

Executive Summary
2016 San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority
Short Range Transit Plan
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This document presents a five-year Short-Range Transit Plan (SRTP) developed for the San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority (RTA). An SRTP is intended to provide a detailed business plan to guide the transit organization over the coming five years. It includes a review of San Luis Obispo region demographics and its transit needs, a series of surveys and ridership counts conducted for all RTA services, a review of the effectiveness and efficiency of existing services, a review of similar systems, analysis of a wide range of options, and the results of public input processes. The resulting SRTP provides operational, capital and institutional plans, including an implementation plan. This SRTP plan has been prepared jointly with the development of a parallel SRTP for the SLO Transit program, in order to identify means to best coordinate the two services. Note that this plan does not cover services operated by RTA under contract to other entities, including the Paso Express service, the South County Transit program, and the smaller demand response services operated for San Luis Obispo County.

EXISTING DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of San Luis Obispo County, per the 2009-2013 US Census estimates is 272,094. Population density is shown in Figure 1. Persons living in **households without vehicles** total 4,423, or 4.3 percent of the total countywide population. **Youth** (persons under 18 years of age) total 51,750, or 19 percent of total population. **Elderly** persons age over 60 total 42,984 (16 percent). There are a total of 36,588 persons living in households below the federal **poverty** level (13.4 percent of total population). Persons who indicate they have a **mobility disability** total 28,401, or 10.4 percent of total population. Of all countywide population, 77 percent live within ½ mile of a public transit route. Population is forecast to increase by 4 percent by 2021.

OVERVIEW OF THE SAN LUIS OBISPO REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

RTA is a Joint Powers Authority formed in 1989 that serves and connects various communities within San Luis Obispo County and nearby cities. Regional fixed route and paratransit services throughout the region (including within the city of San Luis Obispo) are managed by RTA. In addition, RTA is contracted by SLO County to operate community-based services in unincorporated areas (primarily in Nipomo, Shandon and Templeton), and by the City of Paso Robles to operate the Paso Express fixed route services and the Paso Robles Dial-A-Ride service. RTA also provides administrative oversight of the SCT fixed route services in the Five Cities area.

The RTA Board of Directors consists of a representative from all of the cities in which transportation services are provided, as well as all five San Luis Obispo County Supervisors, while the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) meets quarterly and provides

advice to the RTA Board. Services have been directly operated by RTA employees since 2009, when the previously contracted services were brought in-house.

A total of 31,531 vehicle-hours of fixed route services are operated annually, providing over 765,000 passenger-boardings. Key RTA fixed route services consist of:

- Route 9 connecting San Luis Obispo with Atascadero, Templeton, Paso Robles and San Miguel to the north.
- Route 10 connecting San Luis Obispo with the Five Cities, Nipomo and Santa Maria (Santa Barbara County) to the south.
- Route 12 connecting San Luis Obispo with Los Osos and Morro Bay to the west.
- Route 14 connecting San Luis Obispo with the main Cuesta College campus to the west.
- Route 15 connecting Morro Bay with Cayucos, Cambria and Hearst Castle to the north.

Fixed route services are operated hourly on weekdays, except for Route 15 which operates every three hours. Reduced service levels are operated on weekends.

Runabout Service

Runabout is the County-wide ADA complementary paratransit service operated by RTA. Total Vehicle-hours equal 37,838 per year, carrying 45,000 passengers per year (including attendants). Service vehicle-hours (with passengers on board) total 30,456, reflecting the substantial proportion of hours traveling between drop-offs and pick-ups. "No shows" (passengers that are not available for pickup) are 2 percent of all reservations, while late cancellations represent 5 percent of total reservations. Up to 15 vehicles are in operation at peak times. Overall, 94.2 percent of trips were served on-time (0 to 5 minutes late), 4.7 percent were served early, while 1.1 percent were served more than 5 minutes late.

Fleet

RTA's fixed route fleet consists of a total of 34 vehicles, while the Runabout program has a fleet of 22 vehicles. The bulk of the fleet used in RTA fixed routes are 40' diesel coaches, though four 1999 45' over-the-road coaches were recently added. Existing RTA operating/administrative costs total \$8,159,000 per year. Key revenues sources include Local Transportation Funds (44 percent of all revenues) and Federal sources (18 percent).

Ridership

Annual ridership is 1,038,000 per year, when including all services operated or administered by RTA. Since 2007, there has been a consistent annual increase in ridership. 2013 ridership is fully 270 percent greater than 2003 ridership.

Onboard Surveys

RTA Fixed Route Onboard Survey

An onboard passenger survey indicated that respondents were primarily coming and going for the purpose of either work (39 percent) or school (34 percent). 34 percent of the riders were college students (primarily Cuesta College students). Passengers were asked to rank transit service characteristics of RTA on a scale of “Very Poor” to “Excellent.” “Driver Courtesy” received the highest rating with 74 percent of the riders rating it a “Very Good” to “Excellent.” The “Hours of Service” and “Service Frequency” receive the lowest average rating, with 26 percent and 22 percent indicating “Poor” or “Very Poor”, respectively. Asked “What single most important improvement would you suggest for RTA”, the largest number of responses (202) were for expanded hours or days of service, followed by 144 for increased service frequency, and 91 for improved buses.

Runabout Onboard Survey

A high percentage of Runabout rider respondents (32 percent) were using the service for medical/dental purposes, while 20 percent were using it for work. Only 13 percent of respondents said they had a car available for the trip, and 44 percent claimed they would not have made the trip had paratransit service not been available, indicating high transit-dependency of the ridership. Furthermore, 37 percent of the customers did not use the Fixed Route bus on the specific trip surveyed because it would be too difficult for them, while 17 out of the 41 customers require a wheelchair. 63 percent of the respondents were over the age of 60 years old, and 69 percent did not have a driver’s license at the time of the survey. Asked to rank the overall service, 84 percent of passengers indicated “Very Good” or “Excellent”.

Online Survey

In addition to the onboard surveys, an online survey was conducted. Asked to rate RTA, the lowest rated service among RTA riders was “Hours of Service” followed by “Service Frequency.” The highest rated services were “Driver Courtesy” and “Safety Performance.” Overall, 70 percent indicated an “Excellent” or “Very Good” rating of overall performance. The most popular way to improve RTA was to offer a more frequent schedule on both weekdays and weekends (67%), and to operate later on weekdays (46%). Of survey responses that do not ride

the bus, the most popular reason selected was “The bus is inconvenient for me,” followed by “Traveling by bus takes too long.”

Peer Comparison

Comparing RTA fixed route services with seven California peer systems, RTA was found to have relatively high passenger-trips per vehicle-hour (second from the highest) but relatively low passenger-trips per vehicle-mile (second from the lowest), reflecting relatively long trip lengths. Annual passenger-trips per capita was relatively low. RTA’s operating costs were close to average on a per vehicle-hour basis, but the lowest of the peers on a per vehicle-mile basis. The operating subsidy per passenger-trip was relatively low. Runabout was found to carry the lowest number of passenger-trips per vehicle-hour and per vehicle-mile, as well as relatively low ridership per capita. Operating costs are relatively high on a per vehicle-hour basis, but close to average on a per vehicle-mile basis. RTA also has a relatively high cost and subsidy requirement per passenger-trip.

SHORT RANGE TRANSIT PLAN ELEMENTS

Service Plan

- This plan will **enhance weekday daytime service on Routes 9 and 10** by adding new mid-day limited stop express service to the current schedule. RTA should implement weekday express service on Route 9 between San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles in the mid-day period, consisting of four additional round trips using an additional (fourth) bus from roughly 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM) while maintaining all existing runs. This will reduce in-vehicle travel times by up to 20 minutes, expand the frequency of service between these key transit centers, and help address the crowding issue. A mid-day weekday express service should also be implemented on Route 10. The current 74 minute end-to-end travel time would be reduced to 55 minutes. Five new express runs in each direction will occur between roughly 7:30 AM and 5:50 PM, which will allow use of existing express buses. These service enhancements will be implemented in FY17-18, assuming additional funding can be secured.
- **Evening service will be expanded on Routes 9, 10, and 12.** New evening service on Route 9 should be expanded by providing additional local route runs on weekdays (two additional southbound runs and one northbound run), as well as one additional run in each direction on Saturdays and Sundays. Additional evening runs should also be added to the existing Route 10 schedule on weekdays (two additional northbound runs and one southbound run) and one additional round-trip on Saturdays and Sundays. Finally, one additional westbound weekday run should be added to the Route 12 schedule. These service enhancements will be implemented in FY17-18, assuming additional funding can be secured.
- **Route 10 services will be modified** as demand warrants. As ridership patterns result in increased loads or changes in travel patterns, new services (such as limited stop services) will be implemented.

- **Route 12 schedules will be modified** to eliminate the existing long layovers in Morro Bay. This will reduce the in-vehicle travel time between Los Osos and San Luis Obispo by up to 20 minutes, and yield a net increase in ridership. This service enhancement will be implemented in FY16-17 following a focused public involvement outreach effort.
- **Runabout capacity will be increased** to address growth in demand for paratransit service, including the provision of one additional Runabout vehicle in peak operation every two years. RTA will also keep the option for taxi subsidy program open in the future.

Capital Plan

- RTA will **purchase 12 fixed route buses plus 30 Runabout vehicles** over the coming six years to replace vehicles reaching the end of their useful life and to expand the Runabout fleet. Note that no additional fixed route vehicles are required under the Service Plan presented above.
- RTA will **implement Wi-Fi service** on a limited experimental basis, focusing first on the four over-the-road coaches recently added to the RTA fleet.
- RTA will **make vans retired from the fleet available to other transportation providers in the area**, which will expand the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles to residents and help to reduce the demand for Runabout service.
- A new **RTA Transit Garage Facility** will be constructed. The preliminary preferred site has been identified on Elks Lane near Prado Road.
- RTA will construct a **new bus parking facility in Paso Robles** at a County-owned parcel on Paso Robles Street.
- RTA will continue to work with the City and SLOCOG to develop a **new downtown transit center**. As this project will require several years to implement, in the meantime RTA will enhance lighting and add two bus shelters and benches at the existing Government Center site, and work with the City to eliminate nearby on-street parking that is hampering safe bus operations.
- **Bus stop improvements** will be implemented, including new shelters, bike racks, lighting, trash cans, and improved wheelchair accessibility. These improvements will be coordinated with local jurisdictions.

Management Plan

- **Service standards will be revised** to better match current conditions and goals.

- **Runabout eligibility and certification processes** will be modified, in order to control costs and provide more consistency in the process.
- **Runabout scheduling procedures** will be modified to increase productivity and staff efficiency. Coordination of Runabout and fixed route services for individual passenger trips (where appropriate) will be considered, and regional travel training will be expanded.
- **Coordination of RTA and SLO Transit** will be enhanced by (1) working towards a single regional bus tracker website, (2) developing a single ID card for persons with disabilities, (3) defining a consistent policy on passenger baggage, (4) coordinating routes and schedules where beneficial, (5) increasing joint driver training, and (6) working towards a common bus replacement policy.

Financial Plan

RTA will implement the following fare policy changes:

- RTA will offer a **discount Regional Day Pass** to enhance mobility throughout the region by persons with disabilities.
- RTA will **replace the current 7-Day Pass with a 3-Day Pass**, to align with the SLO City program.
- RTA will **accept the SLO Transit picture ID for RTA discount fares**.

Services and capital improvements are planned to be funded through a combination of existing funding sources, including fare revenues, Federal Transit Administration funds, Transportation Development Act funds, other state sources, and Cuesta College contributions. There also is a potential for new revenues from a potential new countywide ½-cent sales tax (though these revenues are not included in this plan). If passed, this new revenue would be focused on expanding Runabout service, expanding evening service and mid-day express service, and reducing fares for seniors and persons with disabilities.