



HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
Regional Transportation Planning Agency
Humboldt County Local Transportation Authority
Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies
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Citizen Participation Process for Assessing Unmet Transit Needs

Transportation Development Act

The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) is responsible for allocating Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds within the region. The TDA provides two major sources of funding, Local Transportation Funds (LTF) derived from a ¼ cent of the general sales tax and State Transportation Assistance Funds (STAF) derived from a tax on diesel fuel. Together, these TDA funds provide a significant revenue source for public transit in Humboldt County. The Unmet Transit Needs process is carried out annually to identify and evaluate any potential needs that are not being met through existing public transportation services. HCAOG is required to assess unmet transit needs prior to allocating LTF money for non-transit purposes, while STA is programmed to the Humboldt Transit Authority and Arcata and Mad River Transit.

Each jurisdiction has their own LTF account. Eureka and Arcata use the entirety of their LTF allocation for transit purposes. The County of Humboldt, Cities of Fortuna, Rio Dell, Blue Lake and Trinidad have funds remaining after paying their share for eligible transit uses. In these cases, the TDA allows LTF to be applied to local streets and roads budgets, including pedestrian and bicycle projects. In Ferndale, there are no eligible public transit services and the LTF allocation is applied to non-transit purposes.

Public Process to Make a Finding

HCAOG's Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) leads the UTN process. Although only one hearing is required, public meetings are held to ensure residents in each jurisdiction are heard. The SSTAC considers all public testimony and input, determines if the suggestions meet the adopted definition of an unmet transit need and applies adopted criteria to determine if the need is "reasonable to meet".

After comments close on December 31, the SSTAC will consider all the comments at their meeting on February 2023, direct staff on any needs to further analyze, and in April 2023 forward one of the following findings to the HCAOG board for consideration:

- (a) there are no unmet transit needs; or
- (b) there are no unmet transit needs which are "reasonable to meet"; or
- (c) there are unmet transit needs, including those that are "reasonable to meet"

Potential Impacts to Local Transportation Funding

If HCAOG adopts finding (c), then the unmet transit needs shall be funded before any allocation is made for non-transit purposes (i.e. streets and roads) within the jurisdiction. Funds for new or expanded transit services can be set-aside from sources other than TDA funds. For instance, in 2018 the HCAOG Board voted to set aside Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funds for late-night weekday service on the Redwood Transit Service. The service was found based on ridership at that time to be an unmet transit need reasonable to meet, but could not be funded due to insufficient Local Transportation Funds available to all required entities. When COVID hit and ridership plummeted, these LCTOP funds were repurposed to support free fares.

Examples of Past Public Input and Findings

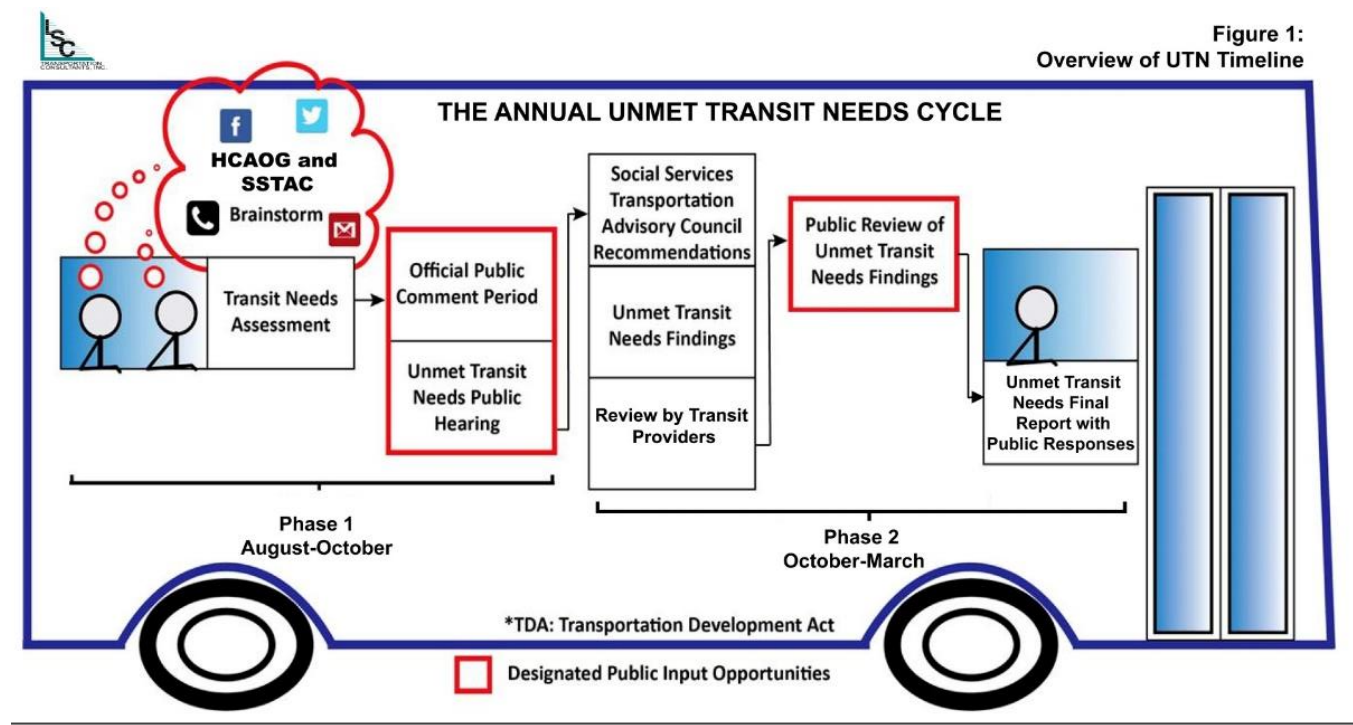
As a result of UTN findings in 2015-16, new transit services began to Tish Non-Village (Bear River Rancheria) and along Old Arcata Road. Both services were discontinued after two years because not enough people used the new service to sustain it.

Public comments often ask for later night service, Sunday service, more frequent peak service between McKinleyville-Arcata-Eureka, and bus service to rural communities. Based on existing ridership, each of these fail to meet the required 10% farebox return ratio -- meaning there are not enough projected transit riders to meet minimum performance criteria necessary to sustain the services. If these conditions change, the Humboldt Transit Authority does not need a formal UTN finding to start new services.

Comments received through this annual process can provide valuable feedback to transit operators. For example, in 2021 several people commented that they needed a westbound bus stop near Titlow Hill for their children to get to school in Arcata on the Willow Creek Intercity line. The operational request was sent to Humboldt Transit Authority and HTA was able to set up a trial flag stop for use during the school year. Not all operational requests can be accommodated, but agencies make every effort to respond. In addition, public comments made during the Unmet Transit Needs process can be beneficial as a record of community need and help secure grant-funded opportunities such as first-last mile mobility solutions to expand access to transit.

Opportunities for Public Comment on Unmet Transit Needs

- The form linked at the project page: <https://hcaog.net/documents/unmet-transit-needs> or visit the survey directly at <https://bit.ly/humboldttransit>
- At one of the advertised public meetings;
- Written comments and/or feedback gathered from staff during direct outreach;
- Comment submittals by email or telephone: [stephen.luther@hcaog.net/444-8208](mailto:stephen.luther@hcaog.net)



UNMET TRANSIT NEEDS DEFINITION & REASONABLE TO MEET CRITERIA

Unmet transit needs are, at a minimum:

- (1) Trips requested from residents who do not have access to public transportation, specialized transportation, or private transport services or resources for the purpose of traveling to medical care, shopping, social/recreational activities, education/training, and employment; or
- (2) Proposed public transportation, specialized transportation, or private transport services identified in the following, but not limited to: a Transportation Development Plan, Regional Transportation Plan, Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan.

HCAOG Plans can be found at: <http://hcaog.net/library>

Additionally, unmet transit needs do not include:

- ❖ Improvements funded or scheduled for implementation in the next fiscal year. Two potential new services that will be reevaluated this year are:
 - Express bus service between McKinleyville and Eureka during peak hours
 - Late Night Weekday Service on the Regional Transit System
- ❖ Minor operational improvements or changes such as bus stops, schedules, and minor route changes. Minor operational improvements are changes to service which do not affect the operating cost of the transit service either by requiring additional staff and/or additional vehicle hours of service or miles of service.
- ❖ Trips for primary or secondary school transportation
- ❖ Sidewalk improvements or street and road needs

Reasonable to meet criteria:

- (1) To be considered “reasonable to meet”, a service must be operationally feasible and financially sustainable, as defined below:
 - a) The service must have adequate roadways, and must be safe to operate.
 - b) Enough money should be available from identified sources of funding to pay for the marginal operating costs of the service continuously for three years.
- (2) The service must be projected to meet a minimum “marginal farebox-return-ratio” of 10 percent within 2 years. If multiple competing services are requested, other factors may also be considered such as estimated subsidy per passenger trip and passengers per vehicle hour of service. For new service, ridership and farebox-return-ratio thresholds will be considered.
- (3) Pursuant to the requirements of TDA Statutes (Public Utilities Code Section 99401.5c, a determination of needs that are “reasonable to meet” shall not be made by comparing unmet transit needs with the need for streets and roads, for the allocation of TDA funds.
- (4) Once a service is determined to be "reasonable to meet" and is implemented, it can be expected that the ridership in the first 1-2 years of the new service will be less than the projected optimal ridership. Ridership should be evaluated at 6-month intervals to determine if service is meeting performance standards adopted by the transit provider, and specifically, whether the service meets a minimum 10 percent marginal farebox-return-ratio. If the service is being adequately promoted and fails to be within 60 percent of the identified standards after six months, 90 percent with the first year, or 100 percent within two years, the service may be cancelled and deemed "no longer reasonable to meet." An exception to this rule is when a community or group is willing to participate in sharing the ongoing cost of the new service.