



RTA BOARD AGENDA (Special Meeting)

Wednesday, June 3, 2015
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS' CHAMBERS
COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
1055 Monterey Street, San Luis Obispo, California 93401
RTA starts at 8:30 am

The *AGENDA* is available/posted at: <http://www.slorta.org>

President: Debbie Arnold

Vice President: Jan Howell Marx

Board Members:

Frank Mecham (First District – SLO County)
Bruce Gibson (Second District – SLO County)
Adam Hill (Third District – SLO County)
Lynn Compton (Fourth District – SLO County)
Debbie Arnold (Fifth District – SLO County)
Jim Guthrie (Arroyo Grande)

Tom O'Malley (Atascadero)
John Shoals (Grover Beach)
Jamie Irons (Morro Bay)
Fred Strong (Paso Robles)
Shelly Higginbotham (Pismo Beach)
Jan Howell Marx (San Luis Obispo)

Individuals wishing accessibility accommodations at this meeting under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) may request such accommodations to aid hearing, visual, or mobility impairment (including Limited English Proficiency [LEP]) by contacting the RTA offices at 781-4472. Please note that 48 hours advance notice will be necessary to honor a request.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

PUBLIC COMMENTS: This portion of the agenda is reserved for any members of the public to directly address the San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Board on any items not on the agenda and within the jurisdiction of the Board. Comments are limited to three minutes per speaker. The Board will listen to all communication, but in compliance with the Brown Act, will not take any action on items that are not on the agenda.

A. ACTION AGENDA

- A-1 Public Hearing: Consider Route 15 & North Coast Runabout Service Changes (Action)

B. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Next regularly-scheduled RTA Board meeting on September 2, 2015
There will not be an RTA Board meeting in July 2015

SAN LUIS OBISPO REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

June 3, 2015

STAFF REPORT

AGENDA ITEM: A-1

TOPIC: North Coast Transit Service Changes

PRESENTED BY: Geoff Straw

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Authorize the Executive Director to Implement the North Coast Service Changes Effective August 16, 2015

RTAC RECOMMENDATION: Consensus to support North Coast Service Change recommendations as part of FY15-16 budget discussion

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION:

History and Use of JARC Funding

As part of the *Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century* (TEA-21), the federal transportation authorization bill enacted on June 9, 1998, the Federal Transit Administration was tasked by Congress to implement the Section 5316 Jobs Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program. Initially, JARC grants were discretionary and were allocated annually to projects supported in the annual Congressional earmarking process.

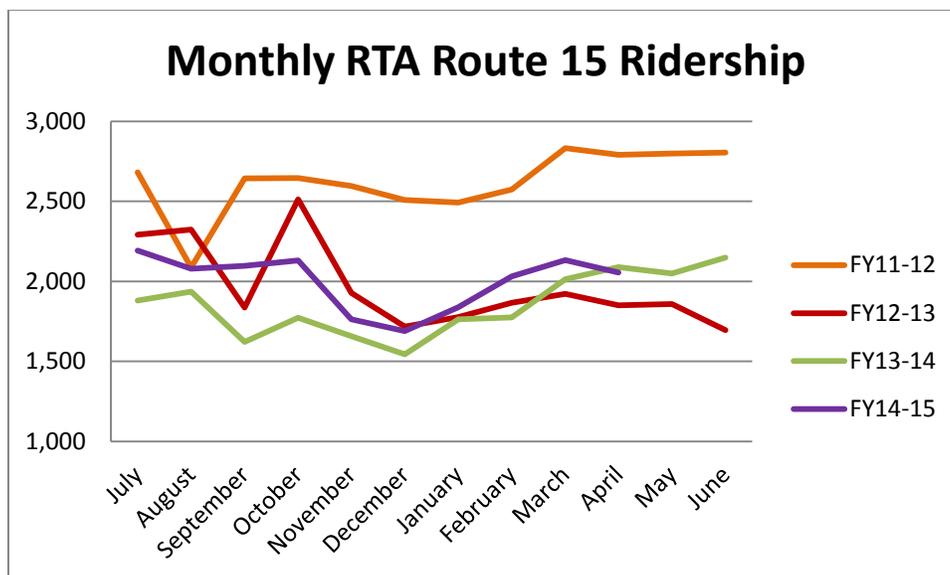
The JARC program was expanded slightly in 2005 with passage of the *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users* (SAFETEA-LU) legislation that was enacted on August 10, 2005. Under SAFETEA-LU, JARC funding was allocated using a complicated funding formula. Funds were allocated directly to transit agencies in large metropolitan areas, while each State DOT oversaw allocation of JARC grants to transit agencies operating in small urban and rural areas.

When the *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century* (MAP-21) authorization bill was enacted on July 6, 2012, the JARC program was eliminated as a separate stand-alone program with designated annual funding. Instead, the definitions of eligible activities for both the urban Section 5307 and rural Section 5311 programs were expanded to allow JARC activities to be included for each of these two formula programs. Grantees now have the option of continuing to fund JARC activities under either of these federal programs; however, if they do, this leaves less funding available for other eligible Section 5307 or Section 5311 activities. Grantees also have the option of not having to fund any JARC activities.

In July 2009, RTA submitted a successful grant application to Caltrans for JARC funding to expand transit services along the North Coast. This JARC grant funded an increase in daily North Coast bus roundtrips on Mondays through Saturdays from three/day to five/day, and Sunday service (three bus roundtrips) was also added. Finally, the grant funded increased access to Runabout service along the Route 15 corridor. This service expansion was implemented in July 2011. RTA subsequently submitted another successful JARC grant application in March 2012 to maintain the expanded North Coast service levels, which funded service through June 30, 2015. In FY14-15, RTA budgeted \$200,000 in JARC funding for North Coast services.

Performance Trends of Route 15

When the expanded Route 15 service was implemented in July 2011, ridership grew substantially in comparison to the former Route 12 service that operated along the North Coast. However, as demonstrated in the graph below, monthly ridership declined substantially after the first year (FY11-12). Compounding this challenge, Runabout trips along the North Coast are typically provided singularly – with little chance to group rides – which results in very high per passenger-trip costs.



Another way to evaluate the effectiveness of a fixed route service is productivity, which is defined as the average number of passenger boardings per hour of service. Over the past four fiscal years, the productivity has averaged 7.9 boardings/hour on Route 15, while the average for the other three year-round RTA fixed routes (Routes 9, 10 and 12) is 25.3 boardings/hour. This lower productivity is expected, given the low-density residential development and low number of major activity centers along the North Coast.

Proposed Changes to North Coast Transit Services

In order to address the relatively low Route 15 ridership in light of declining funding for North Coast transit services, RTA is recommending that the service along the North Coast be modified as follows:

1. **Change Weekday Route 15 to Partial Route-Deviation** – under this scenario, the Route 15 cutaway bus would deviate up to $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile from the fixed route to serve Runabout-eligible riders. This “flex-route” service plan would only be operated between the north Morro Bay city limits and San Simeon on weekdays.
2. **Most Runabout Riders Accommodated** – Persons eligible for ADA complementary paratransit service would be served in the “flex-route zone” (again, up to $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile deviation) by the Route 15 cutaway bus instead of a Runabout van. If the disabled passenger is traveling beyond the southern Route 15 terminus in Morro Bay, a Runabout van would meet the Route 15 bus to transfer the rider. Similar to the current service plan, Runabout riders would be required to schedule flex-route deviation trips between previous day and seven days in advance. There is little doubt that some Runabout riders’ trip experience will degrade if they are forced to transfer (those traveling beyond the Morro Bay terminus), but it should be noted that fixed route riders also are forced to transfer when traveling beyond Morro Bay. Some Runabout riders currently enjoy more schedule flexibility than their fixed route cohorts due to the limited number of daily fixed route runs, and being forced to travel at the same times that the flex-route bus operates will likely degrade some Runabout riders’ current travel experience.
3. **No Adverse Runabout Fare Impacts** – The Runabout fare table effective February 1, 2015 would still apply for their entire trip length. However, under special circumstances the new total fare could be lower. For example, if the Runabout rider can meet the Route 15 bus at an established bus stop, he/she would ride Route 15 for free and only pay the Runabout fare from the transfer point in Morro Bay to their final destination.
4. **Shorten Route 15 to Accommodate Deviations** – In order to provide sufficient time in the Route 15 schedule to accommodate deviations on weekdays, the Route 15 northern terminus would be changed to San Simeon (instead of the current terminus at Hearst Castle). The ridership on Route 15 is lower on weekdays in comparison to weekends, while the opposite is true for Runabout ridership – so this service plan would impact the fewest number of riders. In addition, many weekdays the Route 15 carries zero passengers to or from the Hearst Castle Visitor Center, while weekend service days tend to experience greater passenger activity at the Visitor Center.

Financial Impacts of Recommended Changes

These service changes on the North Coast will have the following financial impacts:

1. The Route 15 miles operated annually will decline by roughly 8,100 miles annually. This equates to an annual savings of approximately \$8,100 (accounting only for fuel and maintenance costs; annual labor costs remains the same).
2. Runabout annual service hours will decline by approximately 900. The net financial impact is difficult to determine with a high degree of accuracy, since the subsidy is based on whether a bus trip can be shared by several fare-paying riders and the passenger-miles saved. To be conservative, it is estimated that Runabout will save approximately \$91,000 annually, based on a marginal subsidy of \$90/hour for Runabout services.
3. Overall fare receipts along the North Coast for both Route 15 and for Runabout will likely decline slightly. As mentioned above, very few riders travel to/from the Hearst Castle Visitor Center – yet the potential loss of those weekday riders will reduce fare receipts.

Public Outreach Efforts

The most obvious impact of this service change recommendation is changing the northern terminus of Route 15 from the Hearst Castle Visitor's Center to Cambria on weekdays. The other impact is how Runabout trips would be accommodated. To ensure affected persons in the community were informed and to seek public input, staff undertook the outreach steps described below.

I initially presented the challenge faced with Route 15 to the North Coast Advisory Committee (NCAC) on June 18, 2014. I explained that special JARC funding would cease to be available after June 30, 2015 and that RTA staff would evaluate alternatives over the next year. I also presented ridership trends at that meeting, and urged the public to try using Route 15 – especially youth, since the Youth Ride Free program is a great way for families to try RTA fixed route services. On May 20, 2015, I again presented to the NCAC – this time providing the service change recommendations discussed in this staff report. An NCAC member suggested that we conduct additional outreach to businesses along the corridor (but especially in San Simeon) to boost Route 15 ridership, while a member of the public suggested a direct connection between Cambria and medical offices in Templeton. No attendees objected to the recommended service changes.

I have also presented the Route 15 funding challenge at RTA Board meetings over the past three years, beginning with the March 2012 meeting when staff presented the final JARC application, and at each RTA Board meeting as part of the Executive Director's Report over the past year. The notion of a route deviation service plan was first raised at the July 11, 2014 RTA Board meeting.

On May 8th, I met on-site at the Hearst Castle with Mary Stephenson, who was designated by the California State Parks Coastal Sector Superintendent Brooke Gutierrez to discuss the possible impacts of Route 15 route changes. Other RTA staff included Operations Manager Phil Moores and Marketing Manager Mary Gardner. SLOCOG Employer Outreach Coordinator Peter Williamson also joined us. Ms. Stephenson is an occasional Route 15 rider, and she understood what RTA staff is recommending. Ms. Stephenson will talk to transportation sector officials to determine if the Castle's contractor could possibly meet the Route 15 bus at its terminus in San Simeon upon request (the rider would tell the Route 15 bus operator, who would radio the request to the RTA dispatcher, who would then call the Visitor Center). Mr. Williamson provided information on SLOCOG's carpool/vanpool ridematching services, as well as other travel options.

Staff evaluated Runabout ridership over the past 12 months to determine which riders either boarded or alighted in the "flex zone." Only 20 Runabout registrants completed rides in the corridor, and staff sent a letter explaining the changes to each of these registrants (see Appendix A for a sample letter). Only two registrants ride regularly – one between Cambria and Los Osos, and the other between Cambria and Achievement House near Cuesta College. Staff has attempted to schedule an at-home meeting with each rider to explain the potential changes and to provide personalized travel training on potentially using the fixed route service (fare-free for Runabout riders).

Staff placed a notice at every Route 15 bus stop and at the transit centers in SLO and Morro Bay that explain the potential service changes. The notice also requests public input through phone, email, letter or testimony at the June 3rd RTA Board meeting. This same notice was provided electronically to Ms. Stephenson for posting in State Parks employee rooms and possible email distribution to State Parks employees. The notice was also placed inside both of the cutaway buses typically used for Route 15 service. Copies of the Runabout letter were also provided to Runabout bus operators to give to any new riders that might be scheduled along the flex-zone corridor over the past two weeks. The RTA website features the public meeting notice, too. Finally, we placed a public notice in the Tribune, New Times and The Cambrian.

As of May 27, 2015 staff has received only one phone call regarding the recommended North Coast service changes. This Runabout rider is blind, lives in Los Osos, and occasionally rides to Cayucos. She supports avoiding the connection at the Morro Bay transit center if the additional Runabout travel time is negligible to take the rider all the way to Cayucos. Any other input received prior to June 3rd will be summarized and presented verbally at the Public Hearing.

Staff Recommendation

Authorize the Executive Director to implement the staff recommended service changes on August 16th.



APPENDIX A

179 Cross Street, Suite A
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
(805) 781-4472 Fax (805) 781-1291
www.slorta.org

May 15, 2015

Re: **Proposed changes to RTA Route 15 and how this affects Runabout riders**

Dear Runabout Rider:

At the upcoming June 3rd meeting, the RTA Board of Directors will be reviewing proposed changes to RTA Route 15. Changes to this route will have an effect on the Runabout service along the North Coast between Morro Bay and San Simeon. Runabout will operate normally in Morro Bay and there are no planned Route 15 deviations in the Morro Bay city limits. The Route 15 will potentially stop providing service to Hearst Castle on weekdays and would instead provide service for ambulatory riders and persons eligible for Runabout service through San Simeon in a new "Deviated Fixed Route service." A Deviated Fixed Route service means that the fixed route van will deviate from the fixed route in order to provide pick-ups and drop-offs for Runabout riders at the same time that it drives its fixed route. It will continue to pick up Runabout riders within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of the fixed route path at their home. It will take riders to their destination within the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile distance of the route, or it will take them to Morro Bay where riders can transfer to a Runabout vehicle, which will transport riders if the destination is beyond Morro Bay.

It is never an easy decision to change service, especially on a program that serves many of our vulnerable community members. However, due to funding changes, we are faced with making the best decision to preserve as much of the public transportation services along the North Coast as possible.

I encourage you to contact me to tell us how this Runabout/Route 15 change proposal would affect you. I welcome written testimony mailed to the address in the upper corner of this page or an email to info@slorta.org. I would also invite you to attend our public hearing on **Wednesday June 3rd, at 8:30 AM** in the SLO County building, in the Supervisor's meeting room where our Board members will hear public comment on this issue if you would like to speak.

I would appreciate your support for this change to the RTA system and the Runabout services so that together we can ensure its long-term success in our region.

Sincerely,

Geoff Straw
RTA Executive Director

The Regional Transit Authority is a Joint Powers Agency serving residents and visitors of:

Arroyo Grande Atascadero Grover Beach Morro Bay Paso Robles Pismo Beach San Luis Obispo and The County of San Luis Obispo