

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction to the Marin County Transit District SRTP

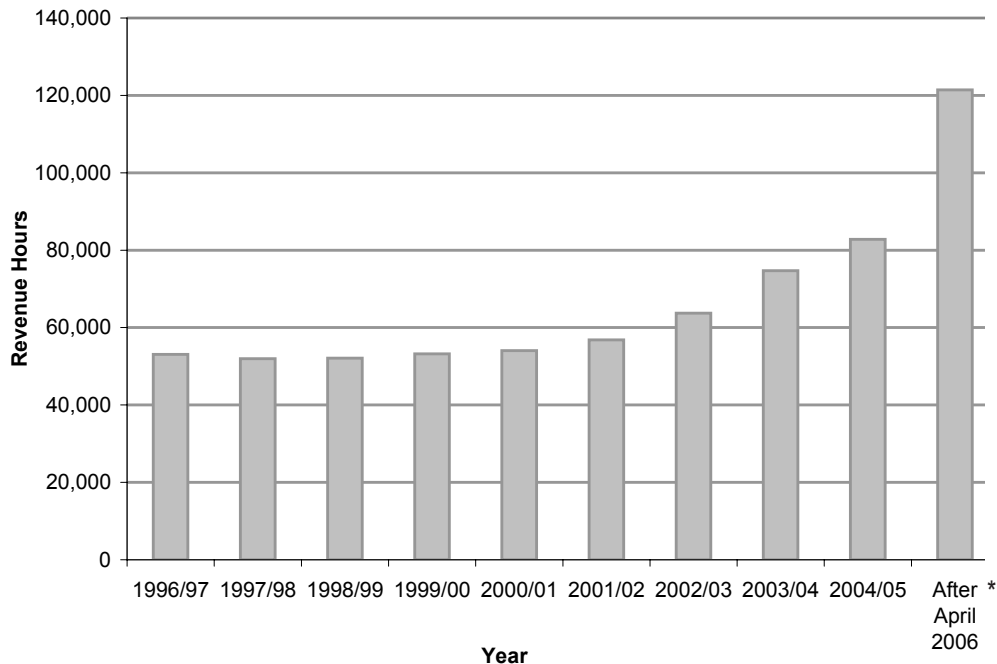
In 1964 the people of Marin County voted to create the Marin County Transit District (MCTD), an independent government entity with the responsibility of providing local transit service within Marin County. The District recently added its second full time employee, and reports to the County's Director of Public Works and a seven-member Transit District policy board. The Transit District Board includes the five members of the Board of Supervisors and representatives from two Marin County cities, currently from San Rafael and Mill Valley.

From its founding until 2003, MCTD's services remained relatively constant while demand for local transit service and paratransit services within Marin County steadily grew. During this time, MCTD's primary fixed route transit function was to act as a "pass through" agency, providing state and federal funding for local transit service (i.e., service within Marin County) to Golden Gate Transit, the regional transit provider, which also planned, managed, and operated local service. MCTD managed and administered the paratransit contract with Whistlestop Wheels for both local and regional paratransit services in Marin County and more recently managed rural services on the West Marin Stagecoach. All of the services that MCTD provided were contracted to other providers; MCTD has never owned any fixed route buses or facilities and has never employed its own drivers.

In November 2003, Golden Gate Transit implemented a major restructuring of its routes, resulting in a dramatic change in the role and responsibilities of MCTD. The restructuring was prompted by a severe financial shortfall at the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transit District, which operates Golden Gate Transit, requiring major reductions in regional transit service. To save money and better match transit service to increasingly local service demands, Golden Gate Transit and MCTD agreed to truncate routes that had previously crossed the county lines and to create new local routes which would operate entirely within Marin County. Many regional routes were thus re-defined as local routes, ultimately transferring responsibility for these routes from Golden Gate Transit to MCTD.

This transition will be complete on May 1, 2006 when four final routes are transferred from Golden Gate Transit to MCTD. After this final transition, the number of annual service hours that MCTD pays for will increase 49% from approximately 82,000 in FY 2004-05 to over 122,000, resulting in a similar increase in operating costs. Including the 2003 restructuring, local service hours have more than doubled, from about 58,000 in 2002 to the 122,000 projected in FY 2005-06, despite an overall reduction in the combination of local and regional service available to Marin County's transit riders. In 2005, local routes will account for well over three million annual passengers, making MCTD one of the largest local transit operations in the state that does not directly serve a major urban center.

**Figure ES-1 Local Fixed Route Transit Service Hours Provided by MCTD with Golden Gate Transit as Contractor**



\* Hours required to maintain current services

This redefinition of some regional routes as local routes significantly increased MCTD’s operating costs without proportionately increasing its revenues. Operating costs have also been affected by increases in the cost per service hour charged by Golden Gate Transit; since 2003, the cost per service hour has increased from \$38.69 prior to the 2003 agreement to \$116 per hour in the current fiscal year. A new agreement which will begin on May 1, 2006 will reduce the average cost per hour to approximately \$110, reflecting Marin County’s desire to introduce small bus service on some local routes. These increases in costs reflect that fact that local transit needs in Marin County can no longer be met simply by utilizing the “down hours” on routes that are providing peak service on the regional system. Demand for local transit in Marin County is consistent all day; nearly all of the buses operating local routes in Marin County

are used only for local service, and nearly all of the drivers operating Marin local routes never operate regional service. The current agreement between Golden Gate and MCTD reflects the increasing cost of providing a local service that is closely linked to, but largely independent of, the regional system.

The transition of routes to MCTD has been accompanied by additional responsibilities for the agency. MCTD is now responsible for the planning, outreach, oversight, and management of virtually all of the transit services that begin and end within the County.

Beginning May 1, 2006, MCTD will begin a newly negotiated contract with Golden Gate Transit to allow Golden Gate to continue as its fixed route service provider, continuing the close relationship between the two organizations, and taking advantage of the existing integration

of MCTD's local transit service requirements into the needs of the broader regional operation. Rural and paratransit service are currently provided by Whistlestop Wheels under separate contracts that will be rebid during the current fiscal year.

## Context for the Short Range Transit Plan

The transition of responsibilities to MCTD has several important implications. First, MCTD has been transformed almost overnight from a largely administrative agency to a full-fledged transit agency. While few riders have noticed this transition, the responsibilities that MCTD inherits give it more autonomy to respond to the desires of local transit users in Marin County, as well as more challenges for funding and integrating local transit service with regional services provided by Golden Gate Transit.

The second implication of MCTD's new status is that the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and the Measure A Sales Tax Expenditure Plan passed in 2004 require MCTD to publish a Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) at least every two years. In their SRTP, transit agencies publicly describe their organization, operations, finances, and plans for the future. This document is MCTD's first SRTP, and is thus an opportunity to define its goals, standards, structures, and policies in a way that will allow the agency to effectively prioritize its efforts as it evolves and develops as an agency. The goals of this SRTP include:

- Develop a detailed understanding of the existing local service network including all types of local service – who uses it, how well it functions, and how it could be improved for current riders.

- Refine standards for productivity and mobility that ensure that sales tax funds and other funding resources will be spent in the most efficient and cost effective manner, consistent with the Measure A Sales Tax Expenditure Plan and other funding requirements.
- Use current and projected travel demand, land use, and demographics in the County to identify service gaps, appropriate service models, and appropriate service levels in a constrained financial environment.
- Develop supporting capital, marketing, and administrative plans that will provide the best possible public transit service in Marin County in light of constrained resources.
- Involve the public in deciding the transit future for Marin County.
- Develop policies that can be used to evaluate services and make adjustments over time.

## Coordination with Measure A Priorities

Measure A, the half-cent transportation sales tax in Marin County, provides a significant new funding source for local transit in Marin County, which is required to sustain current and future local services. Sales tax expenditure priorities and performance criteria for local transit are clearly documented in the Sales Tax Expenditure Plan approved by the voters in 2004. This Short Range Transit plan will be a direct input into the Strategic Plan of the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), which is the agency responsible for sales tax expenditures.

Specifically, the Short Range Plan and the Sales Tax Expenditure Plan are linked in a number of critical ways:

- The performance goals and objectives developed for local transit services are based largely on the criteria included in the Expenditure Plan, and include all of the criteria mentioned in that plan.
- Funding estimates for Measure A funds are divided into the four categories available through the Expenditure Plan – local fixed route services, paratransit, rural service and capital funds and fund estimates are designed to match the estimates developed for TAM.
- Priority projects for improvements in local transit services were considered and included to the extent possible in the transit service plan.

The recommendations in this SRTP are founded upon extensive data collection and community participation, including: existing operation data from MCTD and Golden Gate Transit, original transit performance and usage data collected on all routes in April 2005, and passenger surveys (2,000+ responses for fixed routes services, 500+ for paratransit users). Numerous community meetings as well as collaboration and review by a Technical Advisory Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee provided on-going feedback as the plan progressed.

## Services provided by MCTD

As of May 2006, Marin County Transit District will be financially responsible for providing all local transit services within Marin County. These include:

- Fixed route transit – all routes that begin and end in Marin County
- School-oriented special bus trips designed to serve schools at bell times (Routes 107—143) – 272,000 trips per year

- Rural small-bus transit service – the West Marin Stagecoach operated to West Marin by Whistlestop Wheels. (West Marin Stagecoach) – 28,000 trips per year
- Demand responsive service for seniors and persons with disabilities
  - o Paratransit – Whistlestop Wheels – 83,000 trips per year
  - o EZ Rider, a demand responsive shuttle service operating in Novato – 3,000 trips per year

What do these numbers mean in day-to-day life in Marin County? For employed adults, 10% of trips to work are made on public transit<sup>1</sup>. As most trips to work are made during peak period commute times, this has a significant effect on area congestion. Moreover, MCTD passenger surveys suggest that transit services prevent about 1,000,000 car trips per year, or about 3,000 per day, further reducing congestion on Marin County roads.

The services provided by MCTD help to make Marin County a healthier, more livable, and more equitable place. Besides reducing congestion, MCTD's services provide basic mobility to the most mobility-limited residents in Marin County – low income, senior, and youth – and basic access to the area's social services, schools, and economic opportunities.

---

<sup>1</sup> Year 2000 Census data, includes both local and regional transit service

## Who uses MCTD services

MCTD users can be divided into two large groups, those that use fixed route services and those that use demand responsive (paratransit) services. To summarize the characteristics of the fixed route users:

- The most common customers of the fixed route system are working age adults using the system to travel to and from work. This is not surprising as trips that occur frequently and at regular times are more likely to be made on transit than trips that occur infrequently and require the rider to learn a new route or schedule.
- In addition to adult commuters, there is a high percentage of youth riders, with 18% of the system's riders reporting being 17 years old or younger.
- Seniors over age 65 are underrepresented on MCTD fixed route service. They comprise 4% of riders, but make up almost 15% of the current population in the County. Long waits between buses, difficulty walking to stops and limited amenities at stops may contribute to the lack of senior ridership, as well as the fact that seniors are not generally making as many routine and regular trips as working age adults or school aged youth.
- MCTD riders also tend to have relatively low household incomes and limited access to autos. Over half of MCTD's riders have household incomes of less than \$25,000 per year. 76% of respondents did not have access to an auto on the day they were surveyed.
- Almost 40% of respondents used the Spanish version of the on-board survey, a much more significant percentage than the population of the County would suggest.
- The most heavily traveled routes outside the Highway 101 corridor service all serve the Canal area of San Rafael, which is the most productive service in the County.

**Figure ES-2 Demographic Overview of Transit Riders in Marin County**

	Local Transit Rider %	Paratransit Riders %	Marin County %
<b>Age (2000 census)</b>			
Persons under 18 years old	18%	4%	26%
Persons between 18 and 65 years old	78%	23%	61%
Persons 65 years old and older	4%	77%	14%
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	48%	77%	50%
Male	52%	23%	50%
<b>Income</b>			
Under \$10,000	included below	28%	5%
\$10,000 to \$24,999	51%	38%	10%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	16%	12%	7%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	12%	12%	12%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	10%	7%	18%
\$75,000 or more	10%	3%	48%
<b>Auto Ownership</b>			
None	44%	no data	5%
One	27%	no data	35%
Two	19%	no data	42%
Three or more	10%	no data	18%
<b>Language</b>			
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000	39%	no data	20%

Sources: US Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts  
2005 Passenger Survey, Nelson Nygaard

Paratransit service is intended to serve persons with disabilities that make it impossible for them to use accessible fixed route transit. While these disabled riders tend to be older adults, MCTD's paratransit riders are generally older than comparable paratransit systems. Two-thirds of all paratransit riders reported being over age 75 and one-third reported being over age 85. The population needing paratransit services is expected to grow significantly over time, increasing from about 4,000 in 2005 to over 6,000 in 2020, with implications for the growth of cost of providing paratransit services. This is an issue that MCTD will have to address in the years to come.

A high percentage of paratransit riders have very low incomes. Two-thirds of riders (66%) live in households with an annual income of less than \$25,000 and 28% live in households with an annual income of less than \$10,000. Though paratransit trips can be made for any trip purpose, 85% of respondents indicated that they use this service only for medical trips.

While paratransit service is intended to serve all residents in Marin County, service quality varies greatly in different parts of the County. Trips within the service area "mandated" by the Americans With Disabilities Act – generally within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of an operating fixed route service – receive priority, while areas outside of the mandated area receive service as space allows. This results in many denials of service requests from outside the mandated area, making it difficult to rely on this service for medical trips and appointments.

## Performance of MCTD

This SRTP emphasizes measurements of MCTD's performance for the services it provides. These performance measurements are consistent with the Sales Tax Expenditure Plan that specifies performance goals to be used to measure the success of the local transit system, and reflect the state of the practice with peer systems. Incorporating these values and goals into a comprehensive system of performance measures is critical to enable MCTD to make principled decisions about how to allocate limited services and resources.

Performance standards are not "guarantees" of achievement but are designed as a tool for MCTD and the public to judge the effectiveness of its services. The most commonly used and straightforward measure of operational performance is productivity – the number of passengers carried per revenue service hour. This measure is broadly used throughout the industry to evaluate the efficiency of transit systems and is included in the Expenditure Plan as a primary measure of transit performance. Another important measure of both productivity and cost effectiveness is subsidy per passenger trip. Routes with high ridership will tend to have lower per passenger subsidies.

Figure ES-3 presents these standards for each type of service MCTD provides. More detailed information about system performance is included in Chapter 2 of this plan.

**Figure ES-3 Route Productivity and Subsidy Goals**

Service Type	Passengers per Hour*	Subsidy per Passenger Trip
System-wide Urban Fixed Route	20	\$5
Rural Fixed Route	4	\$12
School	20*	\$4
Local Initiative	7	\$8
Paratransit	2	\$30

Note: The productivity measure for school routes uses passengers per trip instead of passengers per hour, due to the limited service hours of this service type.

These goals, based on the type of service offered, recognize the different performance expectations of different types of service and are consistent with industry peers. Services that meet these standards can be justified based on their return on investment alone. Services that fail to meet these standards must be analyzed based on the other performance criteria, such as a route’s importance in completing a transit network, its usefulness to a particularly transit-dependent community, or the geographic coverage it provides. These additional criteria are useful for analyzing alternative investments and comparing a potential service to existing services that are not fully meeting the goal for productivity and cost effectiveness. No transit system can afford to run routes that fail to meet minimum performance standards, because running unproductive service inevitably means that areas with high potential for transit ridership are unserved or underserved.

In addition to these efficiency measures, this SRTP suggests a range of other measures of performance that are consistent with Measure A and designed for MCTD to evaluate success

in meeting the transit needs of its customers. These include goals for serving highly transit dependent riders, and encouraging senior and youth riders onto the system.

### What this SRTP proposes

The service changes that this SRTP proposes have been informed by the values and performance standards reviewed by the MCTD Board of Directors and expressed in the Measure A expenditure plan. These are outlined in detail in this document.

Responses to the customer survey and comments received in public meetings were also carefully considered. When asked what improvements would better serve their needs, by far the most common response was for increased frequency rather than new service coverage or earlier or later service. Increasing weekend service and reducing fares were also commonly mentioned by riders as important improvements. In addition, the high priority transit improvements listed in Measure A were considered as the transit system plan was developed.

The proposed service plan also respects the basic design principle for the County: the local and regional systems are not independent of one another, and the Highway 101 corridor (Lines 70 and 80) is the main trunk line that unites these systems. Most of MCTD’s fixed route system is designed around connections with this trunk line. Where local lines connect with the trunk, the connection is usually timed, so that passengers do not have to wait long for a connecting bus. San Rafael Transit Center has the most extensive timed connections in

the county, but there are also important timed connections at Marin City, Novato, and San Anselmo. The schedules of MCTD local routes are largely determined by these connections. Frequently, local services assist people in completing regional trips. Many people also use regional services to travel locally within Marin County. The system design encourages this interdependence, emphasizing coordination over duplication to maximize mobility for both local and regional markets.

The following system-wide objectives for redesigning the fixed route service plan were developed using these considerations, as well as information gathered from peer systems, policy makers, and the technical and citizens advisory committees.

- Increase frequency on key corridors throughout the system to maximize ridership.
- Enhance connectivity so that consumers can ride from any place to any other place in Marin County with no more than two transfers, and the majority of transfers can be timed.
- Allow for appropriately sized vehicles throughout the County, introducing smaller vehicles on routes where the maximum load will not exceed the seated capacity of a smaller bus.
- Better reflect travel model results for travel demand.
- Enhance school service, expanding service to schools that are not appropriately served, and providing better bell time coordination.
- Provide a system that is a better match to the performance standards for both productivity and coverage.

To achieve these goals, this SRTP proposes two

overarching changes to the way local transit service is currently provided. First, the service plan proposes the use of smaller vehicles on some routes that better match vehicle size to demand. The second change is the addition of local initiative partnership service. These are services that are jointly funded by MCTD and another local partner, such as a municipality or another interested agency, to provide desired transit service that could not meet MCTD's minimum standard for productivity. This will give MCTD the flexibility it needs to work with local communities to meet locally-identified transit needs – usually coverage in low-density areas where there is a small but acute transit need – in areas where MCTD cannot justify fixed route service.

The following summarizes the impacts of the service plan on local communities based on the transportation needs in each area. Where the proposed service improvement reflects a priority project from Measure A, it is noted below. Of particular note is that when the plan is fully implemented over 1/3 of the proposed service hours will be operated with small buses. The amount of service provided with small bus vehicles will increase over time as buses are acquired.

## Northern Marin

- **Enhance local circulation – recognizing that over half of the trips generated in Novato stay in Novato – emphasizes small buses in neighborhoods.**
- Eliminate the long and circuitous trips on the 57 and 59 routes in favor of enhanced connectivity.

- Create a consistent half-hour service on South Novato Boulevard.
- Provide service to Hamilton.
- New school service to Novato High, Marin Oaks and Hill Middle School.
- Plan for the ultimate implementation of a new transit hub in Southern Novato.

## San Rafael Area

- Expand hours of 15 minute service to Canal.
- Add direct service from Canal to Marin General and College of Marin.
- Add direct service from SRTC to Mill Valley with convenient connections to the Canal route.
- Single seat ride from Canal to Civic Center, Northgate, and northern San Rafael destinations.
- Fast direct service from Civic Center, Northgate and Kaiser to SRTC.
- Maximize existing County Connection shuttle and create the first local initiative partnership route.
- Maintain peak hour service to neighborhoods that have lost their service due to recent GGT cuts.
- Improve school service to Terra Linda High and schools in Terra Linda neighborhood.

## Ross Valley Area

- Direct service from Fairfax to SRTC eliminates the need to transfer in San Anselmo.
- Enhanced frequency on Sir Francis Drake corridor.
- Eliminates low performing Route 21, but retains coverage through new routing.
- Improved school service to Lagunitas and San Geronimo schools from San Anselmo.

## Southern Marin Area

- Enhance peak period frequency between Sausalito, Marin City, Corte Madera, Larkspur, Kentfield, San Anselmo and San Rafael.
- Direct Mill Valley/San Rafael Service.
- Midday shuttle service through Larkspur and Corte Madera that is a good candidate for local initiative expansion.
- Direct service from Southern Marin to Ross Valley serving College of Marin and connecting Sausalito, Marin City, Corte Madera, Kentfield and San Anselmo.
- Improve service to Reed Schools from Mill Valley and Tiburon.
- Improve service to Tam High, Horizon Middle School and Mill Valley Middle School.
- Reduce dependence on Strawberry as a transfer point.
- Improve Marin City transit hub.

## West Marin Area

- Better coordination between the Stage and High Schools.
- Eliminate pass ups through larger vehicles.
- Extend the North Route to SRTC.
- Add weekend service where possible.
- Introduce pilot coastal service.

■ = Measure A Priority Project

## **MCTD Capital and Financial Plans**

The plan estimates a ridership increase of 25% over the next five years assuming the system is able to meet its full potential. Meeting its potential requires a capital plan that provides for new vehicle types, enhanced bus stops, and improved transfer centers, as well as a financial plan that brings stability to the system. Capital projects will be paid for by a variety of sources, including a number of discretionary sources which will dictate the speed at which capital projects can be implemented. MCTD's new contract with Golden Gate Transit calls for MCTD to provide matching funds for the purchase of buses dedicated to local service, and a proportional match for buses it shares with the regional system. MCTD will also be responsible for contributing a share of capital funds for maintenance facilities and other systemwide transit capital needs in proportion to the amount it uses. The ability to go beyond these commitments is dependent on discretionary funds. Other priority capital projects include a new transit hub in Novato, improved bus stop amenities, and enhanced rider information as well as expanding the paratransit vehicle fleet.

The service plan presented in this plan is designed to maximize ridership while retaining coverage to as much of the County as possible. It does not allow for significant growth in the number of service hours provided, but does reallocate existing resources in a more efficient and effective way, and also allows for small increases in service over time. Available resources allow for a plan that proposes a slight increase in total service hours, including 5% a year growth

in paratransit, limited local initiative partnership service, and a small increase in fixed route service based largely on reallocating hours from poorly performing routes to routes with more potential. Ultimately, more than one-third of fixed route service hours will be provided by smaller buses, which will be implemented over time as small buses become available.

The plan is designed to meet the requirements for sustainability over the SRTP period. Existing revenue sources are sufficient to produce a balanced operating budget through the contract period with Golden Gate Transit. Beginning in 2010/11, additional revenue will be required to maintain proposed service levels. At this point, additional revenues will be needed, service levels will be reduced, or lower cost service must be identified. The financial plan for MCTD operations as well as potential sources for expanded funding in the future are presented in Chapter 7. The implementation plan for the new service is described in Chapter 8.

The new service plan will be complemented by a marketing plan, as outlined in Chapter 5. This plan will help to establish an MCTD identity and brand to distinguish it from Golden Gate Transit and help riders understand the difference between the regional and local transit systems. The marketing plan also includes education and outreach efforts for targeted groups – youth, seniors, employers, existing riders, and visitors – to increase ridership. The proposed marketing plan is not lavish, but will allow the MCTD to provide basic outreach materials and customer-experience related improvements.

# The future of public transportation in Marin County

With MCTD’s new responsibilities, its first SRTP is an opportunity to take a purposeful step in the right direction – creating a service plan and supporting capital improvement, marketing, and financial plans that will allow it to provide stable and sustainable local transit service in a way that maximizes its productivity and social benefits. This SRTP articulates the tools and policies that MCTD can use to make decisions in the future as service demand evolves.

Following MCTD Board adoption of this plan, the real work of scheduling and finalizing services for implementation can begin. Much of the service plan can be implemented in Fall 2006. Prior to implementing service changes, the Short Range Transit Plan will be reviewed and improved by TAM as part of the Strategic Plan Process.

As required by Measure A, the plan will be updated every two years.

