

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: RACHEL EDE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR - TRANSIT
TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS
SUBJECT: MARIN SONOMA COORDINATED TRANSIT SERVICE PLAN
(MASCOTS) UPDATE

AGENDA ACTION: INFORMATIONAL

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by Transportation and Public Works Department, that the Council receive a report on the Marin Sonoma Coordinated Transit Service Plan (MASCOTS). This item is provided for Council's information and no action will be taken.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The introduction of SMART train service and the evolving post-pandemic transit market have resulted in an opportune time to launch a coordinated service planning effort for transit service in the US 101 corridor in Marin and Sonoma Counties. MASCOTS is a multi-agency planning effort to comprehensively analyze transit service in the Highway 101 corridor and recommend changes to optimize the transit network. This Council item provides an update on the MASCOTS effort including background, overview, timeline and findings from the existing conditions analysis. The Council will receive another update in early 2025 on the recommendations from the effort.

BACKGROUND

Transit operators in Marin County and Sonoma County form a unique sub-region. These six agencies (Santa Rosa CityBus, Sonoma County Transit, Petaluma Transit, Golden Gate Transit, Marin Transit, and SMART) have a history of coordinating fares, marketing, bus stops, and schedules to improve the network of transit services in the area. However, historically, transit service planning in the Marin-Sonoma region has primarily been done by each agency independently for their service area with agencies responding as quickly as possible to changes in other agencies' schedules. Fully integrated multi-operator service planning has not occurred.

SMART train service launched in 2017. Beginning in 2020, the pandemic significantly altered travel patterns. Agencies have adjusted services to accommodate changed

patterns, but in many cases in an uncoordinated fashion. This has resulted in redundancy along the 101 corridor and missed opportunities to better integrate services. As the pandemic recedes into past and “new normal” travel patterns emerge, this is an opportune time for a comprehensive evaluation of transit service along the 101 corridor.

In 2023 the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD) undertook a strategic planning process. One of the key themes identified through that strategic planning process was the need for improved coordination among transit and county transportation agencies in Marin and Sonoma counties. In response, GGBHTD convened a transit and funding partner meeting in September of 2023 to discuss the Strategic Plan and other topics. This workshop kickstarted an ongoing coordination process through 2024, consisting of a service planning project called the Marin Sonoma Coordinated Transit Service (MASCOTS) Plan, a regular marketing coordination meeting, financial coordination meetings, and a monthly meeting of General Managers and Executive Directors. Participating agencies are Santa Rosa CityBus, Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART), Petaluma Transit, Sonoma County Transit, Marin Transit, GGBHTD, Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC).

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

Not applicable.

ANALYSIS

MASCOTS is a comprehensive structural analysis of transit service in the Highway 101 corridor. The purpose of this effort is to improve service efficiency, effectiveness, and legibility along Highway 101 corridor to better serve existing and future transit customers.

At the outset, the MASCOTS General Manager and Executive Director group agreed on the following Principles of Coordination to ensure good faith participation in the coordination process with the end goal of ensuring the best possible regional and local transit service for riders, the highest combined ridership, and the greatest benefit for the communities served.

Principles of Coordination:

1. Coordination of transit service maximizes the utility of the transit network for riders and the cost effectiveness of service provision.
2. Coordination of schedules supports riders’ ability to seamlessly transfer between services.
3. Coordinated fares and transfer policies maximize the clarity, usability, and equity of the system.
4. Coordinated and joint outreach, marketing, and communication efforts help riders better understand the services available to them and maximize the impact of each operator’s efforts.

As work progresses, the MASCOTS effort is assessing the most competitive markets for transit service, existing ridership patterns, areas of overlapping service, areas where service does/does not meet demand, and connections among services. The outcome will be a coordinated plan for services to meet the needs/demands within the US 101 corridor. Work is currently underway, building off the development of MTC's regional Transit 2050+ planning process, with potential service recommendations being identified in early 2025.

The project will unfold in three phases: Phase 1: Understand Current Conditions; Phase 2: Develop Solutions to Address Opportunities; and Phase 3: Document Impacts of Alternatives. Phase 1 is complete and highlights will be presented as part of this Council item. Some of those highlights are:

1. SMART has changed mobility fundamentally in the 101 corridor in Marin and Sonoma Counties, increasing ridership and offering a competitive and attractive travel option for commuters and all-day riders; local connectivity to SMART is critical.
2. Golden Gate Transit all-day bus ridership north of San Rafael has declined significantly since the launch of SMART and should be re-evaluated.
3. The 101 corridor in Marin County from San Rafael to Marin City in particular, and to a lesser degree Novato to San Rafael, is overserved. Overlapping services create rider confusion and resources could be more effectively deployed.
4. Demand to San Francisco is strongest from San Rafael south and more frequent all-day bus service in this corridor is warranted.

In early 2025, draft recommendations will be released, and a robust public engagement process will be implemented to seek feedback from current and potential future transit riders.

Staff will continue to participate in these efforts and support planning and implementation of MASCOTS service changes to adjust to emerging needs. While MASCOTS recommendations will be focused on the transit operators that directly serve the 101 corridor, Santa Rosa CityBus will certainly play an important supporting role. Strategic realignments and connections on local services are anticipated to play a vital role in improving local connections to the north/south service and ultimately the overall success of this effort.

FISCAL IMPACT

This item is information only and does not have a fiscal impact on the General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The Council finds that the proposed action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under section 15061(b)(3) and 15378 in

that there is no possibility that the implementation of this action may have significant effects on the environment, and that no further environmental review is required.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

PRESENTER

Matthew Wilcox – Transit Planner
Cathleen Sullivan – MASCOTS Project Manager, Marin Transit