

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: MATT WILCOX, TRANSIT PLANNER
TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: SHORT RANGE TRANSIT PLAN (SRTP) 2022 UPDATE

AGENDA ACTION: STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDATION

This item is provided for Council's information only and no action will be requested. Staff will provide an overview of the Short Range Transit Plan process and the major questions and factors that will inform development of the service and financial plans, as well as seek Council feedback on issues and priorities that should be included in this effort.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this study session, Transit Division staff will provide an overview of the Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) process and seek Council's initial feedback on the SRTP update that will be completed over the next few months. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) has changed the process from what it has required for past SRTPs in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Bay Area transit providers. CityBus will be following the process MTC has outlined. In addition, staff will engage in service planning, financial planning, and public involvement beyond MTC's requirements to provide more effective roadmap for CityBus service and further enhance coordination with the other transit providers in Sonoma County.

BACKGROUND

MTC, in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), requires public transit operators that are FTA grantees to prepare and regularly update an SRTP to help inform regional transportation planning and programming activities. SRTPs work on a ten-year planning horizon and with transit operators updating them every three years. Santa Rosa CityBus was updating its SRTP when the pandemic began in 2020. MTC decided to delay all SRTPs in development at that time and began reevaluating the contents and processes of the SRTP. This process of reevaluation began in August 2021.

Based on discussions with operators during August 2021, MTC staff set out to revise the SRTP process and its requirements. MTC revised the normal process to help operators strategically plan in an environment of continued uncertainty about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on public transit.

The result was a reimagined and restructured SRTP process that narrows the planning horizon, focuses the scope, condenses the required materials, and includes a scenario planning component. Additionally, all public transit operators in the Bay Area will submit their SRTPs at the same time. The previous practice was to have the plans submitted on a staggered timeline. The MTC Commission adopted these new guidelines through MTC Resolution No. 4512 on March 23rd, 2022. Per the guidelines, a draft is due to MTC no later than September 30, 2022, and a final council adopted SRTP is due to MTC no later than December 29, 2022.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

There has been no review of this specific Short Range Transit Plan update.

ANALYSIS

The current SRTP update process is primarily focused on scenario planning. Previous SRTPs were structured around creating an operations plan, setting goals and objectives, showing data as it relates to the goals and objectives, and creating a financial plan. For this SRTP update MTC is requiring each operator to provide data and a narrative for three distinct scenarios. The specific scenarios require all operators to work under the same assumptions which will allow MTC to better understand the status and outlook of transit service in the Bay Area as a whole, as well as by each operator. MTC will also use the documents from all the operators to help understand the impacts of varying levels of funding and then develop actionable information to support funding advocacy to articulate the service benefits and tradeoffs at those different funding levels. The three scenarios prescribed by MTC are:

Scenario 1 (Robust Recovery) - There is adequate funding to return overall revenue to 100% of pre-pandemic levels, with escalation. This would not assume proportionate recovery across all revenue sources.

Scenario 2 (Revenue Recovery, with Fewer Riders) - Federal relief funds are eventually exhausted, although other funds recover to pre-pandemic levels. However, farebox revenue remains stagnant (20-50% below pre-pandemic levels, depending on current status) for the next five years.

Scenario 3 (Some Progress) Federal relief funds are eventually exhausted and total revenue available to the agency is 15% below pre-pandemic levels for the next five years.

Santa Rosa CityBus will work within these scenarios in addition to doing a more robust

service plan detailing how CityBus plans to operate service over the next several years. The pandemic shifted the way in which people utilize CityBus; and it is the opinion of staff the system is currently not operating in a way to maximize efficiency and meet the changed needs of current and potential riders.

As part of the service plan process staff will conduct a robust public engagement campaign. The primary intent of the campaign will be to better understand how the pandemic changed rider habits and if service priorities for the riders have shifted over the last three years. Outreach will also include the gathering of opinions on different service delivery options. Within the broader outreach staff has also released a survey to high school and middle school students to gather information on how the Free Youth Program has changed their use of public transit. This information will inform staff on different service delivery options, especially when one considers the fact that youth now make up 25% of CityBus ridership.

In conjunction with the outreach staff will also analyze operational data. The pandemic, while overall detrimental to ridership, has provided insight into how the number of trips taken relates to apportionment of service hours across the system. This detailed analysis will review service route by route and in some cases stop by stop to better understand how travel patterns have changed from before the pandemic. Finally, as it relates to operational data, staff will create new service performance metrics. In a “traditional” SRTP part of the process includes staff establishing key performance indicators; however, these are not a requirement of this version of the SRTP. Despite this fact staff believes it will be important to create metrics more in line with the current state of service, as well as reevaluate which metrics provide insight into making tangible improvements to the transit system.

Staff will also develop short-range operating and capital plans in order to identify the anticipated level of service that can be delivered sustainably over the next five years, taking into account ongoing challenges with staffing.

This study session will act as the kickoff of the Short Range Transit Plan process. Information gathering for the data portions has already begun. Starting in late June staff will begin the public outreach portion of the project. Late July and August will be used to create service scenarios and finalize data. The draft of the report is due to MTC on September 30. Staff will return to Council with the draft for review and comment. Staff intends to use the time between the draft being due and the final submission at the end of December 2022 to finalize service plans that could be implemented over the next year and beyond.

At this Study Session staff will provide an overview of the SRTP process and the major questions and factors that will inform development of the service and financial plans, as well as seek Council feedback on issues and priorities that should be included in this effort.

FISCAL IMPACT

This study session does not have a fiscal impact on the General Fund or the Transit Enterprise.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This Study Session is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is not a project which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15378.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Maps and Timetables

CONTACT

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