



Meeting Date: May 31, 2023

Agenda Item: D.4

## AGENDA SUMMARY REPORT

CTSA Discussion

### **SUMMARY:**

MCOG's study of transportation needs and solutions for Brooktrails, Covelo, Hopland, Laytonville and Potter Valley consider the institutional arrangements by which individual services or multiple services could be administered, managed and operated.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Challenges of Implementing Rural Mobility Solutions AMMA Draft, 5/1/2023

## Challenges of Implementing Rural Mobility Solutions

Implementation of the very modest, lifeline level, mobility recommendations identified by *MCOG's Rural Mobility Solutions Study* presents three challenges.

- First, no single strategy will be sufficient. Research clearly demonstrates that the need for transportation cuts across demographic segments, not just older adults and persons with disabilities, but working age adults, young families, college students and youth. There is a need to implement a mix of low-cost transportation services to address diverse mobility needs within the rural communities.
- Second, finding sustainable funding, particularly for general public services, is not easy. There are limited funding options beyond those already being used by MTA. Using grant funding alone for pilot projects is unreliable. It has the potential to build expectations and then not be sustainable. These are long-term unmet needs which will need to be addressed over time.
- And finally, leadership will be critical for the successful implementation, promotion and management of the recommended programs. Who will take responsibility for this significant ongoing effort, both within the five communities of focus in the Inland Rural Mobility study and elsewhere in rural Mendocino County?

The challenges of sustainable funding can be addressed if MCOG is willing to earmark annually a small portion of Mendocino County's LTF as seed money for Rural Transit Mobility. Five percent (5%) of LTF would represent \$250,000. It is highly likely that Mendocino County can secure and sustain \$200,000 in additional funding from the Caltrans-administered FTA 5310 program for transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities, a fund source for which it is anticipated there will continue to be no local match. In combination, this could provide an annual budget of up to \$450,000 for rural mobility.

**Up to \$250,000 LTF + \$200,000 5310 = \$450,000 annual base funding for rural mobility**

This base funding can then be utilized, under one of three scenarios, to implement rural mobility services to meet both general public needs and those of seniors and persons with disabilities. Following are three potential structures that address the challenges of leadership and ability to implement multiple services, to varying extents.

### Three Options for Structuring a Response to Rural Transit Needs in Mendocino County

#### 1. MCOG would establish a Rural CTSA outside of MTA.

An established community organization (such as the Family Resource Center Network) would be designated as a Rural CTSA for Mendocino County and allocated a small portion of the LTF for use in implementing rural mobility services. The Rural CTSA would offer leadership on the issue of rural mobility countywide and the LTF allocation would provide a sustainable funding base, which would be the focal point for pursuing additional funding, including FTA 5310.

The responsibilities of this CTSA would be to:

- Foster partnerships in rural communities, to engage local resources and organizations in support of mobility solutions.
- Pursue relevant funding opportunities (5310 and others), with the support of MCOG.
- Implement the variety of mobility solutions recommended by the MCOG study.
- Actively market and promote utilization of those services by local residents.

Over time, the CTSA would also be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the services, potentially to recommend new or different mobility options based on community feedback and ridership. As additional funding opportunities arise, such as CARB funding for zero emission transportation, they would be in a position to submit grants to expand on the base funding.

A rural CTSA focused entirely on the mobility needs of rural communities would be in a unique position to provide on-going leadership around this issue. As a non-profit, it would also benefit from a lower cost structure and fewer costly requirements, allowing the allocated funding to go further.

## **2. The CTSA within MTA would utilize the earmarked LTF funds to contract with individual community organizations to operate rural mobility services.**

MTA is currently designated as a CTSA and would use that designation to earmark a portion of its LTF funding for mobility services in rural communities outside the MTA served area.

These funds would then be awarded to one or more community organizations with the ability to implement specific rural mobility services, in the same way that MTA currently contracts with the senior centers to operate service for seniors and persons with disabilities.

- MTA's mobility manager would be responsible for leadership and oversight of the program.
- MTA, with the assistance of MCOG, would be responsible for pursuing additional funding sources (including FTA 5310 and potentially others such as CARB, etc.) to supplement the LTF allocation.
- Community organizations would be asked to propose multi-year budgets and scopes of work for the implementation of services similar to those proposed in the MCOG Rural Study.
- The contracted community organizations would be responsible for operating, marketing and reporting on services provided (including both vehicle-based services and others such as the mileage reimbursement programs and community ride boards) for defined time frames. At the end of the time frame, the contract would be reviewed for potential renewal.

This option would build on MTA's existing organizational infrastructure, but, through contracting to community organizations, would benefit from their lower cost structures.

## **3. MTA would directly operate rural mobility services.**

Under this structure, MTA would take full responsibility for mobility service to rural communities. It would earmark a portion of LTF and pursue 5310 funding for use in implementing rural mobility

solution. With this designated funding, MTA would reallocate its service offerings to provide lifeline service to the rural communities outside its current fixed route footprint,

To the extent that funding allows, MTA's would:

- Operate and market weekly service to connect communities like Covelo, Laytonville and Potter Valley with Ukiah.
- Secure 5310 funding for and implementing a countywide volunteer driver mileage reimbursement program for seniors and persons with disabilities.
- Implement other recommended mobility solutions, such as general public service in Brooktrails and a rideshare incentive program for Mendocino College students.
- Pursue additional funding sources that become available to expand rural mobility options.

While this option would take advantage of MTA's existing infrastructure, it would also be limited by its higher cost of service delivery, in comparison to community non-profit organizations. The available resources would likely result in fewer rural services.

**Under all three scenarios:**

- MTA would consider, through its SRTP process, offering expanded public transit service to Hopland and Brooktrails.
- MCOG would support either MTA or the Rural CTSA in preparation of grant applications to such fund sources as Caltrans-administered FTA Section 5310 funds for seniors and persons with disabilities; California Air Resource Board-administered Clean Mobility Options grants to support rural transportation electrification projects; and other state or federal discretionary grant programs aligned with meeting rural mobility needs.
- MCOG would receive regular reporting on each of the rural mobility projects implemented. Such reporting, no less frequently than quarterly, would enable MCOG staff to report to the MCOG board on an annual basis, comparing program-specific operating goals with operating experience, reporting on the funding mix secured, and offering general observations as to how these modest, lifeline level mobility projects are being utilized and meeting needs.