

# MENDOCINO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

## MINUTES

### SOCIAL SERVICES TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

November 29, 2023

Teleconference - Remote Zoom Meeting

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

Richard Baker, Willits Harrah Senior Center  
Jill Rexrode, Redwood Coast Seniors  
Jacob King, Mendocino Transit Authority  
Dawn White, Mendocino Transit Authority  
Christine Sookne, Redwood Coast Regional Ctr.

#### STAFF PRESENT

Nephele Barrett, MCOG Executive Director  
Janet Orth, MCOG Deputy Director & CFO  
Jody Lowblad, MCOG Administrative Assistant  
Luis Martinez, Mendocino Transit Authority  
Dean Meester, Caltrans District 1

#### MEMBERS ABSENT

None

#### MEMBER VACANCIES

Potential “handicapped” transit user  
Potential transit user at least 60 years of age  
Local social service provider for the handicapped  
Local social service provider for the handicapped  
that provides transportation

- 1. Call to Order & Introductions.** The meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m., Nephele presiding.
- 2. Public Expression.** Dawn reported that in recent conversations with senior center directors, there were requests that MCOG hold another workshop to discuss issues in common. Nephele intended to meet soon and suggested scheduling a date in January or February. Dawn also reported that Ukiah Senior Center has a new interim executive director, Lisa Silva.
- 3. Minutes.** The meeting minutes of May 10, 2023 were provided for information. No action was taken.
- 4. Annual Review of SSTAC Membership.** Janet reviewed status and openings on the membership roster. There were four vacancies and two seats due to expire in April 2024. Jacob nominated Jill and Richard for reappointment to their expiring seats; Jill concurred. Janet noted the two “potential transit user” seats continue to be vacant until a recruitment effort is made. Discussion of possible candidates for the vacant agency seats. Duties of membership were included in the agenda packet. Appointments are to be confirmed at MCOG’s February board meeting on Consent Calendar.

#### Recommendation:

Upon motion by King, seconded by White, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*4 Ayes – Rexrode, King, White and Sookne; 0 Noes, 1 Absent - Baker*), the SSTAC nominated Jill Rexrode, Redwood Coast Seniors, for reappointment as “Local social service provider for seniors that provides transportation” and Richard Baker, Willits Seniors, Inc., for reappointment as “Local social service provider for seniors” through April 2027.

Richard arrived and consented to his reappointment.

- 5. 2024/25 Unmet Transit Needs Workshop and Recommendation – Compile a list of Unmet Transit Needs and identify other transportation needs and potential solutions.** Janet reviewed the annual process of identifying needs, as detailed in the agenda packet. Today’s workshop is the first step of the funding cycle for the coming fiscal year. Items to be reviewed were needs compiled by MTA from public input during the past year, the previous year’s list for reference, and any new information. Discussion of unmet needs included the following, with Nephele sharing screen with a whiteboard for the new list.

Jacob provided the most recent testimony received by MTA from public input at their board meetings, requesting only one new need since last year: transit service such as a scheduled pickup for Golden Rule Mobile Village, a seniors’ community between Willits and Ukiah. Richard reported it was outside the service

territory of Willits senior center transportation. Jacob reported there is no safe location for a northbound fixed route bus to pick up riders on US-101. MTA could provide a stipend under its contract with Willits Seniors to add this service, using appropriate local bus stops in the community. Richard noted both Willits and Ukiah applied for competitive FTA Section 5310 grant funding this year for vehicles. Trips could be offered weekly, alternating between Willits and Ukiah, or some other schedule. Jacob noted 5310 funds are available for operations as well, and confirmed the request came from Ukiah Senior Center, for seniors' transportation needs, a prerequisite for using 5310 funds. MTA will meet with stakeholders to evaluate this more.

Discussion turned to MCOG's Feasibility Study of Mobility Solutions for Rural Communities of Inland Mendocino County, recently completed with recommendations for Laytonville, Covelo, Brooktrails, Potter Valley, and Hopland. Staff expressed optimism that several of these would be met in the near term, with new funding sources coming for transit. Nephele supported keeping Laytonville, Covelo and Potter Valley on the list; while in pre-development proposals, these are not actually funded yet. Jacob considered Brooktrails and Hopland as priorities also. It was agreed to keep all five on the list to support future funding.

Coast communities were considered next. Westport and North Coast had been identified as needs previously. Jacob noted a suggested loop using Branscomb Road would likely not attract enough ridership to sustain a service, though perhaps to/from Fort Bragg could be feasible. Other remote communities include Comptche and Little River. Jill asked about status of service to The Woods retirement community in Little River; Jacob indicated another meeting would be necessary. There has been a request for a coastal mobility study, though MCOG's inland study was meant to identify replicable strategies appropriate for other communities. Janet suggested MCOG's planning program could engage the public to address such strategies locally. Richard suggested a volunteer driver mileage reimbursement as is offered for Meals on Wheels. Nephele reported that North Coast Opportunities (NCO) applied for a 5310 grant for countywide volunteer driver reimbursement serving seniors and disabled. It was agreed to add mobility solutions for remote coastal communities to the list.

Jacob reported a recent idea from MCOG's Technical Advisory Committee, initially conceived as a tourist shuttle from local hotels to Noyo Harbor and the downtown Fort Bragg central business district on weekends, similar to a holiday trolley. This overlaps with existing fixed routes and could serve both visitors and locals.

Janet reported a need for after-hours trips post-discharge from Howard Memorial Hospital in Willits, and asked about status of talks between MTA and Adventist Health, from a previous unmet needs list. She read aloud a recent email from the former Ukiah Senior Center director with an update on non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) coordination efforts. One problem was the difficulty of obtaining data to develop this further. Richard suggested creating a dedicated on-call service for NEMT and recommended discussion of logistical issues with Adventist. Collaboration could save on hospital costs. Jill noted the need for Santa Rosa medical trips also. Staff mentioned the private service Happy Rides may provide trips. It was agreed to add NEMT to the list.

A perennial need is Wednesday service for Ukiah Senior Center transportation. Status of an FTA Section 5310 grant application was unclear. It was agreed to keep this need on the new list. Discussion returned to the current cycle of applications. Draft scores are anticipated from Caltrans in December or January.

Other review included status of new service between Humboldt County and Ukiah, which was found reasonable to meet last year and is considered a met need. Also met was an evening trip in the Fort Bragg and Mendocino coast area, as well as Saturday service between Ukiah and Willits. Evening service for workers in Ukiah Valley is part of MTA's post-pandemic restoration of service. Several other needs on last year's list were found to be infeasible. MTA's update of the Short Range Transit Development Plan currently in progress is a comprehensive review of transit services.

Discussion of non-service needs noted prior SSTAC recommendations. It was agreed to again advise supporting a new Ukiah Transit Center. MTA will apply for competitive state Transit & Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) funds, where Lake and Humboldt Transit have been successful, and the new SB 125 formula-based TIRCP and Zero Emission Transit Capital Program (ZETCP) funds through MCOG. There is also a need for a new MTA Administration building, either a new building or upgrades and modernization of the old 1948 building. Both facilities together could cost \$40 million. These large projects are typically funded through state and federal grants and programs.

Staff will bring any additional public testimony received to the February 5 public hearing. Six needs were recommended for the list, including one from MTA's public outreach, for a total of seven needs, and the two additional recommendations.

**Recommendation:**

By consensus, the SSTAC recommended submittal of the attached list of seven (7) Unmet Transit Needs as testimony for MCOG's public hearing, and two additional recommendations to develop a Ukiah transit center and make renovations to MTA's administration building.

**6. Information: Mendocino Transit Authority's Short Range Transit Development Plan Update –** *Currently in progress, watch for public comment opportunities.* Jacob reported that the consultant, LSC Transportation Consultants, completed an onboard survey, which indicated ridership is up, though still recovering from pandemic losses. The project's Technical Advisory Group will meet again December 14, and the next public workshops are scheduled for January 9 in person and January 11 virtually. Agency input is invited as well as general public. No action was taken.

**7. Miscellaneous / Announcements.** Richard and Jill reported hundreds of free Thanksgiving meals served, counting those in their dining halls and pickup and delivery. Redwood Coast Seniors serves meals in their Redwood Bistro dining room, with a talented new chef, which has been highly successful lately. Willits Seniors will open their annual Christmas thrift store on December 2, and plans a crafts fair for December 16. Jill reported the recent comprehensive renovations to their 100-year-old building, completed during the pandemic shutdown. Installations include 30 new windows, a new roof, plumbing and other deferred maintenance, as well as a new vegetable garden. They received a Mayor's award for the work.

**8. Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 2:37 p.m.

Submitted by Janet Orth, Deputy Director

**Attached:**

FY 2024/25 SSTAC recommendations