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Oona Smith
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via email: oona.smith@hcaog.net

RE: Transit Service Priorities in Humboldt County

Ms. Smith:

This letter is in response to the Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) seeking public input on transit service priorities via the Partnering Assets and Authorities for Comprehensive Transit (PAACT) project.

The PAACT project poses the question of what the Humboldt Transit Authority's priority should be when forced to choose between investing in services that increase ridership by increasing frequency in more densely populated areas (the "ridership" approach) or investing in services that reach more people by extending routes into less dense areas, but providing less frequent service (the "coverage" approach). In these situations, we generally support the "ridership" approach.

We support this approach for several reasons:

- CRTP has conducted informal surveys of local bus riders in recent months. Increased frequency has been the most common request for improved service.
- Increased transit ridership is crucial to meeting the region's climate goals, as laid out in the recently adopted Regional Climate Action Plan.
- This approach provides higher quality transit service. While it does not reach as many nondrivers as the "coverage" approach, it maximizes service quality in the areas with the greatest population and the greatest number of nondrivers.
- It creates the potential for a virtuous cycle, with greater ridership leading to more investment in transit, which in turn leads to even greater ridership.

Despite these compelling arguments for a "ridership" approach, we also recognize its limitations. Specifically, this approach leaves nondrivers in less densely populated areas without access to transit, and therefore with even more limited transportation options.

The difficult choices forced by the coverage vs. ridership dilemma are derived from an assumption of limited resources. We strongly urge HCAOG and HTA to address this fundamental, underlying problem by: (a) advocating vigorously for increased local, state, and federal investment in public transit; and (b) coordinating closely with agencies serving vulnerable populations such as seniors and people with disabilities to provide transportation options to as many nondrivers as possible, even when they are not reached by traditional fixed-route transit.

With more resources available, more service of all kinds could be provided, avoiding some of the tradeoffs altogether.

Sincerely,

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