



Staff Report

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**File #:** 23-0639

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**REQUEST FOR CITY COUNCIL ACTION**

**DATE:** 08/16/2023

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

**FROM:** Community Services Department

**SUBJECT:**

CORONA TRANSIT COMPREHENSIVE OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS FINAL REPORT TO RESTRUCTURE FIXED ROUTE SERVICES AND BUS FARES

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This staff report asks the City Council to approve the 2023 Corona Transit Comprehensive Operational Analysis Final Report, including all recommended transit service and bus fare changes. The Comprehensive Operations Analysis is an in-depth report of the City's existing transit service to assess the current transit system and provide recommendations that enhance customer experience, improve services within the program's financial capacity, and outlines steps to implement service alternatives.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**That the City Council:**

- a. Approve the 2023 Corona Transit Comprehensive Operational Analysis Final Report, including the recommended changes under Scenario 2 to the fixed routes, microtransit services.
- b. Approve the recommended bus fare increase effective January 1, 2024.

**BACKGROUND & HISTORY:**

The City's transit program, known as the City of Corona Transit Service (CCTS), operates public transit services under the Dial-A-Ride and Corona Cruiser fixed-route programs. Dial-A-Ride services were launched in 1977, and the Corona Cruiser fixed route service was launched in 2001. The CCTS operates its transit services in partnership with MV Transportation, the City's current transit provider.

The Dial-A-Ride (DAR) program is comprised of specialized demand response and ADA complementary paratransit service. This service provides curb-to-curb transportation to qualified

individuals, seniors 60 and older, and persons with disabilities; while door-to-door service is available to those certified under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) program administered by the Riverside Transit Agency (RTA). The DAR service area includes the City of Corona, satellite locations in the City of Norco, and the unincorporated Riverside County areas of Coronita, El Cerrito, and Home Gardens.

The Corona Cruiser Fixed Route program is a network of two fixed routes known as the Corona Cruiser Red Line and the Blue Line. The Corona Cruiser provides access to local businesses, retail stores, parks, entertainment venues, municipal services, schools, work, and residential areas. Additionally, the Corona Cruiser provides connectivity with RTA's regional bus routes, RCTC's Corona Transit Center, and the North Main Corona Metrolink Train Station.

The Corona Cruiser Fixed Route program has been operating in its current network for over a decade. Several traffic and circulation changes have occurred at the local and regional levels, which warranted a comprehensive operational analysis of the City's transit services to address the riders' current needs.

On December 21, 2021, the City Council awarded Transportation Management & Design, Inc. (TMD) a contract to prepare a Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) of the City's local public transit services. A COA is conducted to identify strategies to improve ridership, customer experience, cost-effectiveness, service reliability, and quality.

The following is a summary of the COA Process and Timeline.

- Phase I (February - April 2022): Data collection to determine if service alternatives are warranted. Efforts included:
  - Ridership Count
  - On-Board Rider Survey
  - Origin and Destination Data Collection and Analysis
  - Communitywide Survey
  - Fixed Route Bus Stop Amenities
- Phase II (April - June 2022): Summary of findings and development of Existing Conditions Report and Market Assessment, which presents a profile of the community's demographic characteristics, riders' profiles, community trip/travel patterns, and shape of land use patterns and street networks to identify the community's unmet needs. Other key components analyzed included:
  - Key Performance Metric Analysis
  - Route Maps and System Map
  - Route Productivity Analysis
- Phase III (July - September 2022): Identify service alternatives based on the data collected and budget constraints to provide a multi-year service expansion and restructuring plan based on funding availability.

- Phase IV (October - January 2022): Prepare & conduct public outreach to obtain comments and suggestions on proposed service alternative scenarios.
- Phase V: Develop restructuring & implementation list of activities (Summer 2023)

**ANALYSIS:**

The 2023 Corona Transit Comprehensive Operational Analysis Final Report (“Final Report” - Attachment 1) discusses existing transit conditions and the process to identify service recommendations for future expansion and potential funding sources. This staff report will only focus on the Public Outreach/Involvement, Service Recommendations, and Fare Changes components of the Final Report.

Public Outreach/Involvement

Community input is a cornerstone of this COA effort. As such, staff developed a robust public outreach plan that occurred during Phase I and Phase V of this process. Below is a summary of outreach efforts deployed at each phase.

*Phase I: Data Collection.* Community engagement and outreach efforts included:

- On-board rider survey February 2022
  - TMD staff rode each fixed route and interviewed passengers.
  - Respondents were given a \$10 gift card.
  - Informational flyers and posters with QR codes displayed on all city buses for 30 days informing passengers of the survey.
  - Driver announcements for riders to participate in the survey.
- Community-wide survey March 2022
  - Information flyers and posters displayed on buses, city website, and social media blasts.
  - Incentivized survey by offering a day pass to the first 500 respondents, with five respondents selected for a \$50 gift card.
  - Direct email outreach to the City’s affordable housing partners.
  - Paper surveys to encourage participation from community members that either are unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or lack access to the internet.
  - Distributed paper surveys and posters with QR codes to the various apartment complexes throughout the City and all senior living facilities.
  - Staff participated in boots-on-the-ground efforts, including surveying at two senior food drives and door-knocking at Vintage Terrace, a senior apartment complex where service was previously discontinued.
  - Information shared with stakeholders such as RTA, RCTC, and the local school district.

*Phase V: Develop a Restructuring & Implementation List of Activities.* Draft service alternatives were presented at the City Council Study Session in November 2022. Following this meeting, public outreach was conducted to share draft service recommendations and receive feedback. Activities included:

- Information flyers and posters displayed on buses, city website, and social media.

- Direct email outreach to the City’s affordable housing partners.
- Tabling at the Corona Senior Center on December 1, 2022.
- Tabling at the Holiday Lighting Ceremony on December 4, 2022.
- A Virtual Town Hall meeting online using Zoom on December 8, 2022.

Service Recommendations

TMD identified service alternatives with constrained and unconstrained scenarios to improve service efficiency and effectiveness. When developing the service alternatives, staff identified the following four primary goals:

1. Coverage: Expand access to more destinations.
2. Reliability: Update schedules to improve reliability.
3. Productivity: Increase ridership through service enhancements
4. Cost: Provide sustainable services within projected budget enhancement.

Based on the above goals, the following guidelines were developed:

1. Maintain and improve coverage for the existing riders.
2. Improve service reliability and frequency on productive corridors through updated schedules and streamlined fixed routes.
3. Enhance direct service to and from key shopping areas without requiring transfers.
4. Eliminate unproductive route deviations and streamline route alignments.
5. Expand coverage to key locations and integrate public transit with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
6. Pilot a new microtransit service in areas currently not served by connecting into the fixed route network and key destinations.

The following scenarios were presented to City Council on November 16, 2022:

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
Services (mobility options)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One (1) Fixed Route with Dial-A-Ride</li><li>• Microtransit Citywide</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 Fixed Routes with Dial-A-Ride</li><li>• 2 Microtransit Zones with 10 Destinations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain Status Quo</li><li>• 2 Fixed Routes with Dial-A-Ride</li></ul>
Frequency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 30 minutes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 60 minutes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 55-70 minutes</li></ul>
Span	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monday-Friday: 6:30 AM - 7:00 PM</li><li>• Saturday: 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monday-Friday: 6:30 AM - 7:00 PM</li><li>• Saturday: 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monday-Friday: 6:30 AM - 7:09 PM</li><li>• Saturday: 8:52 AM - 5:09 PM</li></ul>

In the first two scenarios, service coverage is expanded to parts of the city currently unserved by deploying microtransit, an on-demand shared ride service comparable to the current dial-a-ride service. A microtransit zone(s) allows customers to travel within and between zones, to specific destinations outside of the zone, and to fixed routes. The third scenario would maintain status quo with existing transit services discussed above.

*Scenario 1*

Scenario 1 included one fixed route and a citywide microtransit zone. This one route is a combination of the high-demand segments of the current Blue and Red Lines but with a frequency of 30 minutes. While this option provides coverage, it is less cost-effective as it's expected to serve fewer riders in the same time period. Scenario 1 would not stay within the budget due to the implementation of a citywide microtransit to replace the loss of fixed route coverage.

*Scenario 2*

This scenario included 3 fixed routes, and 2 microtransit zones with 10 key destinations. This service recommendation can be implemented at 15% cost increase which is within the allowable budgetary constraints. This scenario maintains most existing coverage with simpler more direct routes. The primary goal of this service recommendation is to expand the number of riders who are able to take a direct, one-seat ride to key shopping and employment centers, which were shown to be the primary trip generators for travel patterns in Corona. In addition, this scenario was designed to target the high transit demand potential areas (see Map 3 in the report). The microtransit zones in this scenario further expand coverage where fixed route service will not directly operate, and the 10 microtransit destinations allow riders to connect to new areas between the fixed route and on-demand services.

*Recommended Option*

The survey results demonstrated 64% of respondents chose Scenario 2 as their first choice among the three options, which supports Council feedback from the November 2022 Study Session. The implementation of this service recommendation will require a major overhaul of the current services and is estimated to take several years to implement as it encompasses a variety of activities and capital improvements. A full list of Implementation Activities can be found in the Final Report.

Proposed Fare Changes

Currently, Corona transit fares are lower than the fares charged by RTA. As part of the analysis, it is recommended that the fares be aligned with RTA fares for a consistent customer experience and to generate additional revenue.

Fare Type	RTA	Corona (Existing)	Corona (Proposed)
<b>Fixed Route</b>			
General Public One-Ride	\$1.75	\$1.50	<b>\$1.75</b>
Youth/Student	\$1.75	\$1.50	<b>\$1.75</b>
Senior/Disabled/Medicare Card Holder	\$.75	\$.70	<b>\$.75</b>
Children (46" tall or under)	\$.50	\$.50	<b>\$.50</b>
<b>Dial-A-Ride</b>			
Senior/Disabled/ADA Certified	\$3.50	\$2.50	<b>\$3.50</b>
<b>Microtransit</b>	--	--	<b>\$1.75</b>

If approved, the proposed fares are to be effective January 1, 2024.

*Fare Subsidy*

Staff submitted an allocation request to the State LCTOP for an additional award of funds to be utilized for operating assistance in the form of fare subsidies as follows:

1. Reduced fare of \$1.00 for the general public on the Corona Cruiser
2. Free fares for students on the Corona Cruiser.
3. Free fares for seniors and persons with disabilities on the Corona Cruiser and Dial-A-Ride.

The above subsidy is currently pending approval by Caltrans. If approved, this program is set to start on October 1, 2023, and the funds are expected to last for a three-year period. However, should the City not receive approval for the above LCTOP fare subsidy program, AB2766 subvention funds will be utilized to subsidize the difference between the existing and proposed fares so that riders will continue to pay the current fares for the first two years from the effective date.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

The proposed service recommendation change is an increase of \$360,351 (or 15%) to the FY 22-23 fixed route operating budget. The cost of capital improvements resulting from this recommendation are not known and will be assessed as part of the project management phase. All costs associated with the recommended services changes will be budgeted in future Short Range Transit Plans and funded through other Federal and State grant opportunities that will be brought to Council for approval prior to implementation. The proposed fare changes will be subsidized under the fare subsidy program funded by Caltrans LCTOP and AB2766 funds.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

This action is exempt pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the Guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which states that a project is exempt from CEQA if the activity is covered by the general rule that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA. Since this action approves planning documents and a financial plan there is no possibility that adopting this action will have a significant effect on the environment, therefore, no environmental analysis is required.

**PREPARED BY:** SUDESH PAUL, TRANSIT PROGRAM MANAGER & CYNTHIA LARA, COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE MANAGER

**REVIEWED BY:** DONNA FINCH, INTERIM COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR

**Attachments:**

1. Exhibit 1 - 2023 Corona Transit Comprehensive Operational Analysis Final Report
2. Exhibit 2 - Presentation