

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: YURI KOSLEN, TRANSIT PLANNER
TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: SUSPEND PARKSMART SHUTTLE PILOT ON MARCH 1, 2019
AND USE TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT
STRATEGIES TO CONNECTING DOWNTOWN SMART STATION
AND RAILROAD SQUARE WITH DOWNTOWN AND CITY
PARKING GARAGES

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Finance Department and the Transportation and Public Works Department that the Council, by resolution, direct staff to 1) suspend the pilot ParkSMART shuttle service effective March 1, 2019; and 2) further develop a ParkSMART Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program to pilot TDM strategies strengthening the link between Railroad Square, the Downtown SMART Station, and the Downtown area.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In preparation for initiation of SMART rail service in 2017, the City Council directed staff to implement a pilot shuttle service to provide a connection between the Santa Rosa Downtown SMART Station and parking garages in the downtown area. The shuttle service was implemented on December 13, 2017. Staff now seeks Council approval to discontinue the pilot shuttle service due to poor utilization and productivity but expand the ParkSMART program to pilot other transportation strategies to strengthen connections between the Downtown SMART Station, parking facilities, and the Downtown area.

BACKGROUND

Prior to initiation of SMART's operations, business owners in Railroad Square and residents in adjacent neighborhoods expressed concern that SMART riders traveling to the Downtown Santa Rosa SMART Station would drive to the station and park in the spaces needed for customers of the Railroad Square businesses or on the residential streets surrounding the station.

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The City of Santa Rosa Parking Division commissioned a Santa Rosa Citywide Progressive Parking Management Strategy study that looked specifically at the impacts on parking in Railroad Square and the greater downtown Santa Rosa area. The study found that “the Railroad Square focus area provides an excess of parking”. The study identified a low SMART ridership demand scenario, where parking near Railroad Square would still be able to meet the parking demand, but the study also evaluated a peak SMART ridership demand scenario where the parking demand in the Railroad Square area would exceed the supply.

The City Council expressed interest in a circulator shuttle that would link Railroad Square and the Downtown SMART Station with Courthouse Square and the City’s downtown parking garages. At Council’s direction and as recommended in the study, the Purchasing Division conducted an RFP process. In September 2017, Council awarded a contract to MV Transportation, Inc. to operate the circulator shuttle for one year at a cost of about \$180,000 with two one-year options to extend at a cost of approximately \$155,000, to be paid from the Finance Department’s Parking Fund.

This new shuttle service was branded as the “ParkSMART” shuttle, and operations began in December 2017, supported by an extensive marketing program. The shuttle picks up and drops off passengers at a stop immediately adjacent to the SMART Station, with additional stops at Third St. & Davis St., the Downtown Transit Mall, Courthouse Square, Garage 1 on Seventh Street, and B Street & Sixth Street. Garage 1 was emphasized in shuttle design and marketing as a parking location for SMART riders given available capacity at that garage.

The ParkSMART shuttle service is operated as an overlay to the CityBus system. With the implementation of the new CityBus system in May 2017, there are about 20 trips per hour (10 trips each direction) operating from the Transit Mall to within two blocks of Railroad Square and the Downtown SMART Station. Additionally, CityBus has 15-minute service on B Street passing Garage 1.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

On May 3, 2016, the City Council conducted a study session to discuss the implementation of a Downtown Shuttle.

On March 14, 2017, the City Council conducted a study session to review the Progressive Parking Strategies and Railroad Square Parking Management Plan.

On September 19, 2017, the City Council awarded MV Transportation, Inc. the contract to operate the ParkSMART shuttle.

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ANALYSIS

SMART began service in August 2017. Ridership at the Santa Rosa Downtown Station is thus far generally in line with the pre-SMART service estimates cited in the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's SMART Integration Plan.

Sufficient parking availability continues to exist in the Railroad Square with SMART in operation, as was predicted in the Santa Rosa Citywide Progressive Parking Management Strategy (partly due to the continued availability of parking lot 15, which the study considered unavailable for parking due to the permitted hotel).

The ParkSMART shuttle has been operating since December 13, 2017, and though ridership has grown during the pilot period, ridership levels do not meet the benchmarks set prior to the service, and its productivity (measured in passengers/hour of service) is significantly below performance standards.

There has been no indication of an increase in garage parking related to the SMART train. Since August 2017, the Parking Division has sold two parking permits to people who identified as being SMART train commuters. Both permits sold are no longer active.

A key reason for ParkSMART's poor performance may be that ParkSMART is more of a redundant service, meaning that the public could use CityBus to make these same trips or utilize parking within Railroad Square or the First Street garage at the Transit Mall, rather than parking at Garage 1 on Seventh Street. In addition, the public can utilize the existing sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure and the availability of TNCs (Uber or Lyft) within the Downtown area. All these factors likely contribute to the low utilization of ParkSMART.

In examining ridership on ParkSMART by stop, it appears that existing transit and parking services could sufficiently serve the most popular stops. At the SMART Station, people appear to be boarding the shuttle to get to Downtown, but half of those riders use other means to get back to the train station. The ridership at Garage 1 on Seventh Street suggests that riders who board here are parking their car and returning via ParkSMART. If the City were to recommend and/or incentivize parking at a different parking lot, it would seem these riders may follow that guidance.

The fact that more people get off ParkSMART at the Transit Mall may be because it is the first stop within Downtown, but it also suggests that SMART riders may be comfortable with using the existing CityBus service. The existing CityBus service could serve these riders. Currently, transfers within a 2-hour period from SMART to CityBus are free when using the Clipper Card, allowing SMART riders to travel into Downtown at no additional cost. On the return trip, if a rider pays for their CityBus ride with a Clipper Card, they receive a \$1.50 credit toward their SMART fare.

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Santa Rosa's Station Area is in a dynamic phase. The City is embarking on an effort to increase density, SMART ridership is likely to continue to increase, and transportation demands within the downtown area will mature accordingly. Considering these dynamic factors, staff seek Council's approval to continue to pilot different TDM strategies to connect the Railroad Square and Courthouse Square areas while improving access to the Downtown SMART Station.

Staff recommends the immediate implementation of the following ParkSMART TDM program strategies to replace the shuttle:

1. Offer a discounted Transit Commuter Parking Permit pilot program for Garage 12. This would allow people to park near the Transit Mall and pay half price for parking if they are consistently using SMART, CityBus, Golden Gate Transit or Sonoma County Transit.

Identify the public parking under Highways 101 as the closest parking to the SMART Station.

2. Promote CityBus' 10 buses an hour in each direction from 6:00am-8:00pm between Downtown and the SMART Station through improved signage.
3. Promote reciprocal transfer credits between SMART and CityBus through the Clipper Card.
4. Investigate the feasibility of using parking garage/lot receipts as transfers on CityBus, and implement if found to be beneficial, in order to encourage the public to park and move around downtown on transit.
5. Promote the Sonoma Emergency Ride Home Program for bus, train, carpool, vanpool, bicycling, or walking to work commuters.

Staff expect the transportation options within downtown to continue to evolve. Staff propose the following potential future TDM strategies as part of the ParkSMART program:

1. Promote and support Sonoma County Transportation Authority expected late 2019 implementation of a bike share program.
2. Investigate a program using Uber, Lyft or taxi vehicles to provide first mile/last mile transportation option serving the Downtown SMART Station.
3. Continue to optimize CityBus connections with SMART.

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FISCAL IMPACT

There is no impact to the General Fund. The Finance Department and Transportation and Public Works Department have adequate funding to implement the initial ParkSMART TDM program recommendations within existing Parking and Transit enterprise programs.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action 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

- Resolution

CONTACT

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