



## **South County Transit Short Range Transit Plan Working Paper Two: Goals and Objectives**



**Prepared for the**



**San Luis Obispo Regional Transit  
Authority**



**LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.**



# **South County Transit Short Range Transit Plan**

*FYs 2019-20 to 2026-27*

*Working Paper Two: Goals and Objectives*

Prepared for the

San Luis Obispo Council of Governments  
1114 Marsh Street  
San Luis Obispo, California 93401  
(805) 781-4219

Prepared by

LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.  
2690 Lake Forest Road, Suite C  
P.O. Box 5875  
Tahoe City, California 96145  
(530) 583-4053

April 18, 2019



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: Review of Existing Goals and Objectives, and Monitoring Procedures .....	3

## LIST OF TABLES

---

<i>TABLE</i>	<i>PAGE</i>
1 South County Transit Standards of Excellence – Sections 1 to 3 .....	6
2 South County Transit Standards of Excellence – Sections 4 to 6 .....	7

This page left intentionally blank.

The San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority (RTA) has retained LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc., to prepare a Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) for the South County area. This study also includes evaluation and planning for four County-funded general public Dial-A-Ride programs: Nipomo, Shandon-Paso Robles, Templeton-Paso Robles and Paso Robles. The study provides an opportunity to develop plans that will tailor transit services to current conditions and provide a “business plan” for the transit program regarding services, capital improvements, marketing, and management strategies.

This document is the second in a series of Working Papers that will be prepared in the course of the study. Building on the summary of existing transit services and existing plans provided in Working Paper One, this second Working Paper focuses on the policies and monitoring procedures for the transit programs. This includes a review of existing goals, objectives and standards for the two transit programs. An assessment is provided regarding the way in which services have been monitored and reported to decision makers, along with an overall review of how the policy statements conform to the overall mission and priorities of the organizations. Finally, recommendations regarding changes to policies, standards, and monitoring/reporting processes are provided, and apply our experience in developing appropriate policy statements for other transit programs. This information will be used in upcoming study steps to assess existing services as well as to evaluate potential alternatives.

This page left intentionally blank.



## Review of Existing Goals and Objectives, and Monitoring Procedures

---

This discussion first focuses on the South County Transit fixed route services, followed by the Dial-A-Ride services.

### SOUTH COUNTY TRANSIT

#### Existing Goals and Policies

The key management document for South County Transit is the *South County Transit Strategic Business Plan*. The current version, covering the years 2018 to 2020, was approved by the Board on April 25, 2018. Updates to this plan occur every three to four years. Elements of this *Plan* are as follows:

- Vision Statement
- Mission Statement
- Vision Elements
- Strategic Direction
- Long-Term Goals
- Objectives to meet long-term goals
- Business Direction
- Focused 2018-20 Strategic Business Plan Goals and Objectives
- Focused 2018-20 Strategic Business Plan Standards of Excellence

The key policy statements in this document are summarized below.

#### Vision Statement

*The SoCo Transit of the future will help meet residents' and visitor's diverse transportation needs in the Five Cities Area.*

#### Mission Statement

*SoCo Transit is committed to providing safe, friendly, and reliable service to the citizens of and visitors to the Five Cities Area.*

## Vision Elements

- 1. Continue successful partnerships with jurisdictions, county, other public agencies, businesses and schools.*
- 2. Provide excellent, reliable, sustainable seamless service that is effective in getting residents and visitors where they want to travel.*
- 3. Secure reliable funding.*
- 4. Sustain and continue to improve the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) program to improve service quality and provide efficiencies.*
- 5. Develop a well-executed image-building campaign with a single face for public transportation.*

## Strategic Direction

- 1. Stabilize and grow funding.*
- 2. Continue to improve service quality: On-time performance, scheduling and routing, customer amenities on our vehicles and at our bus stops, operating procedures.*
- 3. Consolidate and streamline operations to improve efficiency and effectiveness of public transportation throughout the county.*
- 4. Include public transportation as part of the lifestyle evolution needed to confront climate change.*
- 5. Reduce private automobile Vehicle Miles Traveled in private automobiles.*
- 6. Improve SoCo Transit's farebox recovery ratio to avoid Transportation Development Act (TDA) penalties.*
- 7. Embrace technological improvements that will positively impact efficiency and quality of service.*

## Long-Term Goals

- 1. Provide market-driven service that meets the needs of the communities that we serve but that will also attract discretionary riders.*

- 2. Provide transportation services that are safe, reliable, economical and accessible in an efficient manner with innovative management practices and technological advancements.*
- 3. Lead and participate in the analysis of the integration of transit operations throughout the county to ensure that customers are provided seamless transit alternatives and services that attract discretionary riders from every community that SoCo Transit serves.*
- 4. Promote the value of SoCo Transit and public transportation to the quality of life in the Five Cities Area and the environmental rewards of utilizing public transportation and the reduction of vehicle miles traveled.*

The Plan includes 16 objectives established to meet these long-term goals.

#### Focused 2018029 Strategic Business Plan Goals and Objectives

- 1. Increase Ridership – Increase ridership through improved system design by attracting discretionary customers and improving sub-regional transit alternatives.*
- 2. Key Performance Indicators – Expand the development and use of our KPIs to enhance system performance, employee performance and improve service quality to our customers.*
- 3. Innovation – Explore innovative opportunities to improve our service for our customers and potential customers.*

A total of 11 objectives are defined to achieve these three goals. These focus on monitoring services, expanding public awareness and exploring new service strategies and technologies.

#### Standards of Excellence

At the core of the Plan is a series of 27 “standards of excellence” that define the metrics to be used to assess progress on the overall plan, as well as the appropriate reporting and review process. These standards are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

#### **Monitoring, Reporting and Review Processes**

Tables 1 and 2 present the monitoring process regarding the individual standards. To assess how this process is being carried out, Board meeting minutes for the most recent year was reviewed. Staff regularly reviews and presents to the Board the most recent data (by route and weekday vs. weekend) on:

- Passenger Ridership
- Service Miles

<b>TABLE 1: South County Transit Standards of Excellence -- Sections 1 to 3</b>			
<b>Current Standard</b>		<b>Review/Reporting Process</b>	<b>Recommended Changes to Standard</b>
<b>Section 1: Service Quality and Efficiency – We will deliver dependable, customer focused and efficient transit services to the communities that we serve. Further, we will look for opportunities to deploy innovative new service within budgetary constraints.</b>			
1	Passengers per vehicle service hour will be 17 or greater.	Administrator will review monthly and report at each Board meeting.	Not Attained (13.0, 13.1 excluding Avila Trolley)
2	The Service Delivery rate for all regularly scheduled / year-round services shall be 99% or greater.	Reviewed quarterly by Operations, and reported by Administrator bi-annually to the Board.	Attained (100%)
3	The On-time Performance for all regularly-scheduled / year-round services shall be 90% or greater. 'On-time' is defined as no later than six minutes from any timepoint in the published schedule. We recognize that making scheduled transfers between buses is vitally important to riders, and staff will explore methods of regularly measuring missed transfers.	Administrator will report bi-annually to the Board.	Attained (93%)
4	SoCo Transit will make consistent efforts to explore new service and service delivery options as well as work with regional efficiencies in the delivery of transportation to the jurisdictions	Reviewed quarterly by Operations, and reported by Administrator annually to the Board.	Attained
5	SoCo Transit will measure overcrowding as the frequency of instances that the number of passengers on a bus exceeds the number of seats (i.e., 34 passengers on a 34-seat bus equates to a Load Factor of 1.00), as well as the duration of exceedances. The Overcrowding standard for regular fixed-route services is no more than 10% of the monthly total number of bus trips that exceed a Load Factor of 1.25 for greater than 20 minutes.	Reviewed quarterly by Operations, and reported by the Administrator biannually to the Board.	Attained
<b>Section 2: Revenue and Resources – While providing excellent service to our customers and communities, we will do so within the financial resources available to us. The financial health of the organization will not be compromised, and we will work to deliver good value for the taxpayers' investment in SoCo Transit.</b>			
1	The annual operating budget will be based upon projected revenue balanced with other eligible TDA uses and the total operating cost will not exceed the budget adopted by the Board.	Administrator will review monthly and report at each regularly scheduled Board meeting.	Attained
2	Farebox Recovery Ratio shall be greater than the minimum standard required by SLOCOG to meet TDA requirements. In FY17-18, that minimum was 20%.	Administrator will review monthly and report at each regularly scheduled Board meeting.	12.3%
3	No significant annual fiscal and compliance audit findings.	Finance and Administration will report any negative audit findings to the Board.	Attained
4	Ensure that all capital procurements provide good value to our customers and our employees.	Evaluated through the Marketing Department's biannual Community Perception Survey, feedback from communities and review of the annual 5-year capital program by the Board.	Attained
<b>Section 3: Safety – We recognize the tremendous importance of safety in the operation of SoCo Transit service to our customers and communities. Therefore, the safety of our customers and employees will be an organizational priority and we will be proactive in promoting system safety.</b>			
1	Rate of preventable vehicle collisions will not exceed 1.0 per 100,000 miles.	Rate shall be tracked by the Safety and Training Manager, and reported annually to the Board.	Attained
2	Address all safety hazards identified and reported to the joint RTA / SoCo Transit Safety Resource Committee.	List shall be compiled with action items and timelines by the Safety and Training Manager.	Attained
3	Preventable workers compensation lost-time claims will not exceed 4 annually, and preventable medical-only claims will not exceed 5 annually.	All work comp claims shall be duly investigated and immediately reported by Finance and Administration to our work comp carrier.	Attained (0/1)
4	Customer and Community perception of system safety will be at least 90%.	As measured by biannual Community Perception Survey.	Attained
5	Total risk management costs shall not exceed industry norms. Staff will undertake alternating market surveys every four years for vehicle liability / physical damage coverage and for workers compensation coverage.	Reported by Finance and Administration in financials and reported at each regularly scheduled Board meeting.	Not Attained

**TABLE 2: South County Transit Standards of Excellence -- Sections 4 to 6**

Current Standard			Review/Reporting Process		Current Status of Standard		Recommended Changes to Standard
Section 4: Human Resources – Our employees are the foundation of the organization. We will support our employees in achieving excellence through training and development, teamwork, and continuous efforts at effective communication while treating each with integrity and dignity.							
1	Recruit, promote and retain highly qualified employees to achieve our service standards.	Annual assessment by Administrator and Department Heads.	Attained		None		
2	Provide continuous development of organizational skills through ongoing training and development programs that result in personal and professional growth.	Training needs will be reviewed annually as part of the budget process.	Attained		None		
3	Enable our employees to achieve excellence in serving our customers by building teamwork and understanding effective communication within the organization.	Ongoing weekly management team meetings, bi-weekly key staff coordination meetings and bi-monthly Driver's Forums.	Attained		None		
4	Employees will be evaluated annually in a fair and equitable way to judge performance and be provided a developmental plan for the next fiscal year.	Employee merit evaluations will be provided to each employee annually with the evaluation grading measurement of attainment of department objectives developed during the budget process and achievement of our Standards and KPIs.	Attained		None		
Section 5: Fleet and Facility – We will operate and maintain a modern and clean fleet and facilities that will be pleasing to our customers and a source of pride for our employees and our communities.							
1	If funding permits, SoCo Transit will match SLO Transit's and the RTA's standard of replacing revenue vehicles when they reach the FTA-defined useful life minimums in terms of service years or miles. If funding remains constrained, negotiate with SLO Transit and the RTA to ensure no agency's buses surpass 40% beyond the FTA standards.	As tracked by Finance and Administration as part of grant-making efforts.	Attained for the fleet as a whole. 2 buses (201 and 204) are at the end of their useful life.		None		
2	Road calls will not exceed 5 per 100,000 vehicle service miles. A road call is defined as all mechanical or other vehicle-related failures that affect the completion of a scheduled revenue trip or the start of the next scheduled revenue trip, including failures during deadheading and layover.	As tracked and reported by the Maintenance Department, and reported biannually to the Board.	Attained (3.1)		None		
3	Maintain a clean, attractive fleet. Maintain our facilities so that they are safe and appealing to customers and employees.	As measured by employee and customer feedback.	Attained		None		
4	Achieve an 80% favorable rating of bus stop appearance by customers and the communities that we serve.	As measured in the biannual Community Perception Survey.	Attained		None		
5	Achieve all federal- and state-mandated maintenance minimums, as well as vendor recommended maintenance schedules, for our fleet and facilities. The following standards apply: A. No negative CHP Annual Terminal Inspection, FTA Triennial Review or TDA Triennial Performance Audit findings. B. Preventative maintenance schedules for all equipment shall be done on a timely basis (3,000 mile intervals or as mandated by equipment OEM vendor).	As tracked by the Maintenance Department, and reported annually to the Board.	Attained		None		
Section 6: Leadership – We will strive to be one of the nation's leading small transit operators. We will work to maintain collaborative relationships within the industry, within our community, and with our stakeholders. We will develop future leaders from within our organization.							
1	Maintain cooperative relationships with federal, state and local funding agencies.	Will be reviewed by staff and the Board.	Attained		None		
2	Develop partnerships with stakeholders, community leaders and decision makers keeping them well informed of the integral role of SoCo Transit and contributions to the communities that we serve.	To be evaluated and monitored by the Board.	Attained		None		
3	Promote effective internal communications and promote the values of the organization.	To be evaluated by the Administrator.	Attained		None		
4	Provide effective leadership for public transportation within the Five Cities Area.	To be evaluated by the Administrator and Board.	Attained		None		

- Service Hours
- Fare Revenues
- Expenditures (administrative, marketing, operations, fuel, insurance)

These figures are used to calculate the riders per mile, riders per hour, cost per passenger and subsidy per passenger. In addition, detailed administrative, operating and capital expenditures are provided for the SoCo transit program as a whole, and compared against the adopted budget.

### **Discussion of Existing Policies**

Overall, the Strategic Business Plan provides a comprehensive framework to improve services, as well as to recognize and address issues as they arise. It provides a clear summary of organizational goals and strategies to the Board, staff and public. The update process also provides an important opportunity to step back from the day-to-day issues of providing transit service to see the big picture and shift organizational priorities. The inclusion of robust data collection processes (such as the Community Perception Survey) is a positive attribute of the plan, as is the comprehensive monitoring and reporting process.

Overall, the Consultant finds that the policy statements are appropriate for the organization. They reflect a good understanding of the desire and strategies to improve service quality and to consider innovations in the transit field, while understanding that it is also crucial to maintain a balanced budget. The schedule for data collection, review reporting is appropriate, providing a balance between the staff costs associated with these tasks and the need for the public and decisionmakers to have current information readily available. The Board is receiving useful data in a timely manner, and is kept aware of trends and issues as they arise.

### **Discussion of Revisions to Standards**

A review of Table 1 indicates 2 of the 26 standards are not currently attained. Based on these findings and an evaluation of current conditions, the Consultant has the following recommended revision to the standards:

- Farebox Recovery Ratio – The current standard of 20.0 percent is a result of the redesignation of the service area as “urban” for purposes of TDA regulations. The current service generates a 12.3 percent ratio for all services, and 12.2 percent excluding the Avila Trolley. Given current costs and ridership demand, attaining a 20 percent farebox ratio is not viable except by a substantial increase in fares (which would further reduce the passengers per vehicle service hour below the standard) or a substantial reduction in service (including elimination of one or more routes). Attaining this standard without significantly reducing mobility options in the 5 Cities area will therefore require consolidation of the relatively low-performing SoCo Transit services

with higher-performing transit services in order for an overall farebox return ratio to be attained.

The other standard not attained is the productivity standard (passengers per vehicle service hour). The current standard is to achieve 17 passengers per vehicle-service hour, while the Fiscal Year 2017-18 indicates that the SoCo Transit system generates 16.3 passengers per vehicle-service (excluding the Avila Trolley). No change is recommended, as the current standard is reasonably achievable and provides incentive for improvements to overall productivity.

Also, it should be noted that if SoCo Transit is merged into RTA, the policy statements and standards of the RTA should be reviewed and revised to address the additional services.

## Dial-A-Ride Services

### Existing Goals and Policies

Existing policies regarding the general public DAR services are limited.

The Paso Robles DAR is funded through the City of Paso Robles. Their Council goals for 2018 includes “*Upgrade multi-modal transportation opportunities.*” The City’s General Plan (most recently amended in 2012) identifies Policy CE-1 D, “*Improve and expand transit services.*” A total of ten action items are listed under this policy. While most focus on fixed route or regional services, the following pertain to the DAR service:

- *Action Item 1. Continue operation of local bus service including inter-connectivity with regional transit.*
- *Action Item 2. Coordinate with the San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority to improve information available on transit options and support advertising/outreach programs for transit.*
- *Action Item 10. Develop a plan to monitor transit system performance and evaluate expansions to transit service.*

The RTA provides the County DAR services (Nipomo, Shandon and Templeton) under a contract with the County dated June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (which was a continuation of a previous contract). The contract, among other things, calls for the RTA to track revenues, expenditures and ridership on a monthly basis.

The South County Coastal Area Plan addresses the County’s plan for the Nipomo area, and was last updated in 1988. It includes the policy statement “*Inter-Community Transit System. The*

county should continue planning efforts to provide Nipomo with an inter-community transit system to connect to the Five Cities area.” The Nipomo Community Plan (1994) also mentions the desire for transit services, including fixed route service, but does not mention the DAR service.

The Shandon Community Plan (2012) includes the following implementation program “*Work with the community, SLOCOG and the Regional Transit Authority to develop a long-term transit plan and improve access to transit options.*” It also calls for development of a park-and-ride lot, and for developers to work with the RTA in planning stop improvements. The DAR service is not specifically mentioned.

The most recent *Short Range Transit Plan Update* for Nipomo Transit (Majic Consulting Group, December 2010) provides a series of policy statements, consisting of vision elements, mission, goals, objectives and standards. Perhaps reflecting that this plan was developed as a “stand alone” document, the overall policies and performance measures are quite extensive (including 23 individual objectives/standards).

### **Monitoring, Reporting and Review Processes**

RTA policy decisions for the DAR services are the responsibility of the Board of Directors, with input from the Regional Transit Advisory Committee. The Board meets monthly, while the Advisory Committee meets quarterly.

Both the Advisory Committee and the Board regularly receives ridership, service level and revenue/expenditure reports, along with key performance measures. Annual performance reports are prepared. These include figures for Nipomo DAR and “Paso DAR”. Monitoring data regarding the Shandon and Templeton services are reported separately and directly to the County.

### **Recommendations**

Over the last ten years, the overall policy framework for the RTA has been enhanced through the adoption and incremental improvements to the *San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority Strategic Business Plan*. The most recent version encompasses the 2018-2020 period. LSC’s recommendation is that the policies and standards for the DARs be addressed through the overall RTA policy process, rather than developing an additional policy document for the DARs. Specifically, the DARs should be included and addressed in the RTA’s *Strategic Business Plan*. This will be a more effective use of management resources, and will ensure that these services are evaluated in parallel with the other RTA services.

In making modifications to the *Strategic Business Plan*, a distinction should be made between the more urban services (Nipomo and Paso Robles) and the more rural services (Templeton and



Shandon). The Shandon and Templeton rural dial-a-rides are “lifeline” services established many years ago to address unmet needs in specific areas, with the RTA effectively serving as a contractor to the County. As such, it is not appropriate to define specific minimum productivity measures. Rather, the purpose of these services is to ensure that these needs are fully met. RTA staff should monitor the services to identify if there are any requests for service that cannot be served. In addition, requests received for service outside of existing hours/days of service should be logged. On at least a bi-annual basis, RTA staff should review the service requests as well as the performance of the services. These reports should also discuss whether RTA service remains appropriate, or whether other means of addressing the mobility needs should be considered.

The following modifications to that document to address the DARs are recommended:

- Executive Summary -- A sentence should be added indicating that “This Plan addresses all services provided by the RTA, with the exception of the South County Transit program (which is addressed in a separate Strategic Business Plan.”<sup>1</sup>
- Standard 1, Item C – Change to “Runabout, Nipomo DAR and Paso Robles DAR demand response services will be 2.0 or greater.”
- Standard 1 – Change last sentence to “Any recommended to seasonal or lifeline services (~~i.e., Shandon Dial-A-Ride, Templeton Dial-A-Ride~~) will include target productivity standards that must be met in order to qualify for continued funding.”

With these modifications, the *Strategic Business Plan* will serve as the policy document for the DAR programs.

The *Strategic Business Plan* standards do not specifically identify the “window” used to define on-time performance, only that 95 percent or more of trips shall be considered on time. The current window used by RTA for DAR service is within 30 minutes (either early or late) of the scheduled pick-up time. Given the smaller service areas of the DARs (other than Runabout) a smaller window of 15 minutes is recommended. A review of on-time performance data for July 2018 through March of 2019 indicates that all four services easily meet this more restrictive standard.

---

<sup>1</sup> Of course, if the SoCo Transit is merged into RTA, this would be amended.

This page left intentionally blank.