC to review all unmet needs comments received for the 2024 calendar year, consider the attached comment analysis, and provide input and 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.

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. The recommendation from staff would be to update the findings from FY 24-25 and to find the following:

- (1) The following requests do not meet the definition of an unmet need:
  - a. Later service in the evening on weekdays on RTS.
  - b. More frequent service on RTS
  - c. Dial-A-Ride service
- (2) The following requests are unmet needs but are not reasonable to meet due to funding:
  - a. More frequent service on A&MRTS.
  - b. Later night Saturday service on RTS
  - c. Sunday service on RTS.
  - d. Expanded ETS service to Greater Eureka.
  - e. Expanded service in Blue Lake
  - f. Expanded A&MRTS service to South Arcata
  - g. A&MRTS Service to Bayside
  - h. Later service on Southern Humboldt Intercity

#### Public process

HCAOG, and member jurisdictions held public hearings in November and December 2024, 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, Contract Planner Michelle Nielsen 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, North State Express, fare consolidation, branding). The presentation content led to several good conversations.

HCAOG accepted comments by email, phone, and mail. HCAOG attended the Independent Living Expo to gather information on potential unmet needs.

In addition to posting on social media (Facebook and Instagram), HCAOG created an online survey soliciting public input, and provided the survey in English and Spanish. A total of 77 survey responses to the English language were received.

HCAOG with assistance from HTA advertised the availability of the Spanish language survey, however, no responses were received for this version of the survey. The availability of the surveys and public hearings was advertised on HTA's in-bus electronic messaging boards. Fifty-two responses were received on the survey's open-ended question of "Can you suggest any improvements that your service provide could make". The survey results are included as part of Appendix A.

### Unmet Needs Analysis

HCAOG's adopted definitions and criteria for unmet transit needs are on 8 and 9 of the attached draft report. The criteria include the 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". The report also includes the allocations of Local Transportation Funding (LTF) by jurisdiction for fiscal year 2025-26, and how each jurisdiction used its allocation of LTF funds for fiscal year 2024-25. In the preparation of the draft report staff requested input from the transit providers, i.e., Humboldt Transit Authority (HTA) and Arcata and Mad River Transit System (A&MRTS). The attached draft Report of Findings provides an initial analysis of the unmet needs and a basis to guide the SSTAC discussion. Previously the SSTAC requested the review of unmet needs include an initial review of farebox performance; where data is available, a forecast of farebox performance is provided.

The need for more frequent service on RTS received the largest number of comments (18), with some variations. This was not found to be an unmet need because improvements (microtransit) are scheduled for implementation by HTA in the next fiscal year that will address the 60-minute headways between McKinleyville and Arcata, while the RTS route has 30-minute headways from Arcata to the College of the Redwoods during peak hours. The request for later service in the evening on weekdays on RTS was not found to be an unmet need in the draft report because HTA began operating a new weekday RTS schedule in February 2024 to address this need. As indicated above, a number of other service requests were found to be an unmet need but were not found to be reasonable to meet due to funding. RTS, ETS and A&MRTS use all allocated Local Transit Funds and grant funds to provide existing service, and more funding is needed to address these needs. HCAOG will continue to be a partner to identify appropriate funding to address these needs.

It is noted that according to HTA's performance metrics and statistics, RTS's cost to operate (per vehicle hour) in June 2024 was 55% lower than June 2023, \$74.20 and \$164.62, respectively. The farebox analysis assumes that operating costs will remain relatively consistent. The report takes a conservative approach and assumes the operating cost per vehicle hour is \$126.00 based on the year-to-date value of \$125.43 per HTA's June 2024 Comparative Performance Activity Report. Last year the operating cost per vehicle-hour was \$150.00.

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 the public at this meeting will be incorporated into the Final Draft Report of Findings which could be brought back to this Council on May 7, 2025, to review and make a recommendation to the HCAOG Board.