

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: RACHEL EDE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR-TRANSIT
TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: CITYBUS TEMPORARY TRANSIT SERVICE MODIFICATION TO
ADDRESS STAFFING SHORTAGE

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Transportation and Public Works Department that the Council, by resolution, approve a temporary minor reduction of weekday frequency on Santa Rosa CityBus Route 1 to ensure service reliability during the current staffing shortage.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the COVID-19 pandemic has continued, the City has been unsuccessful in recruiting enough new bus drivers to replace retiring drivers, inhibiting CityBus' ability to restore service to the desired pre-pandemic levels. Over the past few months CityBus has experienced a net reduction in bus operators which threatens to impact service reliability on a near daily basis. To ensure consistent, reliable service for the public, the Transit Division proposes a minor temporary service reduction to be in effect until enough new drivers are recruited and trained to sustain higher service levels. After evaluating multiple options, staff propose reducing the frequency of Route 1 weekday service from one bus every 15 minutes to one bus every 20 minutes to achieve a more sustainable service level from a staffing perspective while minimizing impacts on riders. This service would be restored as soon as possible to 15-minute frequency after staffing levels have increased and stabilized.

BACKGROUND

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic CityBus has made numerous service changes in response to changing health orders, schools returning to in-person learning, and changes in demand for transit service. Over the past eight months CityBus has been steadily increasing its service as restrictions have lessened and more residents are returning to in-person work and schooling. However, CityBus is no longer able to increase service due to insufficient bus operator staffing and is experiencing significant

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challenges in continuing to operate at its current service level. This is not a problem that is unique to CityBus as public transit operators across the Bay Area and beyond are experiencing challenges with recruiting and retaining drivers.

Currently, CityBus is operating about 85% of the service hours it was operating before the pandemic. Since the last service increase in August 2021 CityBus has lost several drivers to attrition and has not been able to recruit enough new drivers to replace them. This reduction in available drivers as well as a low number of applicants to replace them has raised the concern that trips will inevitably need to be canceled when too many drivers call in sick or other unforeseen circumstances arise. During the December holiday period CityBus gave warning to the public that certain trips may not operate in the event there were not enough drivers available. While as much notice as possible was given to the public about cancellations feedback from customers was that the inconsistency and uncertainty was undesirable. For these reasons Transit Division staff propose a modest temporary service reduction so that the number of driver shifts are manageable given the current pool of available operators.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

At the August 18, 2020 Council meeting, staff provided a Study Session on CityBus' proposed COVID-19 Recovery Strategy.

ANALYSIS

Proposed Minor Service Reduction on Route 1 (Mendocino Avenue)

The decision-making process behind the proposed service reduction was anchored in the desire to ensure a consistent and reliable service with the minimum impact to availability of transit services. Transit Division staff evaluated several different versions of the schedule before identifying the minor frequency reduction on the Route 1 as the best option to achieve these goals. The level of service in the proposed schedule is sustainable given the number of drivers CityBus believes will be available over the next five to six months. (At the current level of service CityBus drivers are working significant overtime hours to ensure all trips run as scheduled, at a level that is not sustainable.)

Table 1 shows the difference in the number of trips by route in the current service versus the proposed reduced service. With the frequency reduction from 15-minute service to 20-minute service, Route 1 would provide 41 weekday trips instead of 57. However, due to the way driver rosters are built and given the opportunity to improve some inefficiencies in the current schedules, staff were able to increase Sunday service frequency on Route 1 and add a weekday trip to Route 6 and two weekday trips to Route 12. Adding these trips was in response to large student ridership as a result of the Unlimited Rides – Youth Program on the Route 6 during school bell times. The earlier service on the Route 12 is the restoration of the first morning trip that residents, pre-pandemic, relied on to get to work.

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Transit Division staff also took into consideration what kind of impact reducing frequency may have on advanced planning and development efforts that rely on the Route 1 as “high frequency” service. As this is a temporary reduction caused by pandemic impacts and not a permanent change in the baseline frequency of the corridor, no issues were raised by other City staff.

Table 1: Service Comparison (Number of Trips per Day)

Route	Current Service			Route	Proposed Service		
	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday		Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
Route 1	57	30	11	Route 1	41	29	20
Route 2	29	~	~	Route 2	29	~	~
Route 2B	28	27	10	Route 2B	28	27	10
Route 3	14	14	7	Route 3	14	14	7
Route 4	14	14	7	Route 4	14	14	7
Route 4B	14	~	~	Route 4B	14	~	~
Route 5	14	14	7	Route 5	15	14	7
Route 6	28	11	7	Route 6	29	11	7
Route 8	27	14	7	Route 8	27	14	7
Route 9	15	14	7	Route 9	15	14	7
Route 10	14	10	7	Route 10	14	10	7
Route 12	26	14	7	Route 12	28	14	7
Route 15	14	8	7	Route 15	14	8	7
Route 18	7	7	7	Route 18	7	7	7
Total	301	177	91	Total	289	176	100

Public Outreach and Engagement

To better understand the impact of these changes on the public CityBus staff embarked on an outreach campaign prior to this Council meeting. Staff conducted outreach virtually as well as in-person outdoors to minimize exposure to staff and passengers alike. Staff released a survey for riders asking how much reduced service on the Route 1 will affect them. Staff also surveyed riders with the same questions at the Downtown Transit Mall, Coddington Transfer Hub, and the stops adjacent to Santa Rosa Junior College. Public feedback on these proposed changes will be shared by staff as part of this report.

FISCAL IMPACT

This action does not have a fiscal impact on the General Fund. This action may result in a minor cost reduction to the Transit Enterprise given slightly lower service levels.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15301 because it proposes minor changes in the operation involving negligible or no expansion of the existing use.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable

ATTACHMENTS

- Resolution

CONTACT

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