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 Transit Needs Assessment

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 are a revenue source for public transit in Humboldt County. The "Unmet Transit Needs" process is carried out annually to identify and evaluate the adequacy of existing public transportation services. HCAOG is required to assess transit needs prior to allocating LTF money for non-transit purposes, while STAF is programmed to public transit agencies.

Each jurisdiction has its own LTF account. The Cities of Arcata, Eureka and Fortuna use the entirety of their LTF allocation for transit purposes and the County of Humboldt increasingly uses all or almost all of its LTF for transit. The City of Rio Dell, Blue Lake, and Trinidad typically 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. The City of Ferndale claims its whole LTF allocation for its streets and roads maintenance.

Public Process to Make a Finding

HCAOG's Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) leads the process. One required hearing is held at the HCAOG Board, and other jurisdictions may hold hearings as well. Comments are solicited through an online survey, ads, and information sharing between organizations serving people who rely on transit. 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". Public comments are accepted throughout the year and close on December 31st.

The SSTAC will consider the draft Unmet Transit Needs report and 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"

Examples of Past Public Input and Findings

Unmet needs include Sunday service, Saturday night service on Redwood Transit System, and later evening service on the Eureka Transit System. These services are often found "not reasonable to meet" based on projected farebox returns and very low estimated ridership that would result in a high operating subsidy. Additionally, unmet needs must be considered financially sustainable based on there being enough money available from identified sources of funding to pay for the marginal operating cost of the service continuously for three years.

Comments received through this annual process can provide valuable feedback to transit operators. Not all operational requests can be met, but the Humboldt Transit Authority makes every effort to respond where feasible. Public comments are beneficial as a record of community need and can help to secure competitive grant-funded projects such as first-last mile mobility solutions to expand access to transit.

Opportunities for Public Comment on Unmet Transit Needs

- Navigate to the project page at https://www.hcaog.net/programs-projects/public-transportation or find the survey at bit.ly/UnmetTransitNeeds
- At one of the advertised public meetings;
- Written comments and/or feedback gathered from staff during direct outreach;
- Comment submittals by email or telephone: info@hcaog.net or 707-444-8208.

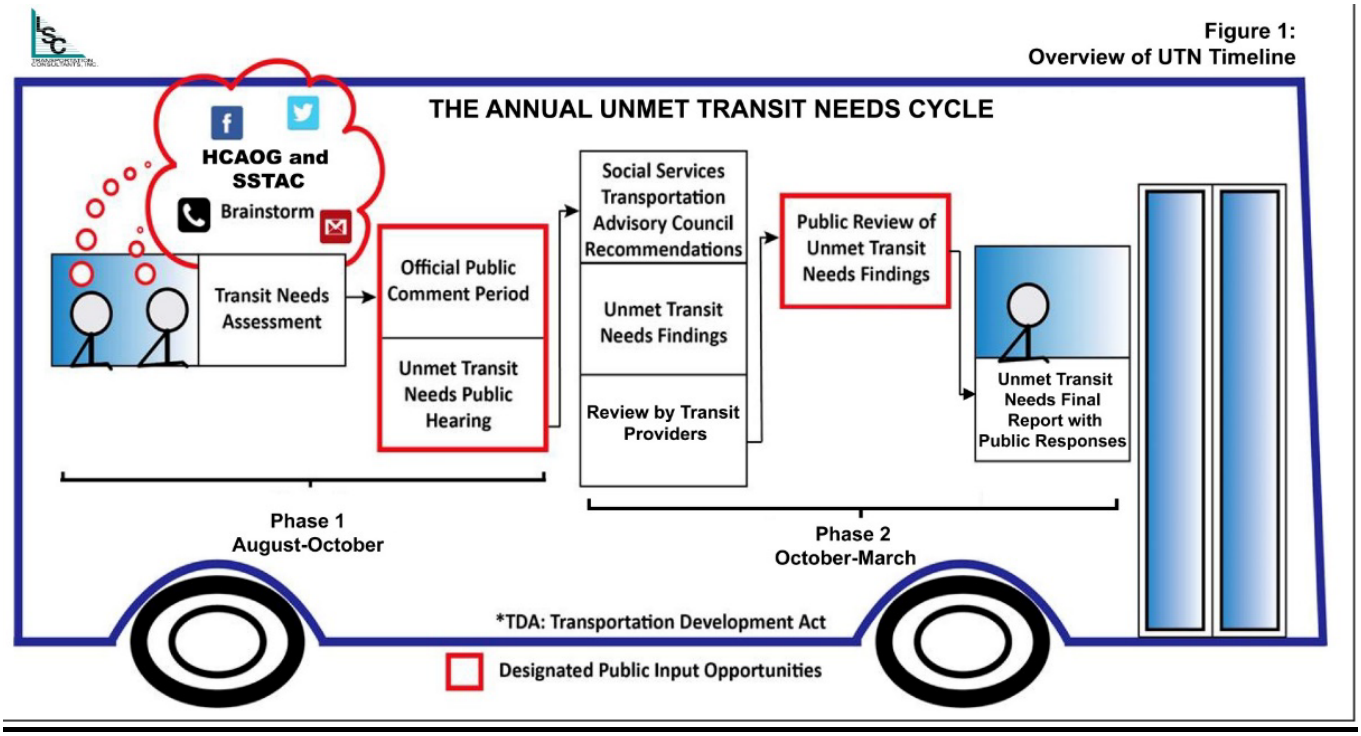

Figure 1:
Overview of UTN Timeline

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.

(3) Sufficient broad-based community support exists, meaning that persons who will likely use the service on a routine basis demonstrate support with at a minimum two requests for general public service and for disabled service.

Additionally, unmet transit needs do not include:

- Improvements funded or scheduled for implementation in the next fiscal year.
- 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 two years. Performance measures including estimated subsidy per passenger trip and passengers per vehicle hour of service will also be considered. 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.