

Mendocino Council of Governments

MINUTES

Transit Productivity Committee – TPC

Monday, April 13, 2026

10:00 a.m. to appx. 12:00 p.m.

Teleconference Locations:

MCOG / Dow & Associates, 525 S. Main St., Suite B, Ukiah
Mendocino Transit Authority, 241 Plant Rd., Ukiah
Mendocino County Administration Ctr., 501 Low Gap Road, Ukiah
648 Willow Avenue, Ukiah
Harrah Senior Center, 1501 Baechtel Road, Willits
15168 Caspar Road, Caspar
City Hall, 416 N. Franklin St., Fort Bragg

General Public Teleconference by Zoom

PRESENT:

MCOG Board Members: John Haschak, Heather Criss
MTA Board Members: Tess Albin-Smith, Jim Tarbell
Senior Centers Rep.: Jill Rexrode, Redwood Coast Seniors (Alternate)
Staff & Others: Nephele Barrett, Janet Orth, Michael Villa, and Julie St. Pierre, MCOG
Dawn White and Luis Martinez, MTA

ABSENT:

Jacob King, MTA and Richard Baker, Willits Seniors

1. Call to Order and Roll Call. After brief discussion about who would chair the meeting, Director Haschak yielded to Nephele Barrett, who proceeded to call the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and asked the teleconference participants to introduce themselves.

Technical issues noted with Jill Rexrode reconnecting to the teleconference.

2. Public Expression. None

3. Review and Recommendation on MTA's Analysis and Prioritization of 2026/27 Unmet Transit Needs. Michael Villa reviewed the statutory transit development process and current stage of analysis per Transportation Development Act (TDA) requirements. For the upcoming fiscal year, MCOG has determined that there are needs, which were forwarded to MTA for analyses to be prepared outlining operational costs, ability to provide service. The report was received with categorization of needs defined as either high, medium, or low priority.

- **Item P-2** – Add additional route to Santa Rosa to align with the extended times added by SMART Train. Jim Tarbell pointed out that the proposed Transit Center in Central Ukiah (Item S-7) is listed as low priority, adding that in his opinion, it has become a high priority. Luis Martinez responded that after MTA's analysis, the transit center did not qualify as a transit need, as defined in the TDA. Nephele clarified that the transit center would be considered a capital, not an operational "service" need, and suggested another category may be necessary to identify types of needs that don't meet the TDA's specific definition.
- **Item S-3** – Non-emergency Medical Service, including after-hours/weekends for hospital release and out-of-county. Nephele noted that although this unmet transit need was categorized as low priority, the fixed-route service doesn't fully address

hospital release times or out-of-county needs, suggesting the recommendation be reworded to reflect that some, but not all, of the associated needs are being met. Luis stated that they would reprioritize and incorporate into the recommendation that a partial need has been met, and to undertake what needs to be done to fully assess that priority.

- **Item S-6** – the Covelo and Laytonville Mobility Solution, and **Item S-1** – the Microtransit Service to Brooktrails, including Brooktrails Lodge. John pointed out that these two items are somewhat related and asked about their status. Luis answered that MTA is currently working on the routes, and that the purchase of new vehicles is pending; the most challenging issue is with staffing, as there is a shortage of drivers preventing the implementation of that service. Nephele added that MTA Executive Director, Jacob King, has been exploring options for an appropriate vehicle for these routes, which Luis confirmed.
- **Item S-5** – the Service to Noyo Harbor and downtown Fort Bragg central business district. Tess Albin-Smith pointed out that MTA still doesn't provide this service. Emphasizing weekend tourist congestion and a lack of parking, Tess proposed that the creation of weekend and seasonal service be elevated to medium priority. Nephele shared that this item came out of the SSTAC meeting – where neither weekends nor peak service had been specified – and suggested adding a note to indicate that the Transit Productivity Committee (TPC) considered this as a higher need, rather than “Low Priority.”

Although received too late for inclusion, Michael shared a new public comment requesting alignment of the Santa Rosa route with SMART Train schedules, adding that this particular comment will be moved to consider during next year's process of identifying unmet transit needs.

Janet questioned whether any of the identified transit needs can be met in the coming fiscal year, either with funding, partnerships, or other alternatives. Nephele pointed out that they will be meeting the need identified in Item P-2, for an additional route to Santa Rosa to align with the extended times added by SMART Train. Discussion followed about whether this item would be considered reasonable to meet in the coming budget year 2026/27, even though service on that additional route began in 2025/26.

The committee determined that the recommendation to MCOG be revised. Nephele suggested an alternative, stating that there are unmet transit needs, including one or more that are reasonable to meet for potential funding in 2026/27 MTA Allocation, or by other means. And then specify that that particular unmet need will continue to be met through adjustment to existing routes.

Recommendation:

Upon motion by Haschak, seconded by Criss, the TPC recommended that MTA continue to explore opportunities to increase ridership, including coordination with housing and transit center development.

Nephele reported that although Tess Albin-Smith and Jill Rexrode would have to abstain from voting due to unposted locations, it was also noted that we have a quorum with three out of five members voting.

The motion then carried unanimously by roll call vote (3 Ayes: *Haschak, Criss, and Tarbell*; 0 Noes; 2 Abstaining: *Albin-Smith, and Rexrode (Alt.)*)

4. Review and Recommendation on the Fiscal Year 2026/27 Transit Claim. Michael reviewed his written report, highlighting that total TDA funding available for MTA and FY 2026/27 is about \$4.75 million, up roughly 3% from last year. The claim was received on time and staff deemed it acceptable. A summary of the funding sources was provided:

- The County Auditor’s Fund Estimate of \$4,259,000 is up 2.4% (\$98,000) from the revised FY 2025/26 budget estimate.
- The Executive Committee recommended setting the Local Transportation Fund (LTF) Reserve balance at \$639,000 (15% of the fund estimate).
- Under the Executive Committee’s recommendations, LTF balance available for allocation is \$3,565,429, up 1.7% (\$60,679) from the 2025/26 budget for MTA.
- The preliminary State Transit Assistance (STA) revenue estimate has declined as expected due to increases in fuel-efficient and electric cars, makes \$876,829, down 9.8% (\$94,741) from last year’s revised estimate. Without a carry-over balance from last year, MTA is claiming the full amount for operations.
- The proceeds from SB125’s four-year Allocation Plan are estimated at \$11,063,615. In FY 2025/26, \$2,988,941 will be expended to purchase three electric buses.
- The Capital Reserve has an available fund balance of \$308,575, which MTA is claiming for Long-Term Capital.
- Funds associated with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311 are uncertain, pending Caltrans’ estimate.

Sharing MTA’s Claim for Funds for FY 2026/27, as well as MCOG’s Budget Summary Page, Michael reported that the total amount of TDA funding for MTA comes to \$4,750,883, an increase of 3.1% (140,903) from the 2025/26 budget. John commented it was good that the claim for Senior Centers showed an increase.

Recommendation:

Upon motion by Haschak, seconded by Criss, and carried unanimously by roll call vote (3 Ayes: *Haschak, Criss, and Tarbell*; 0 Noes; 2 Abstaining: *Albin-Smith, and Rexrode*, the TPC recommended that MCOG make the following transit allocations:

LTF Reserve at 15 percent of Auditor’s revised estimate	639,000	
Local Transportation Fund (LTF)		
MTA Operations	2,923,652	
Unmet Transit Needs	0	
Senior Center Operations	641,777	
Total LTF		3,565,429
State Transit Assistance Fund (STA)		
MTA Operations	876,829	
MTA & Seniors Capital	0	
Transit Capital Reserve	0	
Total STA		876,829
Capital Reserve Fund (CRF)		
MTA Capital, Current Year	0	

Senior Capital, Current Year	0	
Long-Term Capital Reserve	308,575	
Total CRF		308,575
Total Recommended FY 2026/27 Transit Allocation		4,750,833

5. Review and Recommendation on MCOG Standards. Michael cited that the most recent TDA Triennial Performance Audit, released in May 2025, pointed to recommended standards in the June 2024 Short Range Transit Development Plan (SRTDP). Compared with MCOG’s report, Michael stated that that TDA’s audit provides more detailed information, breaking down individual routes.

Michael next reviewed the history of standard adjustments, going back to 2022, when the Transit Productivity Committee (TPC) approved the reduction of the Passengers per Hour standard to 73% of the adopted levels for Dial-A-Ride, Short Distance Bus Routes, and Senior Centers. In 2019, farebox recovery was lowered to 10% for all service types, in line with the State’s requirement for rural operators. The requirement was then waived, or relaxed, by State legislation post Covid, but those waivers expire July 1, 2026, which means the farebox standard will again apply to MTA.

In 2014, the Board adopted the [Consumer Price Index] “CPI Adjusted Rolling Average” method for cost standards, which averages three years of actual performance data adjusted for inflation. Michael noted that this method is still working well; and notably, this year’s rolling average brought cost standards down as a result of 2021’s higher cost data being dropped.

Staff is suggesting that we lower the Passenger per Hour standard for Short Distance Bus Routes from 10.2 down to 7, aligning with the SRTDP recommendation of a minimum of 6 and a target of 8 for Short Distance Bus Routes. There was a brief discussion of the implication of lowering this standard to provide a better chance of being able to meet it, since there is a greater discrepancy for this service type when compared with the others.

Recommendation:

Upon motion by Criss, seconded by Haschak, and carried unanimously by roll call vote (*3 Ayes: Haschak, Criss, and Tarbell; 0 Noes; 2 Abstaining: Albin-Smith and Rexrode*), the TPC recommends adjusting the Passengers per Hour standard for Short Distance Bus Routes.

6. Annual Review of MTA Performance Reports Compared to MCOG Standards. Referring to the staff report, Michael stated that the annual performance review of MTA against MCOG’s adopted standards for the current report period from January 1 through December 31, 2025, used the three-year “CPI Adjusted Rolling Average” method, where a new year is added and the oldest one drops off the chart.

Michael reported that MTA needs to meet at least two of three core standards – **Passengers per Hour**, **Farebox Ratio**, and **Operating Cost per Vehicle Service Hour** – and apply the fourth standard, **Cost per Passenger**, if two of the three standards are not met. Michael shared that ridership is a persistent problem, adding that none of the service types met Passenger per Hour in 2023, 2024, or 2025 – even though the standard was lowered in 2022. Consistent with the what the TDA auditor found statewide, because many operators still haven’t recovered pre-pandemic ridership levels. The **Farebox Ratio** has generally been achievable, though it’s been waived since

Covid. When the waiver expires July 1, 2026, MTA will have to prepare to meet that 10% farebox standard again.

All service types met the **Cost per Hour** standard in 2025 – except for long-distance routes – though they did meet that standard in 2024; the three-year average shows overall improvement.

None of the service types have met the **Cost per Passenger** standard consistently, though Senior Centers did in 2025, which is directly associated with ridership levels. Performance has been fairly dependable, with ridership recovery being the greatest challenge. If ridership improves, the **Cost per Passenger** numbers would follow.

Janet noted that all the Senior Centers are grouped together, but their performance varies widely. Redwood Coast Seniors and Willits Senior Center are doing the best, meeting all their standards and increasing the average, with Redwood Coast having the highest Farebox Ratio of 19.9%. It was noted that the other senior centers have challenges such as being smaller and having higher staff turnover.

Service Type	2025	3-Year Average
Dial-A-Ride (DAR) maintained same 3-year average of 2 out of 3 standards; Farebox and Cost/Hour improved in 2025, meeting those standards.	2 of 3	2 of 3
Short Distance Bus Routes maintained the same 3-year average annual performance as 2024, meeting Farebox and Cost per Hour.	2 of 3	2 of 3
Long Distance Routes improved from 0 of 4 to 1 of 4 (Cost per Hour) in 3-year average, and declined from 1 of 4 in 2024 to 0 of 4 in 2025, missing Cost/Hr.	0 of 4	1 of 4
Senior Centers again maintained the same 3-year average, meeting Farebox and Cost/Hour; they also met Passengers/Hour in 2025.	3 of 3	2 of 3

Janet reviewed how 3.1% was the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate that’s been used for the past year to calculate the annual average by using increases from a past period, applied through 2025.

Michael invited further discussion and stated that this item needs no action. Janet stated that a report should come out of this committee – whether it’s a recommendation or just reporting some of the findings.

Janet continued, saying that she was surprised by the short-range service, thinking that in-town services would do better, adding that costs have come down on the short-distance routes, and they went up a lot on the long-distance. Janet added that these are just things that she doesn’t understand and doesn’t have enough information – just things to notice. Michael added that the figures for the long-distance routes Cost per Service Hour also went up.

John asked if we can say that we reviewed the data. Janet answered yes, we have reviewed the data and mentioned MTA’s performance and context in the greater community of transit operators. Janet said that that is statewide and that everybody is suffering and having a hard time in transit – it’s not just MTA having these issues. Nephela added how much cost increases are really hurting transit operators.

Janet next raised considerations of productivity improvement opportunities for all service types such as ways to increase ridership and how everyone struggles with that. Noting that last year MTA was moving in the right direction in taking some positive actions and steps. Nephela

mentioned the simplification of the fare structure, and said that she wasn't sure if it's been implemented, but knows it's in the works. Luis confirmed that it hasn't started yet, and Dawn reported that they are in the process of doing their fare review survey now, and that should be ready to review shortly. And that there are a few things that they have to do before they can implement it.

Janet asked if there were any takeaways from this review. Nephele expressed curiosity whether there have been any discussions about potential productivity improvements or ways to increase ridership coming from the MTA Board or out of those meetings. Tess couldn't recall doing that recently, but thinks that services such as the Bragabout could benefit from more advertising, adding that this should be brought up at a future meeting.

Nephele thought that a recommendation coming out of this group could be to explore options for improving community awareness, or explore options for increased advertising. Janet mentions she hears MTA ads on the radio quite frequently. Jim said they have been improving since the pandemic and that the transit agency could generate revenues from renting out office space at the new transit center. Nephele mentioned that the project Jim was referring to, if the proposal is successful, is a mixed use with senior housing that could increase ridership. John mentioned that housing being built across from the Library for Mendocino College students could increase ridership to the college.

Janet mentioned the State is big on the idea of Transit Oriented Development (TOD), the idea of all new housing having a transit component. It's a strategy to link housing, jobs and transportation together more.

Janet brought up how we are trying to build a recommendation of exploring options to build ridership and look at opportunities with housing development. Janet stated that one of the unmet needs met last year was adding service to the college, MTA was able to partner with the student body association. They raised funds to help MTA pay for the unmet need and how it's a way to generate funds to meet unmet needs. Tess mentioned that one of the issues is that not all satellite campuses are served equally. Janet proceeded to go over the different campuses and discussed what was added last year to the main campus. Tess brought up that kids from coastal areas wanting to go to a Junior College can't afford to live away from home and how students need to go to the main campus. Luis mentioned they haven't received anything about the evening and brought up the frequency is every hour to the main campus until 5pm.

Janet said the recommendation could be to continue to explore ridership where John agreed. Janet brings up the performance review and how the lack of ridership prevents the other standards from being met.

Nephele said the recommendation could be to continue to explore opportunities to increase ridership including coordination with housing and transit center development. Report consistent with ongoing performance by dial a ride and short distance bus routes and senior centers specialized services as a whole while long distance routes need improvement on productivity. Janet mentioned that is a two part and Nephele clarified that one is a recommendation and the other is to report out.

Recommendation:

Upon motion by Criss, seconded by Haschak, and carried unanimously by roll call vote (*3 Ayes: Haschak, Criss, and Tarbell; 0 Noes; 2 Abstaining: Albin-Smith and Rexrode*), the TPC recommends the following:

- Continue to explore opportunities to increase ridership including coordination with housing and transit center development.
- Report consistent ongoing performance by dial a ride and short distance bus routes and senior centers specialized services as a whole while long distance routes need improvement on productivity.

7. Miscellaneous / Members' Concerns / Announcements – *No Action*

8. Adjournment: 11:13 a.m.