

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: RACHEL EDE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR – TRANSIT,
TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: SANTA ROSA CITYBUS SHORT-RANGE TRANSIT PLAN
UPDATE

AGENDA ACTION: STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDATION

The Transportation and Public Works Department recommends that the Council hold a study session for staff to provide an overview of Santa Rosa CityBus system performance and finances and engage the Council in discussion about the goals of the Short Range Transit Plan update, the proposed planning approach, and next steps in the process. Council will take no action, but may discuss and provide direction to staff. This item has no impact on current fiscal year budget.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Study Session will provide an overview of Santa Rosa CityBus system performance and finances and engage the Council in discussion about the goals of the Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) update, the proposed planning approach, and next steps in the process.

GOAL

Public transit is a key element in creating access to opportunity in cities. This item relates to Council Goal #4 - Foster a Safe, Healthy, and Inclusive Community by reducing vehicle traffic and greenhouse gas emissions, and increasing mobility for all residents in the City of Santa Rosa. This item also relates to Council Goal #1 – Achieve and Maintain Budgeting Excellence and Fiscal Stability, and Council Goal #3 – Promote Citywide Economic Development.

BACKGROUND/PRIOR COUNCIL REVIEW

Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) updates are completed every three to four years to adopt the 10-year service, financial, and capital plan for a transit system. In the Bay Area SRTPs are required by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and

follow MTC guidelines. The next SRTP update is not due to MTC until August 2027; however, given current operational and financial conditions, the Transit Division is opting to complete an update of the service plan element of the SRTP ahead of the MTC deadline. The service plan developed through this study session, upcoming public engagement, and future City Council action will comprise the majority of the operational section of the full SRTP that will be brought to Council for adoption by August 2027. The last SRTP update was adopted by City Council at its December 13, 2022 meeting.

ANALYSIS

This SRTP update will respond to several challenges and opportunities affecting the Santa Rosa CityBus system:

- Post-pandemic changes in travel and traffic patterns are driving the need for service changes to improve transit system performance, specifically in the area of on-time performance and schedule adherence.
- Integrated transit planning efforts including the Marin Sonoma Coordinated Transit Service Plan (MASCOTS) have created the opportunity for local transit agencies to connect more powerfully with the regional transit network—including with SMART as the preeminent 101 corridor operator for Sonoma County—and to better integrate transit services to provide a more efficient and customer-oriented transit system.
- The “fiscal cliff” for the Santa Rosa CityBus system is now in sight due to increasing expenses combined with revenue sources that are not keeping pace with costs.

Given these factors, the Transit Division seeks to develop an updated service plan for CityBus that improves system reliability, increases connectivity with SMART and coordination with local partner agencies including Sonoma County Transit, and positions the CityBus system for success and fiscal resilience into the future. Due to the current fiscal constraints in the Transit Fund, staff anticipate that challenging decisions will need to be made involving trade-offs between competing priorities in the transit system. To support this process, the Transit Division is working with an experienced transit service planning team from Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates. The Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates team will provide expert analysis and an objective assessment of opportunities and support development and evaluation of recommendations for transit service changes.

This Study Session will provide Council with an overview of the current state of the CityBus system inclusive of ridership trends and fiscal projections. Staff will review current constraints as well as opportunities. Following the Study Session, staff will incorporate Council’s feedback before finalizing service scenarios to vet with the public. Staff anticipate returning to Council in fall 2026 for review of recommendations and ultimately adoption of service changes.

FISCAL IMPACT

This item does not have a fiscal impact on the Transit Fund or the City's General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378, the recommended action is not a "project" subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it does not have the potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. In the alternative, the recommended action is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the recommended action may have a significant effect on the environment.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable.

ATTACHMENTS

Not applicable.

PRESENTER(S)

Dan Hennessey, Director of Transportation and Public Works

Rachel Ede, Deputy Director-Transit

Matthew Wilcox, Transit Planner