

REDWOOD COAST COMMUNITY TRANSIT PLAN

FINAL REPORT

Prepared for the

Community Transportation Association of America

Prepared by

LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.



March 14, 2006

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Community Transportation Association of America
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Washington, D.C. 20005

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides funding nationwide for the evaluation and development of transportation services in rural communities as a means of promoting economic development. At the request of Action Network (AN) in Gualala, California, the Redwood Coast region was chosen as a project site by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), which administers the USDA program. CTAA, in turn, retained the services of LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc., to assist in the conduct of the project.

The Action Network (AN), a non-profit organization formed to tackle transportation and other community-wide issues in the region, has been working for several years towards addressing transportation issues. In November, 2001, AN secured a Caltrans Community Based Transportation Planning Grant which resulted in identification of strategies to leverage and collaborate with existing providers and consumers of transit services to improve access in the Port Arena, Gualala, and Sea Ranch areas. The two public transportation priorities identified for the region include development of a refined public transit service model for the Redwood Coast region and developing a strategy to more effectively provide non-emergency medical transportation for local residents. In the process, the Redwood Coast Community Transportation Coalition (RCCTC) was formed specifically to tackle these needs.

The RCCTC has identified lack of public transportation services as a serious impediment to economic growth and quality of life in the Redwood Coast region. As an important fishing, timber, and tourism center, the Redwood Coast has a wide range of social and economic needs. These include travel by workers, shoppers, visitors, and participants in social service, education, and health care programs. The need for transportation is increased by the long, linear configuration of the developed roadway system, as well as by the weather, which is often inclement. At present, transportation services are limited to minimal route service, a senior van, and a volunteer transportation program. Many in the community believe that improved public transportation could provide benefits to both residents and visitors to the area, as well as economic benefits. Therefore, the goal of this project is to evaluate the transportation needs and options for the area, and to develop an appropriate, financially feasible plan to meet the transportation needs of the citizens and visitors of the Redwood Coast. Chapters 1 through 4 detail the environment in which transportation services are being provided. A review of the project process to date is included, as are detailed demographic analysis, and descriptions of the existing transportation services, and an analysis of transit demand.

TRANSPORTATION ON THE REDWOOD COAST

The Redwood Coast stretches from Elk in Mendocino County to Fort Ross in Sonoma County. The population lies primarily in Point Arena, Gualala, and The Sea Ranch, with pockets of population stretched along Highway One and its small feeder roads. The sole access (other than

very limited private air service) is provided by roadways that are windy, narrow, and often affected by inclement weather. Existing public transit programs are very limited and do not address many of the region's transportation needs. As a result, residents without automobiles or the ability to drive can have difficulty reaching jobs, programs, and services.

In reaching out to the community to identify social issues of importance, the AN repeatedly found that transportation is integral to meeting other goals the community has, including access to healthcare, youth activities, and employment. Currently, two public transit routes serve the Redwood Coast region, each making a trip once in the morning and once in the evening. Senior and disabled transportation is provided by one van located in Point Arena. Additionally, the Community Resource Council provides transportation for "essential needs" through a network of volunteers. CRC drivers use one van for weekly long distance trips, and daily trips are made as needed using volunteers' private vehicles and donated fuel. While the available transportation meets some of the need, there is great concern that other needs are not being met.

KEY ISSUES

The transportation issues facing the Redwood Coast region have been identified through numerous processes. Most significant were a household survey conducted by the Action Network and committee work completed by the Redwood Coast Community Transportation Coalition (RCCTC), which continues to act as a steering committee for this project. In addition, a series of interviews were conducted with key people in the community and a study project kickoff meeting was held on July 13, 2005. These efforts contributed to the identification of key issues. The major issues are summarized below:

1. *Inter-versus Intra-area Trips* – Locals have a need to travel within the region for limited health care access (at the Redwood Coast Medical Clinic), for errands, and to access entertainment and educational offerings. However, for full services, access is needed to Fort Bragg, Ukiah, and Santa Rosa.
2. *Shore up the Volunteer Program (CRC)* – The Community Resource Council provides efficient, low-cost transportation in the region. However, volunteers are often themselves elderly and reach "burn-out" after several years of service. There is a fine balance in achieving a quality experience for the volunteer and meeting the needs of the clientele. Additionally, to increase service through funding of the CRC would require a changed "business model" which might jeopardize the entire program. At the same time, it may be difficult to sustain the volunteerism required for this program.
3. *Ensure Funds for the Operating Costs* – Acquiring vehicles for public transportation is much less problematic than sustaining funding for operating costs. Any successful transportation program will require long-term funding.
4. *Non-emergency Medical Trips* – While the CRC provides trips for "essential needs," they cannot provide transportation for emergent needs of under 48 hours (per reservation requirements). Non-emergency medical transportation has repeatedly been identified as a top priority.

5. *Identify Operator for Local Service* – Whether the role of an existing entity is expanded or a new operator established, provision of local transit services would require identifying a provider.
6. *Transit Service Off of SR1* – Current limited services operate along State Route 1, but much of the population is on “the Ridge,” a parallel route east of SR1.
7. *Gualala-Point Arena* – Nearly all of the local activity centers and population are located in either Gualala or Point Arena, and the transportation needs are subsequently strongest between the two towns.
8. *Under-counted Population* – While the U.S. Census Bureau shows the population on the Redwood Coast to be approximately 17 percent Hispanic, school enrollment indicates the Hispanic population is closer to 50 percent. It is believed much of the Hispanic population is undercounted because they don’t want to identify themselves through the census due to their immigration status.
9. *Lack of Evening and Weekend Service* – There is currently no public transit services available on evening or weekends, which limits mobility options for all trip types (particularly for events such as cultural events which tend to be scheduled in these periods). As a resort area, many of the employment transportation needs in particular extend into the weekends and evening hours. Lack of evening services also impacts the elderly, many of whom can drive in daytime conditions but not at night.
10. *Visitor Transportation Needs* – While visitors tend to prefer and rely on their private vehicles, there are several potential needs for transportation. Campers arriving at RV parks with large vehicles may wish to use a shuttle service to access town events and services rather than having to tow an additional vehicle or move a large RV. Additionally, some travelers may arrive weary of the narrow, windy roads and might prefer sightseeing by bus.
11. *Family Transportation Needs* – Families need assistance in transporting youths to and from after-school programs and extracurricular activities, as well as to and from day-care service. In addition, various educational and recreational programs require after-school transportation in order to get youths to the various activities. Youth programs also require transportation during the summer vacation and holidays.
12. *Senior Citizen Transportation Needs* – It is important for senior citizens to have transportation services accessible in order for them to keep their independence and to allow them to “age in place.”
13. *Cultural Functions* – Theater and art are important cultural outlets in the Redwood Coast region, and organizers of local events indicate a need for transportation to access such events, particularly evenings.
14. *Bi-County Service Area* – The fact that the Redwood Coast region includes portions of two counties, numerous unincorporated towns (and only one incorporated city), as well as two

Native American Rancherias, makes planning for the area more challenging. In addition, the two counties are in separate Caltrans Districts, further complicating planning and grant application processes.

KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS

To further gain a better understanding of the issues, as well as perceptions regarding transit on the Redwood Coast, interviews were conducted with key members of the community. Interviewees were chosen based on their leadership role in the community or their direct involvement in providing or trying to provide transit. The intent of this effort was to gauge the community's perception of transportation conditions and their interest in supporting transit services. The interviews were held in complete confidentiality, and the opinions expressed below are those of the individuals interviewed, and not of the Consultant. Important findings are summarized below, and provided in detail in Appendix A.

- While most of the interviewees identified transportation as one of the key issues facing the Redwood Coast, employment was the number one concern. Other issues included education, health care access, and housing. Most of the interviewees tied transportation directly to other issues, though several said transportation was adequate.
- Interviewees generally identified transit for the elderly and disabled as the greatest need, and for those who are economically disadvantaged. A fair number of interviewees also noted that youth have no access to activities due both to a lack of activities and a lack of transportation.
- When asked how services could be improved, respondents wavered between stating that service was not remotely adequate to believing service was as good as it could get.
- Interviewees believe the existing providers (SCS, CRC, and particularly MTA) should provide transit. Some suggested that it would be nice to see private providers emerge (taxi or dial-a-ride), but most did not see this as realistic. One interviewee said it would be nice to see competition for the service to ensure better quality, particularly noting that MTA did not have a stake in the local community.
- When asked what the role of local government, the Pomo Tribe, and social service programs should be, there were a variety of answers. The overall consensus was that locals should have input into planning transit, but that the MTA should remain the primary provider. It was noted that the only "local" government is the city of Point Arena, though the County of Mendocino could qualify as local and regional. Interviewees did not see a major role for the Pomo Tribe, noting that they were isolated from the rest of the community (politically and geographically).
- Interviewees believe transit should be subsidized. Suggested sources of funding included federal, state, local taxes, philanthropists, taxpayers in general, gasoline taxes, and passenger fares. Most interviewed, however, see funding as very limited, particularly noting MTA's budget woes, which led to service cuts. The general consensus is that there is no money for transit.

- Interviewees unanimously agreed that there is much public support for transit. However, some qualified this by saying support is vocal, and not expressed by ridership. Interviewees believe the public likes the idea of transit, not necessarily for themselves, but for their neighbors.
- Interviewees were mixed on whether there is political support for transit. Most agree there is support, but say it does not translate into service on the ground. As with the public, the support is vocal and ideal, but not necessarily tangible.
- When asked how transit services could be coordinated, interviewees gave suggestions, but most did not see coordination as a big issue, particularly as there are only three providers.
- When asked to provide additional comments, interviewees stated the following:
 - I saw the report (Moving Toward Action), and it's quite an investment. It's a beautiful dream. It identifies real needs, but I can't see how we can break out of the current system.
 - People who live here need to be fit or should move. It's too expensive to support them. It would be more cost effective to counsel them to move than to try to bring services to them.
 - People who can afford to have a car, do, and that is how they get around unless they are physically incapable of driving (including too young).
 - Some feel ignored by the inland structure. It comes down to priorities. Service is provided at a level that meets minimum requirements and population levels. We have to concentrate services where the best efficiency is—it only makes fiscal sense. Service is population based.
 - There is no way MTA can come close to its performance standards of productivity in providing service in the Redwood Coast region. A volunteer service is needed if the area wants to do more. The service (MTA routes 75 and 95) doesn't get used that much.
 - The population isn't on the highway, but on "the Ridge."
 - What we have is efficiently run. It seems to have evolved into what it is because it is the appropriate service. Though there have been several attempts to expand, it hasn't paid off.
 - MTA has enlightened management. They are willing to try things, within financial constraints. They are going through difficult financial times. They're willing to try things where there is a demonstrated need.
 - It (MTA) is under poor management with no resources.

EFFORTS TO DATE – PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are a number of studies and planning efforts that have preceded this study which have laid the groundwork for addressing transit issues in the regions. These studies and their relevance to the current plan are described below.

Redwood Coast Strategic Issues: Planning Process November 2002 to December 2004 – Prepared by the Redwood Coast Community Transportation Coalition for the Action Network, City of Point Arena, and the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians

This report is a documentation of the transportation needs of the Redwood Coast, including needs related to the transportation infrastructure, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and transit service. The report familiarizes the reader with federal legislation affecting transportation, establishes the role of the Action Network and the RCCTC's in transportation issues, and identifies community goals and objectives related to transportation. In addition, the report establishes regional priorities for transportation. It is a culmination of several years of effort from the RCCTC achieved through meetings with local leaders, the public, Caltrans, and transportation providers. Highlights of the report as they pertain to the current study include the following:

- Discusses the establishment of the Redwood Coast Community Transportation Coalition as an advisory committee to oversee and provide input into the planning process.
- Reports the startup of two new services under the advocacy of the RCCTC, including Saturday service between Fort Bragg and Gualala (since discontinued) and extended service to The Sea Ranch Apartments.
- Identifies the process of public participation including a) an extensive Community Needs Survey, and b) nine community forums.
- Stated the following objectives:
 - Create a local carpool or rideshare program.
 - Develop a public transportation plan that considers the following services: evenings and weekends, dial-a-ride, a trolley that serves tourists and local special events, local taxi or jitney service, and a local fixed route.
 - Increase availability of specialized public transportation for youth, elderly, and disabled residents by increasing the Community Resources Connection and South Coast Senior Center, Inc. services.
 - Coordinate with local inns and motels to determine feasibility of participating in funding a trolley, local event, and jitney services.

- ▶ Increase funding to CRC's transportation program through the use of Medicaid Title 19 funds to better serve the region's low-income families, senior citizens, and disabled residents. (A grant was applied for on behalf of the CRC to acquire funding.)
 - ▶ Coordinate existing resources and utilize the SCSC van to increase specialized transportation services.
 - ▶ Select a lead agency model with a role and responsibility of coordinating the region's transportation resources.
 - ▶ Identify and communicate to agency officials the barriers preventing the use of the Indian Health Van and local school buses to transport children and the general public.
 - ▶ Publish a schedule at least four times per year to communicate available specialized and public transportation options.
 - ▶ Increase marketing of public transportation services.
 - ▶ Arrange community meetings between both counties to express ideas and identify solutions.
- Regional priorities were identified, including:
 - ▶ Develop a transit operations plan to improve transit services between the communities within the Redwood Coast planning area.
 - ▶ Enhance the SCSC and CRC special transportation programs by seeking local, state, and federal funding opportunities.
 - ▶ Expand the CRC non-emergency medical transportation program by partnering with Action Network, Redwood Coast Medical Services (RCMS), and South Coast Senior Center. Furthermore, investigate the feasibility of creating a non-emergency medical transportation program that qualifies for cost reimbursement from MediCAL.
 - ▶ Complete a local transportation plan and consult with STA and MTA to include recommended service improvements in each agency's unmet needs processes.
 - ▶ Initiate discussions concerning the creation of a bi-county special district to assume future responsibility of planning, funding, and implementing transportation solutions.

Moving Toward Action: Redwood Coast Community Based Transportation Strategic Plan – Prepared by the Redwood Coast Community Transportation Coalition for the Action Network, City of Point Arena, and the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians, December 2004

Whereas the first report (summarized above) was primarily a discussion of process, program review, and policy analysis, the strategic report strives to outline a plan of action to achieve goals of the first report. Highlights from this report are outlined below:

- **Regional Organization:** discusses the mission and role of Action Network and the Redwood Coast Community Transportation Coalition in achieving community goals, as well as their role in transportation planning.
- **The Plan:** outlines the progress to date; states the goals for increasing transportation choices.
- **Existing Conditions and Community Needs:** conveys what the current conditions are in which transportation needs exist, and identifies priorities. Regarding public transportation, non-emergency medical transportation was identified as the region's highest priority. The Plan includes some discussion on working towards establishing financial support to meet this need. The Plan also recommends increased coordination of local resources to expand the SCS transportation to additional clientele.
- **Conclusion:** The Plan concludes that continued collaboration and support from the various state and local governmental agencies providing transportation services within the region would be needed to continue the efforts of the Action Network. Additionally, as a non-profit agency, the Action Network is prevented from being an applicant for many state and federal funding sources, necessitating AN to partner with other entities within the region.

Community Survey Results – Prepared by the RCCTC for the Action Network, City of Point Arena, and the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians, December 2004

The Redwood Coast Community Transportation Coalition conducted a community survey on behalf of the Action Network, the City of Point Arena, and the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians in support of the strategic planning efforts outlined above. The survey was mailed out to 4,000 households with a 25 percent return rate representing 2,083 residents. Results showed the following:

- 9.5 percent of households identified themselves as having members with disabilities.
- 11.5 percent of individuals stated they were unable to go somewhere due to a lack of transportation at least one or two times per week; 2.3 percent were unable to go somewhere three to four times per week; and 2.0 percent were unable to go somewhere more than four times per week due to a lack of transportation.
- When asked if their transportation needs were being met, 2.5 percent of respondents said they rarely have trouble, 9.5 percent said they sometimes have trouble, and 3.0 percent said they often have trouble.

- When asked what their unmet transportation needs were, respondents answered as follows:
 - Medical or dental 25 percent
 - Miscellaneous errands 21 percent
 - Entertainment 15 percent
 - After school programs 13 percent
 - Visit family/friends 13 percent
 - Job related 10 percent
 - Child care facilities 3 percent

Community Based Transportation Forums; June, July and August, 2003 -- Facilitated by the Action Network in the communities of Annapolis, Elk, Fort Ross, Gualala, Kashaya Rancheria, Manchester, Manchester-Point Arena Rancheria, City of Point Arena, and The Sea Ranch

The focus of the forums was to give residents in the Redwood Coast region background information on the project’s history, grant timeline, survey results, local community information and to further encourage group brainstorming and discussion as well as individual concerns and ideas. At the close of each forum, participants provided their priority suggestions for the strategic plan and were encouraged to remain involved.

Mendocino Transit Authority Short Range Transit Development Plan, April 2005-- Prepared by Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates

The Short Range Transit Development Plan (SRTDP) evaluates MTA services and makes recommendations for improvements. The purpose of the SRTDP was to create a service policy and operational framework to guide MTA in meeting the mobility needs of residents and visitors to Mendocino County. As the south coast services are a small percentage of the overall transit program, only some portions of the report directly address the Redwood Coast region, and overall findings may or may not be reflected on the Redwood Coast. That said, the following items from the report are of interest in this current study:

- MTA was found to be a well-managed transit agency, providing a high quality of planned transit service.
- The growing Latino population associated with Mendocino’s service and agricultural economies is expected to increase needs for transit service.
- Given the drop in ridership, productivity, and farebox recovery, further service expansion is cautioned, unless it can be demonstrated that there is sufficient potential ridership to support the mandated farebox recovery ratio. Even then, new service would need to be provided within financial constraints.
- There is a wide range of mobility needs and transit operating conditions in Mendocino County. This creates service delivery challenges for MTA. Fixed route and demand response

services are most effective in serving high concentrations of population where density of demand and potential ridership is high enough to support reasonable levels of farebox recovery.

- Not all the mobility needs in the County can be effectively served by fixed route or dial-a-ride services. A broader “family of services” may be required to serve the wide range of travel needs. One item fitting this category on the South Coast service is the mobility manager (as described below).

Additionally, the SRTDP offers 24 recommendations to be implemented over the five-year planning horizon. Recommendations which directly impact the Redwood Coast region include the following:

- #1, Year One: Establish a Latino marketing plan and process.
- #4, Year One: Route 65 and 95 enhancements (essentially to identify popular destinations and list them on the schedule to inform potential passengers of specific destinations once the bus arrives in Santa Rosa).
- #16, Year Four: Target marketing and outreach to North Coast and South Coast schools (essentially to gain input from schools and students regarding potential changes to South Coast services).
- #19, Year Four: Implement a local South Coast Community Shuttle (intended to complement the existing Route 95 and provide additional local service along the State Route 1 corridor between Gualala and Elk, with timed connections with Route 60 and Route 75). It is specifically *not recommended* that service extend to the residential communities along the “Ridge Road,” citing the low density and spread out linear series of roads that make up the Ridge Road south of Point Arena.
- #20, Year Four: Provide technical assistance to the Manchester-Point Arena Rancheria to develop a shuttle to Point Arena. This need was identified through the outreach process. The Rancheria also expressed a willingness to consider a potential cost-sharing arrangement to help support this service extension.

MTA can provide planning assistance to develop a funding strategy and service plan for a Rancheria provided shuttle service to connect the separate segments of the Rancheria together and with Point Arena for shopping, school, and connections with South Coast services. Service could be timed to connect with Route 95 and the South Coast Community Shuttle with connections to Routes 60 and 75.

- #21, Year Four: Restructure Route 75 to provide increased service between Ukiah and the Coast via Anderson Valley. The idea behind this recommendation is that a pulse point would be created at Navarro River Junction where buses coming from Ukiah, Fort Bragg, and Gualala would meet, exchange passengers, and return to their original destinations.

- #22, Year Five: Establish a mobility manager function within the MTA (partially as an outreach service and partially as a dispatch service, in order to enable individuals to call for help to identify the best means of completing their trips).

It should be noted that while this SRTDP was recently completed, MTA simultaneously faced significant budget cuts which have decreased its ability to act on the recommendations. Subsequently, the Consultants suggested that MTA might have to focus on those recommendations that will increase ridership and service productivity without requiring additional hours. Under constrained funding, it was recommended that MTA should proceed with:

- Enhanced MTA radio communication system (FY 2004/2005). The new radio system has been installed and has greatly increased coverage in general, but it is still difficult to gain contact from Anchor Bay to Bodega Bay. As more cell towers are installed, coverage is expected to improve.
- Increased marketing to the Latino population and the school/student market.
- Route 65 and 95 service enhancements.
- MTA mobility manager.

It is recommended the next five-year SRTDP be initiated in 2009/2010.

Sonoma County Transit Short Range Transit Plan, FY 2004-2013, -- Prepared by Sonoma County Transit, September 2004

Like the Mendocino County plan, the Sonoma County Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) evaluates SCT services and makes recommendations for improvements. However, even more so than in Mendocino County, service to the Sonoma Coast is a small percentage of their services. In fact, only two routes of 17 intercity routes serve the coast: Route 95, which is contracted out to MTA and is a bi-County route, and Route 29, which was established in 2000 and serves the coastal communities of Bodega, Bodega Bay, and Jenner as well as Doran Regional Park and the Sonoma Coast State Beaches on weekends in the summer. Sonoma County Transit also operates nine local routes.

The following items from the report are of interest in this current study:

- Due to increases in fuel and labor costs, as well as lower State sales tax revenues, total systemwide fixed route service hours were reduced.
- By 2009, a recovery of service hours is anticipated assuming that operating costs stabilize and revenues increase.
- A newly passed sales tax provides additional transit revenue (passed in November, 2004).

- There is little analysis of Route 95, presumably because it is operated by MTA and accounts for less than half a percent of overall system ridership. There are no recommendations regarding this service.
- Route 29, which serves Bodega Bay and Jenner, is the only other SCT route which serves the coast. It operates only on weekends in the summer. Ridership was between 500 and 900 passenger trips annually.
- The County of Sonoma's forum for discussing transportation issues is the Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA). Comprised of elected representatives from the nine incorporated cities and from the County of Sonoma, the SCTA reviews transportation policy decisions and coordinates transit service funding and other transportation-related capital projects. The SCTA has a Transit Technical Advisory Committee which meets periodically to discuss transportation-related issues that affect Sonoma County's seven fixed route public transit operators. In addition to staff from each respective public transit agency, the TTAC includes representatives from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), each incorporated city, and the County of Sonoma. The TTAC prepares and reviews the annual Transportation Development Act/State Transit Assistance Coordinated Claim for Sonoma County and reviews other various MTC resolutions and staff directives.
- Under the SCTA, a Paratransit Coordinating Committee (PCC) promotes cooperation and coordination among the various paratransit operators in Sonoma County.