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# Placer County Rural Transit Study

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## Executive Summary



*Prepared for*

**Placer County Transportation Planning Agency**

*Prepared by*



**LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc.**



**PLACER COUNTY**

**RURAL TRANSIT STUDY**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Placer County Transportation Planning Agency (PCTPA) conducted a study regarding potential improvements in public transit services in rural western Placer County. PCTPA identified eight rural unincorporated communities in Western Placer County which have limited or no public transit service:

- ◆ Unincorporated Lincoln
- ◆ Sheridan
- ◆ Loomis – Including Penryn
- ◆ Granite Bay
- ◆ Unincorporated Auburn – Including Bowman and Newcastle
- ◆ North Auburn
- ◆ Colfax – Including Meadow Vista and Alta
- ◆ Foresthill

The primary objective of this study was to determine the feasibility of expanding public transit in the study areas and so that PCTPA can respond properly to unmet transit need requests.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

The current total population of Placer County is 348,432. The total population of the census tracts considered part of this rural transit study is 115,207 – 33 percent of the total countywide population.

A review of population in various “transit dependent” groups indicates the following:

- ◆ Granite Bay and Loomis/Penryn – Transit services catering to youth needs is particularly important in Granite Bay
- ◆ Unincorporated Auburn/Newcastle – There are greater concentrations of elderly and low income residents in this region.
- ◆ West Placer/Unincorporated Lincoln – Youth and low income are the significant transit dependent groups in this area
- ◆ Sheridan – Sheridan has above study area average proportions of youth, low income, and disabled residents.
- ◆ North Auburn, Colfax/Meadow Vista, and Foresthill – All these study areas show a higher proportion of elderly, low income, and disabled residents.
- ◆ North Auburn is the location of both the greatest number of zero-vehicle households and the greatest proportion of zero-vehicle households in the study area. Colfax/Meadow Vista/Alta also has a relatively high number of zero-vehicle households.

The elderly population is expected to grow substantially through 2020 and 2030. The population of seniors ages 65 through 74 is expected to increase by 49.0 percent between 2010 and 2020 and by 81.4 percent between 2010 and 2030

## **CURRENT TRANSIT SERVICES**

### **Placer County Transit**

Placer County Transit provides fixed route, demand response, and commuter services throughout western Placer County. PCT routes which serve study areas are:

- ◆ Lincoln/Rocklin/Sierra College Route
- ◆ Auburn to Light Rail
- ◆ Highway 49 Route
- ◆ Alta/Colfax Route
- ◆ Lincoln Circulator
- ◆ Placer Commuter Express (PCE)
- ◆ Dial-A-Ride
- ◆ Taylor Road Shuttle
- ◆ Vanpool Program

The Placer County Transit system has seen an increase overall ridership and vehicle service hours within the last several years. For the fixed routes, the Auburn to Light Rail Route carried the greatest number of one-way passenger trips in FY 13/14 (144,487) followed by Lincoln-Sierra College (103,588). The fixed route with considerably lower ridership was the Alta – Colfax line, which had 7,834 annual one-way passenger trips. Out of the PCT DAR services, the Highway 49 route and Taylor Road Shuttle generated the highest ridership in FY 2013-14, with respectively 12,748 and 10,422 one-way passenger trips. The Granite Bay DAR only accounted for 487, or 1.5 percent, of total annual DAR one-way passenger trips.

### **Auburn Transit**

Auburn Transit offers two deviated fixed route services within the City of Auburn and portions of unincorporated Placer County. The Red and Blue Routes generally travel between Bowman Road in the north and Sacramento and High Street to the south and will deviate from the fixed route up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile upon a reservation request, with two hours advance notice.

### **Roseville Transit**

Roseville Transit offers twelve local routes generally within the City of Roseville, with an added route during peak hours.

### **Western Placer CTSA**

The Western Placer Consolidated Transportation Service Agency (WPCTSA) in cooperation healthcare and non-profit agencies operates two main programs: Health Express Non-Emergency Medical Transportation and My Rides volunteer driver/mileage reimbursement program. These WPCTSA services are available throughout western Placer County and are the only form of public transit available for some very rural communities such as Foresthill and Sheridan.

## TRANSIT NEEDS AND DEMAND

### Populations Not Served by Current Transit Programs

Census tracts which stand out as having a high number of transit dependent residents with limited transit services are located in the Foresthill, Colfax, and North Auburn study areas. All these census tracts have at least 3,800 transit dependent residents. Transit dependent communities with little or no transit service available include: all of Sheridan, Loomis/Penryn south of I-80, Foresthill, and the North Auburn area around the I-80 corridor. Census tracts having more than 120 zero vehicle households are located in North Auburn, Loomis Penryn, Colfax/Meadow Vista/Alta, and Granite Bay. In addition to having large concentrations of transit dependent residents (youth, elderly, low income, and disabled) and limited transit services, the portion of North Auburn along the I-80 corridor and Loomis Penryn outside the Taylor Road Shuttle service area also have a high concentration of zero vehicle households.

### Transit Need

The mobility gap methodology is one way to quantify transit need, defined as the difference between the number of trips made by persons who reside in households owning no personal vehicle and the number of trips that would likely be made by those persons if they had access to a personal vehicle. One important finding from this analysis is the location of the highest need. North Auburn's trip need of 628 daily-trips accounts for 45 percent of the total study area trip need. Colfax/Meadow Vista/Alta has the next highest trip need, at 208 daily-trips, though its population is lower than that of Granite Bay. The other rural areas with over 100 trips needed per day include Granite Bay and Loomis/Penryn. The area which stands out as having the highest levels of transit need and lowest levels of transit service is Colfax east of I-80.

Unmet transit need hearing minutes were also reviewed as another indicator of transit needs.

## PEER ANALYSIS

A review was conducted of nine rural peer transit routes in northern and eastern California. The analysis showed that the average annual ridership per capita for the nine rural routes was 1.27 trips per capita and the average annual subsidy per passenger-trip was \$58.64.

## SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

An extensive list of service alternatives was developed, based upon stakeholder input, the unmet transit needs findings, a community survey, Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC) meetings in each of the study areas and PCTPA Board input:

- ◆ **Sheridan Service Alternatives** - Lifeline transit service 1 day per week, 2 days per week and 5 days per week.
- ◆ **State Route 193 Corridor Service Alternatives** - Both a frequent "commuter" type of service as well as lifeline service between Lincoln and Auburn along the SR 193 corridor.

- ◆ **Combined SR 193 and Sheridan Alternative** – A combined SR 193 and Sheridan lifeline service was analyzed at the one day per week level.
- ◆ **Granite Bay Service Alternatives** – Expanding service hours for the existing Granite Bay DAR, contracting with the City of Roseville to operate the Granite Bay DAR and extending Roseville Transit fixed routes into Granite Bay.
- ◆ **North Auburn Service Alternatives** – Expanding the Highway 49 DAR service area as well as a separate route for the community of Bowman.
- ◆ **Alta/Colfax Service Alternatives** – Operating one additional round trip per day (mid-day) and changing the existing schedule to better serve commuters.
- ◆ **Taylor Road Shuttle Alternatives** – Expanding the Taylor Road Shuttle deviation service area to 1 mile, and to 1.5 miles.
- ◆ **Foresthill Alternatives** – Lifeline service ranging from one day per week to five days per week.
- ◆ **Rural Vanpools** – Expansion of the vanpool program could be used to address commuter needs in all communities in the study area. Examples include between Lincoln and Auburn or Alta and Auburn.
- ◆ **Transportation Network Companies (TNC)** – The option of using TDA funds to subsidize TNC trips (such as Uber or Lyft) was considered.
- ◆ **Increase Marketing/Public Awareness of Health Express and My Rides** - It was discovered through the public input process that many MAC committee members and the general public are unaware of Health Express and My Rides services in Placer County.

## RECOMMENDED PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The study defined recommended performance standards specific to rural transit services.

## RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

The following strategies to improve mobility for rural residents of western Placer County are based on documented needs for transit service and meet the recommended rural performance standards.

### Combined Sheridan/SR 193 Corridor Lifeline Service 1 Day per Week

The service should be a true lifeline service with two round trips, one day per week between the Sheridan Post Office and Lincoln (Twelve Bridges Transfer Point) and then between Lincoln (Walmart) and Auburn (Nevada Street Station) along SR 193. The service should operate as a deviated fixed route to meet ADA requirements and provide increased mobility for the general public. Transfers to the PCT Lincoln – Rocklin – Sierra College Route would be possible at Twelve Bridges and to Auburn Transit or PCT Highway 49 route at Nevada Street Station. This



strategy would allow for a three hour stay in Lincoln for Sheridan residents and a two hour stay in Auburn for Lincoln/SR 193 residents. It would be reasonable to charge a higher fare for this service.

The annual operating subsidy required is estimated at \$21,610 and the service would carry around 740 one-way passenger trips per year. PCT is the most likely operator for the service and therefore the vehicle would be based at the Lincoln Corp Yard. Initially, the service should be advertised as a “reservation only” service with a minimum of two individual passenger reservations, made at least two business days in advance, for either the Sheridan leg or SR 193 corridor leg. This strategy would be implemented as a demonstration route. If after three years of operation, performance standards were not met, this route should be discontinued.

*Capital Requirements* - A new small transit vehicle or minivan would be required for the Sheridan/SR 193 service. In terms of bus stops, a sign would need to be installed at the Sheridan Post Office. Existing bus stops in Lincoln and Auburn could be used.

### **Foresthill Lifeline Service 1 Day per Week**

Lifeline service to Foresthill one day per week should be implemented as a three year demonstration service. This new route should extend from the Foresthill Community Center near the intersection of Main St & Soap St in Foresthill to the Nevada Street Station in Auburn. In order to be compliant with ADA, the route should be operated as a deviated fixed route. The three-quarter mile service area would cover most of the communities of Foresthill and Todd Valley and include the Sky Terrace Mobile Home Park and Hillcrest Mobile Home Park. The schedule would provide a three hour stay in Auburn for residents to make medical appointments or do some shopping. The Foresthill Lifeline route should be a reservation only service and a higher fare could be charged. The route would not operate unless a minimum of two individual passengers made a reservation at least two business days in advance (which could be modified in the future depending on ridership patterns). The Foresthill Lifeline route would serve 900 one-way passenger-trips per year, or 12 per service day. Accounting for headway, layover, and travel time, this alternative would require \$19,940 in annual operating subsidy. PCT would operate the service.

*Capital Requirements* – If the Foresthill Lifeline route is operated on a different day of the week from the Sheridan/SR 193 Lifeline route, the same vehicle could be used. A bus stop should be placed at the Foresthill Community Center.

### **Alta/Colfax – Commuter Schedule + Mid-Day Run**

The schedule for the existing two daily Alta/Colfax – Auburn runs should be modified to meet commuter schedules, and a third mid-day round-trip run added. The existing Alta/Colfax schedule should be adjusted so that the first round trip would arrive in Auburn at the Nevada Street Station at or before 8:00 AM and the second round trip would depart Auburn at or just after 5:00 PM. The runs should also originate and end at DeWitt Center to serve county employees (as well as other users of county services). Passengers could transfer to Auburn Transit and PCT Highway 49 routes at Nevada Street Station at the top of the hour. The three-quarter mile deviation service area would not change. The mid-day run should depart Auburn around 11:00 AM and then depart Alta at around Noon to arrive in Auburn around 1:00 PM,

providing non-commuting passengers with a three hour stay in Auburn in the morning or a four hour stay in the afternoon.

This plan element would increase total operating subsidy by \$44,420 annually and would increase passenger-trips by 4,630. As the number of vehicle service hours operated within the Colfax area would increase, the funding arrangement between the City of Colfax and PCT should be reviewed and revised.

*Capital Requirements* – No new bus stops or vehicles would be required as part of this alternative.

### **Roseville Operates Granite Bay Dial-A-Ride**

Placer County should explore the potential for the City of Roseville to provide Dial-A-Ride services in the Granite Bay area. Roseville destinations for Granite Bay DAR passengers would no longer be limited to the Sierra College Blvd corridor, improving service to Granite Bay residents, and the hours that service is available would be expanded from the current 4 hours per day to 6 AM – 10 PM. As a result, the Granite Bay DAR would carry roughly 580 more passenger-trips per year. Placer County's annual operating subsidy would be reduced by \$3,180. This strategy will require frequent and close coordination with the City of Roseville.

### **Detailed Service Review in the Auburn Region**

There appears to be some confusion among residents regarding service area boundaries for PCT and City of Auburn transit services within the greater Auburn area. As such, many Auburn transit needs could potentially be met through better outreach and communication of available services to residents. There is also overlap of the deviation request areas for Auburn Transit and PCT. Therefore, a more detailed service review of public transit services in the Auburn region should be conducted that also considers coordination opportunities for fares and schedules as well as joint marketing outreach.

### **Expand PCT Vanpool Budget to Meet Rural Commuter Needs**

A vanpool is a good alternative strategy to address commuter needs in rural Placer County. Commute patterns and public input indicate the potential for vanpools between Lincoln and Auburn, between Alta and Auburn and between Foresthill and Auburn. The PCT vanpool budget should be increased by 10 percent to meet rural commuter transportation needs.

### **Farebox Ratio Adjustment**

Per the Transportation Development Act (TDA), PCTPA has adopted a blended farebox ratio for PCT services of 13.2 percent. The ratio is based on the proportion of PCT service area which lies within urbanized and non-urbanized portions of western Placer County. The implementation of some of these rural transit strategies will change that proportion. Therefore, after the three year demonstration period for the recommended strategies, PCTPA should reevaluate the blended farebox ratio for PCT services. TDA law allows for an exemption from the systemwide farebox ratio calculation for "Extension of Public Transit Services" for two years after the end of

the fiscal year in which the extension of services was put into operation (PUC 99268.8). PCTPA should grant the farebox ratio exemption to the operator as applicable.

## POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

The following lists potential funding sources for the rural transit strategies:

- ◆ **Passenger Fare Structure** – Change the passenger fare structure so that reservation only services and long distance services are subject to a higher fare that is more equitable to the distance travelled and relative operating costs.
- ◆ **Transportation Development Act – Local Transportation Funds (LTF)** - LTF funds are the most likely funding source for the rural transit strategies identified in this document. Therefore, implementation will trigger the unmet transit needs process. This study should be used as basis for decision-makers for that process.
- ◆ **Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds** – The FTA recurring grant programs can be used for both operating and capital transit expenses.

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