



Public Transit in the Region

Information

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Attachments: No

Referring Committee: Not Applicable

Issue:

SACOG staff will present an overview of the role that the agency has in planning, funding, and coordinating public transportation in the six-county Sacramento region. In the presentation, staff will also provide a look ahead for upcoming key issues related to public transportation in the upcoming year.

Request:

Review & Discuss at Meeting

Recommendation for Board:

None; this is for information only.

Recommendation for Committee:

Not applicable

Background:

As the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the six-county Sacramento region, and the state-designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency for the four-county subregion (Sacramento, Yolo, Yuba and Sutter counties), SACOG plays an important role in planning, funding and coordinating public transportation services in the region. SACOG does not operate any public transportation services directly, but plans for, coordinates and convenes transit operators including Sacramento Regional Transit (SacRT), the Yolo County Transportation District, Yuba-Sutter Transit, Unitrans and Davis Community Transit in Davis, South County Transit Link in Sacramento County, El Dorado County Transit, Placer County Transit, Roseville Transit, Auburn Transit, and Paratransit Inc. Additionally, SACOG coordinates with intercity rail operators including Capitol Corridor, San Joaquins, and Valley Rail.

It's important that the board understand SACOG's role in public transportation, particularly given some key actions that need to be taken this upcoming year including award of SB 125 funds for public transportation in the four-county RTPA region and the updating of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that governs distribution of federal transit funding across multiple public transportation operators in the region.

Discussion/Analysis:

The following is a brief overview of the responsibilities that SACOG has under federal and state law to plan, fund and help coordinate public transportation services.

Planning

As a federal and state designated transportation planning agency, SACOG is required to plan for the future of public transportation across the six-county region as part of the long-range transportation plan (the 2025 Blueprint). Returning board members will be familiar with the Blueprint development process, but at a high level, the federal government requires an MPO for each urbanized area of the country. SACOG has fulfilled this role for the greater Sacramento region for more than 40 years. The planning process is defined by law to be a “continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive performance-based multimodal transportation planning process.”

While light rail and bus service in Sacramento County may come to mind first when thinking about transit, as noted above, there are many local providers of both fixed route and on-demand transit services throughout the six-county region, as well as existing and planned intercity rail that is integral to our region meeting the transportation needs of the future.

As a tool to fulfill requirements and to implement our region’s 2025 Blueprint, SACOG leads substantial planning efforts. Most recently, SACOG concluded the NextGen Transit Study in 2021, and has completed multiple implementation efforts including the Regional Transit Network (2024) and Regional Mobility Hub Design Guidance (2024). Ongoing efforts include facilitation and oversight of the regional Coordinated Human Services/Public Transit Plan and its related processes, and the newly developed Emergency Preparedness Plan and establishment of the Emergency Preparedness Advisory Committee that includes public transit operators and emergency response providers, among other regional agencies. SACOG partnerships across the region have resulted in strong land use-transportation connections, including the development of a Transit-Oriented Development Action Plan with SacRT and local jurisdictions, and sponsorship of an Urban Land Institute National Advisory Services Panel to develop equitable transit-oriented development advice for SacRT’s Florin & Meadowview light rail station areas, among others.

Funding

In addition to planning, the state and federal government define specific responsibilities for SACOG related to funding. Some of these funds are administered on state-determined formulas, while the board has discretion on other federal and state funds on what capital and operational costs to fund.

For federal funding, SACOG has a responsibility to develop a four-year Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP), which lists all the significant regional transportation projects in the region in the near term, including programming (or assigning) federal funding to those projects. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) provides formula funding to both urban and rural public transit providers. Under a memorandum of understanding between transit operators and SACOG, the funds in the urbanized area are distributed based on a formula approved by the SACOG board based on the performance of each operator, and a portion is available for competition among all operators every few years.

For state funding, there are three ongoing programs and one one-time program. First, the State Transit Assistance program provides that transit operators have discretion on how to spend funds, but are encouraged to use them for one-time capital expenditures. Second, the Local Transportation Fund is distributed by SACOG within each county to public agencies for transit services, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and streets and roads funding. The Local Transportation Fund is one of the few sources of funding

that SACOG has for planning and administration of all the state mandated activities that SACOG performs, and so approximately four percent of the funds are used for those purposes. Third, the State of Good Repair Program provides formula funding via SACOG to transit operators for eligible transit maintenance, rehabilitation and capital projects. SACOG distributes these funds on a population formula. Finally, SB 125 is a one-time program established by the state legislature that SACOG can use to fund transit operations or capital improvements.

Transit operators can also compete for federal and state flexible funding for transportation that SACOG opens up to cities, counties, Caltrans, and other transportation agencies every few years.

Coordination

Federal law requires SACOG to coordinate transit activities among all providers of public transportation and to have a written agreement that clarifies roles and responsibilities. There is also ongoing coordination between SACOG and transit operators at the staff level, including through regular Transit Coordinating Committee meetings that SACOG organizes. Transit operators have also voluntarily come together and asked SACOG to lead various transit activities, including establishing the Connect Card transit fare that works across most operators, and cooperative purchasing of transit planning software.

Representation

FTA requires that transit be represented in the decision-making process on MPO boards. This can be fulfilled either through a board seat or through the designation of existing board members to fulfill this process. SACOG has followed the latter process since 2016, which in practice means that each year, SACOG reviews the composition of local transit agency boards and determines where there are SACOG board members who sit on a transit agency board as well. The SACOG board then adopts a resolution each year confirming the transit boards and the board members who serve in these dual roles are identified on SACOG's website. FTA has certified SACOG's compliance with this requirement every four years since 2015.

Oversight

In addition to the responsibilities listed above, SACOG has some oversight responsibilities over transit operators. State law requires annual financial audits of the funds awarded by SACOG and triennial performance audits of transit agencies in the four counties of Sacramento, Yolo, Sutter and Yuba. Federal law also requires SACOG to monitor the age of transit assets as part of performance-based planning and report to the federal government.

Looking Ahead

Staff will touch on these responsibilities in our presentation at the board meeting, along with providing a general background on the key role of public transportation in the region and the responsibilities that SACOG board members who also serve on local public transportation agency boards have. In addition, staff will provide an overview of some of the upcoming actions related to public transportation that the board will be involved in over the course of the upcoming year, including:

- Updating the MOU that governs distribution of federal transit funding in the Sacramento urbanized area;
- Awarding state transit funding under SB 125 to transit operators in the four county RTPA area (Sacramento, Yolo, Yuba and Sutter counties);
- Completing the development of the 2025 Blueprint plan for the six-county region and developing both policies and implementation strategies that can help increase ridership and

- effectiveness of transit service in order to meet regional and state goals;
- Advocating for transit-related grants at the federal level and state level that help implement the Blueprint and fund projects on the SACOG board-adopted regional project prioritization list; and
- Continuing work on the recently completed and adopted Regional Transit Network, including partnerships with local agencies and transit operators to advance identified key regional corridors for near-term speed and reliability improvements that prepare for future BRT and other high-capacity transit services.

Fiscal Impact/Grant Information:

SACOG's work is included in the Overall Work Program/Budget.

List of Attachments:

Not applicable