



**STAFF REPORT**  
Board Meeting of May 29, 2024

**AGENDA ITEM:** 5-A

**PREPARED BY:** Natalia Austin, Senior Regional Planner

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**SUBJECT:**

Social Service Transportation Advisory Council's (SSTAC) FY 2024-25 Unmet Transit Needs Recommendations – Resolution No. 24-05

**Enclosure:** Yes

**Action:** MCTC Staff recommends the MCTC Policy Board approve the Social Service Transportation Advisory Council's (SSTAC) FY 2024-25 Unmet Transit Needs finding by Resolution No. 24-05

**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.

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 24, 2024, at the MCTC Policy Board meeting. In addition, since July 1, 2023, 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 30, 2024, 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-seven comments. Seventeen 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 unmet transit needs, including needs that are reasonable to meet.

SSTAC Recommendation for the City of Madera: There are no unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet.

SSTAC Recommendation for the City of Chowchilla: There are no unmet transit needs that are reasonable to meet.

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:

- CONNECT TO MERCED, SPECIFICALLY TO THE MERCED AMTRAK STATION

**SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need**

Discussion: There is not enough documented demand for a route to Merced. There was a route in the past that was discontinued due to low ridership. There are options to get to

Merced Amtrak utilizing existing local transit service combined with rail service. The Madera Metro Blue Line serves the Madera Amtrak Station (MDR). Amtrak tickets from Madera to Merced cost \$9.00 for a direct one-way trip and have six different time options. The train ride takes less than 35 minutes.

- ADD LATER SERVICE TO/FROM THE COMMUNITY OF LA VINA, SO RIDERS CAN MAKE IT BACK HOME FROM APPOINTMENTS THAT RUN LATE.

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet**

Discussion: There is not enough documented demand to provide later Fixed Route service to and from La Vina. The County is conducting a study to implement a microtransit service that could address the specific needs of the area and help document when increased fixed route service is warranted. A microtransit or demand-response type of service may provide the flexibility needed to serve the needs of this community better.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
Will be determined with microtransit study	Yes	Yes	Will be determined with microtransit study	Yes

- ADD MORE FREQUENT FIXED ROUTE SERVICE IN THE COMMUNITY OF LA VINA

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet.**

Discussion: There is not enough documented demand for more frequent Fixed Route service in La Vina. The County is conducting a study to implement a microtransit service that could address the specific needs of the area and help document when increased fixed route service is warranted. A microtransit or demand-response type of service may provide the flexibility needed to serve the needs of this community better.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
Will be determined with microtransit study	Yes	Yes	Will be determined with microtransit study	Yes

- PROVIDE SERVICE TO VALLEY CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL AT 8PM (EVENING) AND BACK TO YOSEMITE AVENUE IN MADERA AT 7AM (MORNING)

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet.**

Discussion: There is not enough documented demand for transit service to Valley Children’s Hospital in the evenings. The microtransit study will provide guidance on the amount of ridership needed to support this service if implemented.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
Will be determined with microtransit study	Unknown - There was only one comment regarding this need	Unknown - It is unclear how many people this will benefit	Will be determined with microtransit study	Yes

- PROVIDE MEDICAL TRANSIT SERVICE FROM THE MOUNTAINS (EASTERN MADERA COUNTY) TO HOSPITALS IN FRESNO, MADERA, OR MARIPOSA

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet.**

Discussion: The County provides the Medical Escort Service for residents in the Eastern Madera County communities, including the mountain communities. The service runs on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Some residents are not healthy enough to utilize this service, since the ride and wait times can be long. In some instances, riders are dropped off in the morning for their appointments and then wait to get picked up, in some cases several hours later, after the rest of the riders are done with their appointments to head back home. The County believes that microtransit service will assist in making these medical trips more convenient, increasing the benefit to residents.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
Will be determined with microtransit study	Yes	Yes	Will be determined with microtransit study	Yes

- ADD A STOP CLOSER TO ROAD 200 IN NORTH FORK

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet**

Discussion: There is not enough documented demand for a new stop that would add ten minutes or more to the route at this time.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
Will be determined with microtransit study	Unknown - There was only one comment regarding this need	Unknown - It is unclear how many people this will benefit	Will be determined with microtransit study	Yes

- ADD A BUS SHELTER AT THE STORE IN LA VINA

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet**

Discussion: There is not sufficient room for a bus shelter at the store; however, the County will continue to work with the store owner to find a solution. There may be a stop added on the other side of the street where there are planned sidewalks. Most of the MCC stops are in the unincorporated area that lacks infrastructure like sidewalks to add an ADA compliant shelter.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
No – Existing infrastructure will not support a shelter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

- ADD TRASH CANS AT THE STOPS IN LA VINA

**SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need**

Discussion: The County transit administration will not allow trash cans at the stops because of the sustained maintenance that would be required.

- ADD MORE LIGHTING AT THE BUS STOPS AND ALONG THE ROUTES TO BUS STOPS IN LA VINA; ADD LIGHTED SCHEDULES TO SHOW IF THE BUS IS RUNNING ON TIME

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, reasonable to meet**

Discussion: The Transit App (by Swiftly) provides the location of the bus in real-time. The schedules are also accessible on the app. However, the app may not perform well in areas with weak internet service. The County has plans to install new schedule holders that have a solar light at bus stops throughout the county, including in the community of La Vina. Together with the app and the lighted schedule holders, this unmet transit need will be met.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

- ADD MORE SHELTERS AND BENCHES AT STOPS IN LA VINA

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet**

Discussion: The residential areas of La Vina tend to lack the supporting infrastructure (sidewalks) for the installation of benches and shelters. The County continues to look for opportunities to add shelters where they can be installed safely and with adequate ADA access.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
No – lack of support infrastructure prevents installation in many locations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

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:

- TRAVEL TO ST. AGNES MEDICAL CENTER IN FRESNO BY MADERA METRO DIAL-A-RIDE

**SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need**

Discussion: There are options to get to Fresno for medical appointments from Madera. Madera County provides fixed route service from Madera to Valley Children’s Medical Center, where riders can connect to Fresno Area Express to get to destinations (including medical) in the City of Fresno. Madera County also provides the Medical Escort service on Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday specifically for medical trips to the Fresno and Clovis Area.

- ADD SERVICE ON SUNDAYS IN THE CITY OF MADERA

**SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need**

Discussion: Dial-a-ride service is available on Sundays. A greater need would have to be established (i.e. community acceptance, potential ridership) before amending the budget and contracting with MV Transit to add a fixed route service on Sundays. Even though utilizing Dial-a-ride requires an advance reservation, same-day service is available if there are cancellations. 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.

- PROVIDE A STOP NEAR SHERWOOD WAY TO GET TO MADERA COLLEGE

**SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need**

Discussion: To get to Madera City College from Sherwood Way, there are a couple of options. A rider can reserve Dial-a-Ride to get to the college, or they can use the fixed route system. To use the fixed route system, get on the bus at one of the three bus stops along Sherwood Way. Take the blue line to Walgreens, then transfer to the green line to get to the college.

- PROVIDE SERVICE AFTER 5:30 PM IN THE CITY OF MADERA

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet**

Discussion: Many events, including public meetings, begin at the end of the business day. Providing public transit service later in the evenings would provide transit dependent persons with increased mobility options. However, when the City surveyed residents as part of its recent needs assessment, later service was not an issue. The need for later service would need to be established by further analysis and demonstrated possibly by a pilot study.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

Feasibility	Community Acceptance	Benefit to Population	Cost Effective	Consistency with Existing Service and Plans
Unknown	Unknown – There was only one comment regarding this need	Yes	Unknown	Yes

- PROVIDE SERVICE TO ALL THE CAMARENA CLINICS

**SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need**

Discussion: All but two of the Camarena clinics are being served by the current route system in the city. In most cases, the riders are dropped off right at the clinic.

- ABILITY FOR USERS TO SAVE THE TRANSIT SCHEDULES

**SSTAC Recommendation: Not an unmet transit need**

Discussion: There are many ways for Madera Metro transit users to access and save the schedules. They are available in hardcopy or for download on the agency’s website.

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

- PROVIDE SERVICE UNTIL 5PM AND ADD WEEKEND SERVICE IN CHOWCHILLA

**SSTAC Recommendation: Unmet transit need, not reasonable to meet**

Discussion: Several years ago, the City approved a pilot program with extended hours until 5 pm. For two years it was underutilized, so the service was discontinued. The City will continue to monitor community needs to determine if there should be an extension of service hours based on information collected during outreach efforts and ridership data.

*Reasonable to Meet Requirements*

<b>Feasibility</b>	<b>Community Acceptance</b>	<b>Benefit to Population</b>	<b>Cost Effective</b>	<b>Consistency with Existing Service and Plans</b>
Unknown - it is unclear how many residents of Chowchilla would utilize the service in the evenings and on weekends	Unknown – There was only one comment regarding this need	Unknown	Unknown	Yes

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 2023-24 Overall Work Program and Budget.