



STAFF REPORT
Board Meeting of May 21, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: 5-D

PREPARED BY: Natalia Austin, Senior Regional Planner

SUBJECT:

Social Service Transportation Advisory Council's (SSTAC) FY 2025-26 Unmet Transit Needs Recommendations – Resolution No. 25-03

Enclosure: Yes

Action: MCTC Staff recommends the MCTC Policy Board approve the Social Service Transportation Advisory Council's (SSTAC) FY 2025-26 Unmet Transit Needs findings by Resolution No. 25-03

BACKGROUND:

Pursuant to Section 99401.5 of the California Public Utilities Code, the Madera County Transportation Commission (MCTC), as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency, is responsible for performing the annual “unmet transit needs” process. The purpose of this process is to ensure that all “unmet transit needs” that are “reasonable to meet” are met on transit service before any Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds are expended for non-transit uses, such as streets and roads. If the MCTC Policy Board, through the unmet transit needs process, identifies an “unmet transit need” and determines the need is “reasonable to meet,” these transit needs must be met before any TDA funds are expended for non-transit uses, such as street and road projects. According to CA PUC Section 99401.5 (c), an agency's determination of needs that are “reasonable to meet” shall not be made by comparing unmet transit needs with the need for streets and roads.

In 2022, the MCTC Policy Board adopted the following definitions by Resolution No. 22-01 for its Unmet Transit Needs process:

- A. UNMET TRANSIT NEEDS: An unmet transit need is an expressed or identified need that is not currently being met through existing public transportation services. An unmet transit need also is a need required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- B. REASONABLE TO MEET: The term “reasonable to meet” shall apply to public or specialized transportation services that meet the following minimum criteria:
 - 1. Feasibility

- The proposed service can be provided with available Transportation Development Act (TDA) funding and/or other funding sources (per state law, the lack of available resources shall not be the sole reason for finding that a transit need is not reasonable to meet per PUC Section 99401.5(c).
 - Sufficient ridership potential exists for new, expanded, or revised transit services.
 - The proposed transit service will be safe and comply with local, state, and federal law.
2. Community Acceptance
 - The proposed transit service has community support from the general public, community groups, and/or community leaders.
 3. Benefit to Population
 - The proposed transit service serves a significant number of residents where it is needed and would benefit the general public and/or senior and disabled persons as a whole.
 4. Cost Effective
 - The proposed transit service will not affect the ability of the overall system of the implementing agency or agencies to meet applicable transit system performance objectives or the State TDA farebox ratio requirement after any exemption(s) period(s) if the service is eligible for exemption(s) per CCR 6633.2.
 - The proposed transit service, if implemented or funded, would not cause the responsible operator to incur expenditures in excess of the maximum amount of LTF, STA, FTA funds, and fare revenues and local support.
 5. Consistent with Intent of Existing Transit Service(s)
 - Once established, the proposed transit service will not abuse or obscure the intent of existing transit service(s).
 - The proposed transit need should be in conformance with the goals included in the Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy, and consistent with the intent of the goals of the adopted Short Range Transit Plan.

The role of the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) is to aid the MCTC Policy Board in its review of transit issues with emphasis on the annual identification of unmet transit needs within Madera County. The MCTC Policy Board makes the final determination, taking into consideration the recommendations of the SSTAC, and adopts a finding of fact for each jurisdiction by resolution. The establishment of the Madera County SSTAC is consistent with State Law (SB 498, Chapter 673, 1987) which mandates both the purpose and minimum membership of the Council. The purpose of the SSTAC is to:

- A. Annually participate in identification of transit needs (Unmet Transit Needs Public Hearing Process).
- B. Review and recommend appropriate action by the MCTC Policy Board which finds, by resolution, that:

1. There are no unmet transit needs,
 2. There are no unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet,
 3. There are unmet transit needs, including needs that are reasonable to meet.
- C. Advise the MCTC on any other major transit issues, including the coordination and consolidation of specialized transportation services.

The annually required public hearing to receive comments regarding unmet transit needs was held on Wednesday, April 23, 2025, at the MCTC Policy Board meeting. In addition, since April 26, 2024, MCTC staff have received public input on potential unmet transit needs within the region through online surveys, comment forms, and workshops. The SSTAC met on April 29, 2025, and evaluated all comments received using the MCTC Policy Board adopted “unmet transit need” and “reasonable to meet” definitions and made a recommendation to the MCTC Policy Board. The following staff summary was prepared in cooperation with the SSTAC. The SSTAC has also submitted a letter outlining its recommendations to the MCTC Policy Board under separate correspondence.

SUMMARY:

The SSTAC and MCTC staff reviewed twenty-four comments. Eight of the comments were identified as potential unmet transit needs and were evaluated using the “unmet transit need” and “reasonable to meet” definitions. The SSTAC has made the following recommendations for each jurisdiction:

SSTAC Recommendation for Madera County: There are no unmet transit needs.

SSTAC Recommendation for the City of Madera: There are no unmet transit needs.

SSTAC Recommendation for the City of Chowchilla: There are no unmet transit needs.

MCTC Staff concur with the SSTAC recommendations for all three jurisdictions.

The potential unmet transit needs that have been evaluated and the recommendations made by the SSTAC for Madera County (MCC) are as follows:

- PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION TO UC MERCED AND MERCED COLLEGE

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need.

Discussion: This route is approximately 70 miles roundtrip and would take 2.0 hours to complete. At Madera County Connection’s (MCC) current operating expense, it will cost approximately \$200 per roundtrip to provide. To achieve the targeted Fare Box Recovery Rate of 10% and an average fare of \$1.57 per passenger, this route would require a minimum of thirteen passengers per run, with two runs per day, or 26 passengers total. There was a route in the past that was discontinued due to low ridership. MCC is interested in collaborating with the university to assess its feasibility and if there is

enough potential ridership, would like UC Merced to consider contributing funding support for this route. Caltrans has suggested securing funding for a study to evaluate the need for this service and potentially partnering with MCTC to conduct it. Additional planning and coordination will be necessary to move this effort forward.

- INCREASE THE FREQUENCY ON THE VALLEY CHILDREN'S ROUTE. THE GAP BETWEEN THE 11:51AM AND 3:15PM DEPARTURES IS TOO LONG.

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need.

Discussion: This route is approximately 40 miles roundtrip and takes about 1.4 hours to complete. Based on MCC's current operating expenses, it costs approximately \$132 per roundtrip to provide service. In order to meet the targeted Fare Box Recovery Rate of 10%, and assuming an average fare of \$1.57 per passenger, a minimum of 9 passengers per roundtrip would be needed. However, with an average of only 3 riders per run last year, reaching this ridership level does not appear to be a realistic expectation at this time. Microtransit may offer a flexible and cost-effective solution to provide increased service in this area. MCC is currently exploring potential funding sources to support this option. Future development, The Hill, is anticipated near the hospital, which could generate additional demand for transportation services. In particular, janitorial and other hospital staff residing in Madera may rely on this service for commuting, highlighting the potential need for targeted transit solutions. MCC regularly assesses any change in service demand and will adjust accordingly.

- INCREASE THE FREQUENCY TO THE COMMUNITY OF LA VINA TO MONDAY – FRIDAY BETWEEN 7:30AM – 3:30PM OR AT 7:30AM, 1:00PM, AND 5-6:00PM. RIDERS FROM LA VINA GET STRANDED IN MADERA BECAUSE THERE ISN'T ENOUGH FREQUENCY TO GET BACK HOME AFTER APPOINTMENTS (MULTIPLE COMMENTS)

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need.

Discussion: This route covers approximately 22 miles roundtrip and takes about 1.1 hours to complete. Currently, it requires approximately \$106 per roundtrip to operate. To meet the target Fare Box Recovery Rate of 10%, with an average fare of \$1.57 per passenger, the route would need at least 7 passengers per trip. However, the service averaged only 1.7 riders per run last year, making the goal of 7 passengers per roundtrip unlikely under current conditions. MCC will further survey the riders of this route to better understand their specific transportation needs and travel patterns to ensure that any future changes are aligned with existing rider preferences.

- PROVIDE SERVICE FROM OAKHURST (ALL MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES) TO GET TO MADERA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT BY 8:00AM, MONDAY-FRIDAY FOR COURT APPEARANCES, JURY DUTY, ETC.

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need.

Discussion: The frequency of service in Oakhurst was increased from 3 runs to 5 runs to better accommodate demand. Additional runs will be considered as ridership continues to grow. However, to reach Madera from Oakhurst by 8:00 a.m., service would need to begin as early as 4:00 a.m. from Madera, which presents challenges in terms of both operations and ridership. Sustaining a run that early in the day may not be feasible without sufficient passenger demand.

- PROVIDE LOCAL SERVICE IN OAKHURST ON SUNDAY TO GO TO CHURCH SERVICES

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need.

Discussion: Microtransit may offer a flexible and cost-effective solution to provide increased service in this area. MCC is currently exploring potential funding sources to support this option.

- ADD A BUS STOP AT THE NEW RIVER GROVE APARTMENT COMPLEX IN OAKHURST

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need.

Discussion: There is an existing stop at the park and ride that is within a quarter of a mile of the River Grove apartments.

- NEED AN APP TO TRACK THE BUSES IN REAL TIME AND GET UPDATES WHEN THE BUS IS LATE, HIGH TRAFFIC, ETC.

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need.

Discussion: Riders can use MCCtransit.com to track the County's buses. The Transit App (by Swiftly) also provides the location of the bus in real-time. The schedules are also accessible on the app.

The potential unmet transit needs that have been evaluated and the recommendations made by the SSTAC for the City of Madera (Madera Metro) are as follows:

- INCREASE THE FREQUENCY OF BUSES AND SUNDAY SERVICE AS WELL AS EXPAND THE HOURS OF OPERATION IN THE CITY OF MADERA

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need.

Discussion: (Metro) Dial-a-ride service is available on Sundays. There have been some comments in the past regarding additional service on Sunday. The City of Madera conducted a Transit Plan Services Assessment that was completed in July 2023. The newest route changes that have been implemented have been based on the results of the assessment. While the City is open to ongoing consideration for additional expansion of services, at this time the requests have been very minimal. Additionally, consideration of

any expansion of program changes requires a budget review to ensure financial sustainability of services.

- NEED AN APP TO TRACK THE BUSES IN REAL TIME AND GET UPDATES WHEN THE BUS IS LATE, HIGH TRAFFIC, ETC.

SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need

Discussion: Madera Metro (City of Madera) is in the process of contracting with a vendor to work on a Micro-Transit Feasibility Study. It is anticipated that this study will include the integration of technology platforms to address the identified feedback.

There were no potential unmet transit needs that were evaluated by the SSTAC for the City of Chowchilla (CATX).

The rest of the comments received were determined to be either operational or non-transit issues. These comments were forwarded to the appropriate agencies to be addressed.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No fiscal impact to the approved 2024-25 Overall Work Program and Budget