

Transit Operations

SACRAMENTO REGION

MTP2030
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN
THE NEXT STEP IN BLUEPRINT

ISSUE BRIEF

OCTOBER 2005

Transit operations face critical challenges over the next 25 years. In developing the MTP 2030, key questions bear consideration:

- How is the public share of transit's operating costs to be provided?
- How can the funding pool be expanded or the farebox share increased to allow for more service?
- How can we prepare for transit's future replacement and rehabilitation needs?

This brief highlights the transit operations issues being studied for the MTP2030. For the complete Transit Operations Issue Paper and a list of MTP2030 Community Workshops visit www.sacog.org/mtp

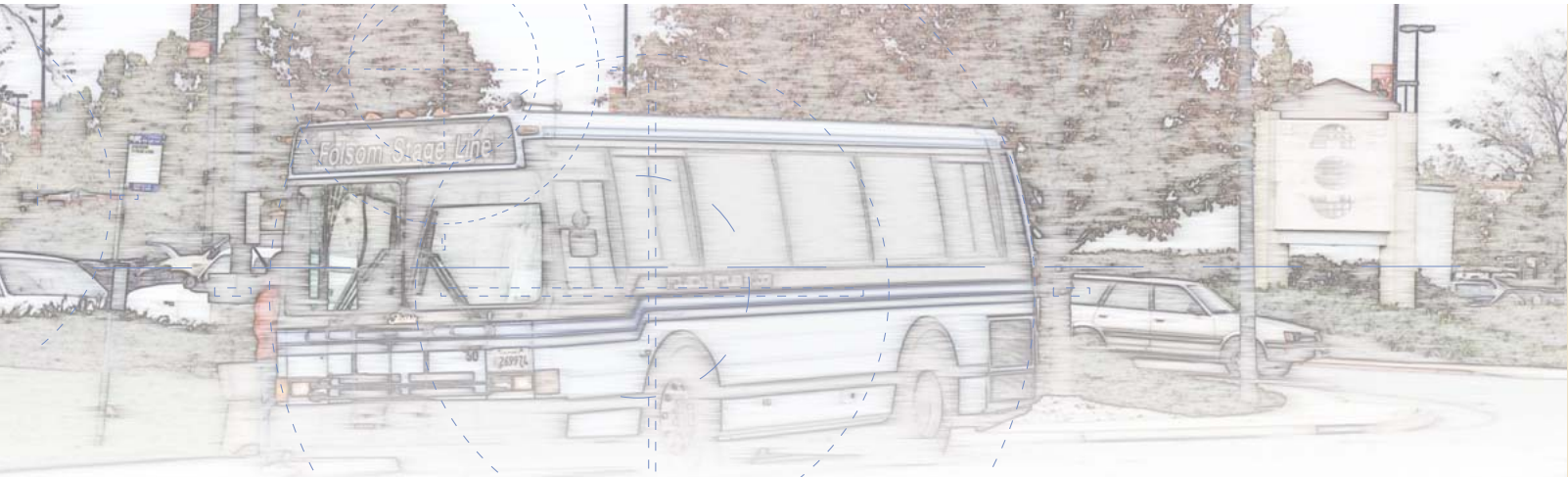
Transit operations in the region encompass a wide array of services including: urban light rail and bus service, express commuter buses from suburban cities, assisted paratransit dial-a-ride service for the disabled, and rural lifeline service running once-a-day or even once-a-week. This discussion excludes intercity/interregional rail and bus services.

Cost of Transit Operations

The 14 transit services in the region cost about \$160 million per year to operate. Sacramento Regional Transit District (RT) accounts for about 70 percent of the region's operating costs, and carries 80 percent of the region's 36 million annual transit rides. Smaller suburban operators comprise a larger share of passenger miles traveled. For most operators, labor comprises 75 to 85 percent of operating cost.

Paying for Transit Operations

The fundamental challenge for transit service and expansion in this region centers on operating funds. The key sources include Transportation Development Act (local sales tax) funds, Sacramento's Measure A half-cent sales tax, and farebox revenues. Every bus that Sacramento RT puts in service costs on average about \$300,000 annually, which requires \$240,000 from public funding to supplement fare revenues. RT's ability to expand operations is effectively capped by available operat-



ing funding. Fares are often set for public policy reasons, related to the ability of the transit-dependent to pay, rather than to cover the largest possible share of operating cost.

There are some options for increased funding beyond fares with additional sales-tax revenues the most likely source. Davis offers a different model, with mandatory UC Davis student fees funding 60 percent of Davis Unitrans operating costs and students allowed to ride fare-free.

Rehabilitation and Replacement of Transit Equipment

The region has no funding source dedicated to transit equipment rehabilitation and replacement. At present, these needs, which total nearly \$600 million over the next 25 years, must compete in regular regional funding programs against highway and transit improvements and expansion.

New state clean-air rules require many suburban operators to convert fleets from diesel to clean fuels in upcoming years. RT has been running with about 15 percent spare buses in its fleet, versus a national average of 22 percent, leading eventually to an increased breakdown rate and extra costs.

Transit System Performance

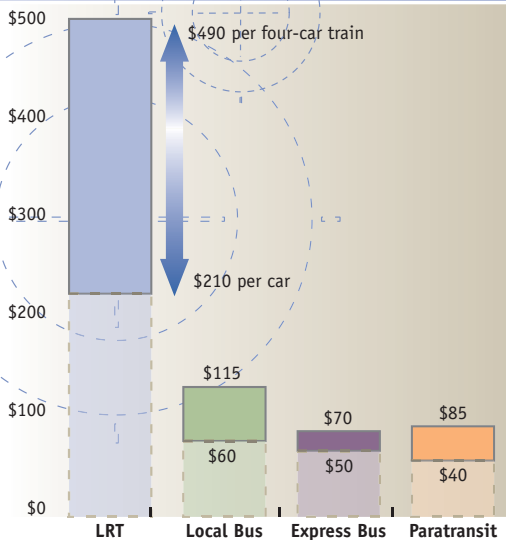
Except for the transit-dependent, transit serves only a small niche in travel in the region today. Transit carries 1 percent of daily trips in the region today, including 3 percent of peak hour commute trips and 20 percent of commute trips to and from downtown Sacramento.

Current transit service is highly focused on downtown Sacramento—the area with the largest concentration of transit-friendly land use densities—yet only 15 percent of the region’s jobs are located in downtown Sacramento.

Under today’s conditions, a RT route must carry 75 riders per run to cover operating cost. RT’s best route today carries about 75 riders on a daily average, but the system-wide average is only about 15 riders per run.

The demographics of an aging population, including doubling the population over age 75 within 25 years, poses major challenges for paratransit service, which today costs five times as much per rider as regular service. It becomes important to consider ways to serve those assisted riders who could board a bus independently with regular transit service.

RANGE OF OPERATING COSTS
per hour of vehicle in service
in SACOG region



Comparisons

The Blueprint intention for more compact development and community activity centers offers hope that conditions for transit service will improve in the future. Urban density matters; denser cities such as Boston, Baltimore and Los Angeles operate at about 30 percent lower cost per rider compared to more sprawling cities like Dallas, San Jose and Sacramento.

During peak service, Sacramento’s transit fleet is relatively small at 290 buses per million people. Most comparable-sized cities provide 500 to 750 buses per million people during peak service. Other transit systems, for example Golden Gate Transit, New Jersey Transit, San Diego and Houston, have been notably successful running express service on carpool lanes for a premium fare.



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