

MENDOCINO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

MINUTES

Social Services Transportation Advisory Council
May 30, 2024

Primary Location:

MCOG / Dow & Associates Offices
525 S. Main St., Suite G, Ukiah

Teleconference Locations:

Redwood Coast Senior Center, 490 N. Harold St., Fort Bragg
Harrah Senior Center, 1501 Baechtel Road, Willits
Redwood Coast Regional Center 1116 Airport Park Blvd, Ukiah

General Public Teleconference by Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT

Richard Baker, Willits Senior Center
Jill Rexrode, Redwood Coast Seniors
Jacob King, Mendocino Transit Authority (MTA)
Dawn White, MTA

MEMBERS ABSENT

Christine Sookne, Redwood Coast Regional
Center

MCOG STAFF PRESENT

Nephele Barrett
Janet Orth
Jody Lowblad

MEMBER VACANCIES

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

PUBLIC PRESENT

Philip Thomas, Anderson Valley Senior Center
Dean Meester, Caltrans District 1
Genevieve Evans, LSC Transportation
Consultants, Inc.
Liz Dorsey, Ukiah Senior Center
Sheryl Mitcham, Ukiah Senior Center

1. Call to Order & Introductions. Executive Director Barrett called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Self-introductions were made: Jacob, Dawn, Nephele, Janet and Jody at MCOG in Ukiah; Richard in Willits; Jill in Fort Bragg; and Philip, Dean and Genevieve joining by Zoom. Liz and Sheryl arrived at the Ukiah location in time for Agenda item #7 (to attend the workshop following SSTAC meeting).

2. Public Expression. None.

3. Minutes of November 29, 2023. The minutes from the November meeting were included in the packet for information and reference. Due to the length of time between meetings, the minutes had been finalized. No action was taken.

4. Presentation: Draft MTA Short Range Transit Development Plan (SRTDP). Genevieve Evans, AICP and Principal of LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc., presented the plan with a slide presentation. Highlights included Project Approach, Background–Demographics, MTA service overview and Ridership Trends, Passenger Survey, Alternatives Evaluation, and plan components: Service Plan, Capital Plan, Financial Plan, and Fare and Marketing Recommendations. She described data collected and public engagement. Documents are posted at: www.2023mendocinotransitplan.com/

Ms. Evans noted Mendocino County has an aging population and a higher proportion of those who are transit dependent than statewide. Ridership trends reflect gradual Covid pandemic recovery.

Survey respondents were more interested in adding evening service than in new routes. Micro-transit and on-demand services were considered and recommended for Willits and Fort Bragg. Performance standards were updated in the SRTDP to be more realistic than the current adopted MCOG standards.

Fleet replacement is part of a capital plan, with transition to zero emissions due by 2040. The new formula SB 125 transit capital funds are an important source addressing greenhouse gas emissions. MCOG has allocated some of this funding for a pilot project to serve Covelo and Laytonville; the SRTDP considers operational logistics. MTA's ambitious capital plan includes vehicles, bus stops, and facilities.

Operating costs are up and local funds down, resulting in an operational deficit; if SB 125 funds closed a million-dollar gap, plan elements for the first year could be implemented. All available funding sources are assumed to be available, with certain sources competitive and not guaranteed.

In summary:

- MTA will continue to provide current level of service throughout planning period
- SRTDP will expand service to rural communities – Brooktrails, Covelo, Laytonville
- SRTDP will expand transit coverage in Ukiah and Willits and improve operating efficiencies
- On-demand technology will be introduced to Mendocino County (Fort Bragg and Willits)
- MTA will implement regular capital upgrades (vehicles, facilities, bus stops) throughout plan period
- SRTDP will support MTA's continued transition to a zero-emission fleet (new BEVs, charging infrastructure)
- Major capital projects – Ukiah Transit Center, New MTA Administration Building
- Simplified fare structure will improve ridership and lower administrative costs
- All service plan elements will be funded based on anticipated funding levels
- Additional funding will be needed to fund all recommended capital upgrades.

Questions and discussion followed. MTA's board had accepted the draft plan the previous day. LSC will accept comments from the SSTAC for consideration in the final document. Jacob considered the plan as starting guidance; more analysis and adjustments could be made over time as needed. Comments from the group were positive. Richard was appreciative, recognizing the effort and planning to create this result, a definite improvement. Philip reported Anderson Valley Senior Center ridership was up, with not only seniors but also others requesting rides to medical appointments in Ukiah; a fair rate as described in the plan is important. With no further comments, Nephele thanked all involved. No action was taken.

5. Review and Recommendation on MTA's Analysis and Prioritization of 2024/25 Unmet Transit Needs. Janet briefly reviewed her written report of the annual process with status to date. Today's meeting is a chance to comment and make a recommendation on whether any of the needs are "reasonable to meet." The Transit Productivity Committee (TPC) met to consider the same item May 2. Both groups' recommendations will be reported at MCOG's Board of Directors meeting June 3, when a formal finding will be made by resolution as part of budget adoption.

She explained a change to her staff report, that two High Priority needs (#S-3 and P-3) were combined into one in the TPC's recommendation. She noted the recommended #S-1, Service/micro transit for Covelo and Laytonville, was dependent on SB 125 funds, which have been delayed, though not cut to date, in the State budget. The TPC's recommended need #P-3, evening service in Ukiah, also would depend on a funding partnership with Mendocino College.

Richard asked whether SB 125 funding could help to alleviate the 24 percent shortfall of Local Transportation Funds to senior centers. Staff indicated that, assuming eligibility, operational funding would require an amendment to MCOG's allocation plan. Philip said the proposed cut to the senior centers transportation program would be difficult to address and they were not sure what to do yet, and asked to keep Anderson Valley in mind. Nephele elaborated on differences between the funding sources. She acknowledged the serious reduction in local funds available for the seniors, resulting from high estimates by the County Auditor-Controller that did not materialize for MCOG's budget over the past couple of years. Now that reserves have been depleted, the cuts are reaching senior centers. This will be discussed more in the workshop following today's SSTAC meeting.

Nephele noted the terms “high, medium and low priority” were not meant to reflect the level of need in this analysis, but included other factors such as feasibility and readiness.

Recommendation:

Upon motion by Baker, seconded by King, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*4 Ayes – Baker, Rexrode, King, and White; 0 Noes; 1 Absent – Sookne*), the SSTAC recommended a finding that “there are unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet” for Fiscal Year 2024/25 contingent on available funds, as identified on the FY 2024/25 list:

- #S-1 Service/micro transit for Covelo and Laytonville
– *contingent on SB 125 funding availability*
- #P-3 Evening service 6pm to 10pm for all routes, primarily in Ukiah
– *Ukiah service is reasonable contingent on funding partnership with Mendocino College*

6. Discussion/ Recommendation on Any Other Transportation Issues. No further recommendations.

7. Members’ Concerns / Announcements / Membership Recruitment. There was a discussion of the vacant seats. Richard offered to print information in the Willits Seniors newsletter to help recruit for the two vacant “potential transit user” seats; staff will follow up. Philip volunteered to serve in one of the open seats.

Liz and Sheryl arrived at approximately 11:10 a.m.

Introductions were made. Liz started six weeks ago as Ukiah Senior Center’s new Executive Director, and Sheryl is the new Transportation Manager. The open positions were discussed and both expressed willingness to serve as new members. Formal appointments will be made by MCOG’s Board.

Recommendation:

Upon motion by King, seconded by Baker, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*4 Ayes – Baker, Rexrode, King, and White; 0 Noes; 1 Absent*), the SSTAC made the following nominations:

- Philip Thomas, Anderson Valley Senior Center
– *Local social service provider for persons of limited means*
- Liz Dorsey, Ukiah Senior Center
– *Local social service provider for the handicapped that provides transportation*
- Sheryl Mitcham, Ukiah Senior Center
– *Local social service provider for the handicapped that provides transportation – Alternate*

8. Adjournment. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:18 a.m.

Submitted by Janet Orth, Deputy Director & CFO