Reimagine METRO
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission’s
Interagency Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC)

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Speaker:
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What is Reimagine METRO?

• Santa Cruz METRO is re-envisioning where buses should go, and how often they should run.

• Key goals include:
  
  • Increase the amount of service provided.
  • Make transit more reliable, and relevant to the community’s needs.
  • Adapt to post-COVID travel patterns.
  • Create a network that is useful and attractive for many people’s trips.
How do we get there?

We are planning changes to the network that would come into service in:

• **Phase 1 - December 2023**, with the operating resources that will be available by the end of this year.

• **Phase 2 – over the course of 2024**, based on additional funding and operators.

• **Phase 3 – long-range improvements**, once Phase 2 is complete and further resources become available.
What we’ve done so far

- **Analyzed the data** on the market and needs for transit, and the performance of the existing network.

- **Outreach** to stakeholders, riders and the general public about their perceptions of the system.

- **Network design workshop** with project partners.
What we’ve heard

• **It takes too long to get places**, due to long waits, slow rides, and occasional missed trips.

• **There isn’t enough service.** METRO provides 13% less service than in 2019, and 30% less service than it did twenty years ago.

• A broad range of concerns about communications, fare structure, reliability, weekends and evenings, bike-bus connections, overcrowding at UCSC and other topics.
Alternatives Presented for December 2023
Both alternatives included:

- **More service.** ~10% increase overall.
- **Higher frequency** in areas with higher demand.
- **Simpler and more direct routes**, especially in Watsonville.
- **Better transfers.** Shorter waits, no second fare.
- **Some different route numbers** and names.
- **In some areas, change which streets** have bus service.
Public Input
Outreach Efforts

• **Online Public Meeting** – 90+ attendees

• **Stakeholder Conversations** – 20 organizations

• **Rider Focus Groups** – 30 riders from throughout the service area

• **In-Person Outreach** – 3 events in Watsonville, 1 in Live Oak

• **Online Survey** – 789 responses online, plus 15 in-person responses

• **Project Website** – 1,500+ unique visitors from July 1 to Aug 15.
Existing METRO Service
Alternative A – Lean toward Frequency
Alternative B – Lean toward Coverage
High Level Takeaways

• Positive Responses to Increased Frequency

• Positive Responses to Simplified Service, esp. in Watsonville

• Desire for return of Route 91X

• Some uncertainty about what’s being proposed, and questions about how major service changes will be communicated
Survey Results reflect a diversity of county residents and METRO riders

- 804 responses

- Among those who reported demographic information:
  - 52% regular METRO riders
  - 45% people of color (30% Latino)
  - 40% from households earning less than $50k/year
  - 40% don’t have a car
  - 28% UCSC or Cabrillo College students
  - 15% have a disability that limits mobility
Most respondents agree service needs to change

“Do you agree that METRO service (where and how often the bus should come) needs to change?”

- Yes: 78%
- No: 7%
- Not Sure: 15%

n = 790 responses
...most respondents agree the proposed changes for December go in the right direction.

“Generally speaking, do these changes sound like a good idea?”

• Yes: 84% (definitely: 44%, probably 41%)

• No: 5% (definitely: 2%, probably 3%)

• Not Sure: 11%

n = 767 responses
For future improvements, **high frequency** is the public’s highest priority.

Among the following improvements, which three are most important to you?

- **High-frequency service wherever possible**
  - (every 15 mins or better on weekdays)
  - 56%

- **All-day express service on Highway 1 between Watsonville and Santa Cruz**
  - 34%

- **Weekend service levels matching weekday service levels**
  - 33%

- **More frequent service on Hwy 17 to San Jose**
  - 29%

- **More service in the evening**
  - 29%

- **Direct service between UCSC and the east side of Santa Cruz and Live Oak**
  - 23%

- **Something else**
  - 29%

n = 622 responses
Recommendations for December and beyond
December – Updated Parameters

• Return to a full roster of drivers.

• New climate and ridership recovery funds from FY 23-24 state budget.

• This allows for 21% more service, compared to Spring 2023 (vs. 10% more in the alternatives).

• This makes it possible to incorporate the most popular elements of both alternatives.
Recommendation: Phase 1
Elements of both Alternative A and B:

- Routes 18 and 19, both operating every 15 minutes or better
- Service every 30 minutes on High Street, connecting UCSC and parts of the East Side.
- Route 3 splits into Route 3A (Twin Lakes) and Route 3B (Brommer/17th)
- Route 91 peak express service from Watsonville to Santa Cruz
Similar to Alternative A in this area, plus:

- Route 3 on both 38th and 41st Ave
- Better evening service on Routes 1, 2 and 3.
Watsonville and South County

- Route 91 peak express to Santa Cruz
- Better evening service on Routes 1 and 2
- Routes 73 and 78 adjusted to maintain coverage on similar streets
How would access improve?

**Downtown Watsonville**

**Blue Areas =**
newly accessible within 45 minutes

**Pink Areas =**
no longer accessible within 45 minutes

Travel times include walking, waiting, riding and transfers.
Overall Access Change – Phase 1

69% of residents would experience an increase in access of at least +1,000 jobs within 45 minutes.

49% of residents would experience an increase of at least +5,000 jobs.

2% of residents would experience a decrease.
Other Improvements in Phase 1

• Routes 1, 2 and 3 would each operate:
  • Every 30 minutes until 9 PM
  • Every 60 minutes until midnight.

• In other words, until 9 PM, in both directions:
  • A bus every 15 minutes between Santa Cruz and Watsonville.
  • A bus every 10-20 minutes at Cabrillo College
  • A bus every 30 minutes or better on all of Soquel Drive
Next Steps

If the Board approves this recommendation, staff and the project team will:

- Develop schedules and prepare for the Phase 1 major service change in December
- Proceed with development for a Draft Future Network Plan for Phases 2 and 3.
Phase 2:
High-Frequency Cross-County Service
Existing METRO Service
Recommendation: Phase 1
Phase 2:
High-Frequency Cross-County Service

Santa Cruz METRO
High Frequency Network

The bus comes about every:
- 15 minutes
- 30 minutes
- 60 minutes
- 90 minutes
- Limited trips (peak-only, weekend, or special service)

Route terminus
Transit center

DRAFT
Phase 2 Benefits

- Estimated **1.75 million new transit trips per year**, with over 100,000 residents within a 5-minute walk of 15-minute or better service.

- **Reduction in VMT and GHG emissions** through creation of high-quality transit that is fast, frequent and reliable.

- **Improved reliability and on-time performance** with transit signal priority and other rapid bus design elements.

- **Greater development potential of affordable housing** along high-frequency network.

- **Supports equity** – METRO riders are primarily low-income (65%), lack access to a personal vehicle (35%), and/or are students (52%).
Phase 2 Costs, Funding & Other Considerations

• Phase 2 would require 50 additional bus operators and 16 zero-emission buses

• Funding identified and plan to be workshopped in October with METRO Board. Will include consideration of:
  • Newly flexible Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) funding
  • Increases in Contracts for Transit Services

• Free fares systemwide (pilot)

• Rapid Bus Enhancements ($26 million, $7.5 funded through TIRCP):
  • Transit Signal Priority (TSP) on all major corridors
  • Queue Jump/Transit Only Lanes where appropriate
  • Upgraded bus stops, including new shelters, lighting and real-time information
Phase 3: Long-range Plan

Service every 15 minutes or better between all major destinations.
Routes 1 and 2 every 15 minutes from Watsonville to UCSC.
Route 3 every 15 minutes from Capitola Mall to UCSC.

This map shows a future network concept. Exact route patterns have not been finalized.
Phase 3: Long-range Plan

- Further increases in service on Route 91.
- Increased service on Highway 17.
- Weekend service matching weekday levels.
- Increases in evening service.
- When speed and reliability improvements allow, relinking Routes 1 and 2 between Watsonville and Santa Cruz.
- Additional service to Scotts Valley/more direct service to SLV.
- All-day service on the 40 and 41 in addition to peak school trips, no more 42.
- Potentially, some METRO contribution to increased service from Watsonville to Salinas.
Discussion

• Questions, Comments, Concerns?

• Direction to Project Team
Thank you!

**Project Website**  
http://www.scmtd.com/ReimagineMETRO