Comprehensive Operational Analysis
Choices Report - Executive Summary

“Advocating and delivering quality public transportation as a leader within our community and industry.”

MAY 27, 2020

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MST provides local and regional public transit in Monterey County.

MST Services
Monterey-Salinas Transit District (MST) is the public transit agency for Monterey County. MST’s services include:

- **Fixed-route transit.** This includes all MST’s numbered bus lines (1 to 95), as well as the JAZZ A and B. MST divides its fixed route services into:
  - Local lines provide service in the greater Monterey and Salinas urban areas. They account for about 2/3 of MST’s fixed-route service and ridership.
  - Regional lines run longer-distance trips between Salinas, Monterey, cities in southern Monterey County, Watsonville and other destinations.

- **Demand-response services,** where people reserve a ride in advance. This includes:
  - Paratransit provided to passengers eligible under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
  - On-call service in Marina, Gonzales, Soledad, Greenfield and King City. This minibus service is available to the general public and allows for local rides within the on-call area and transfers to the nearest fixed route.

MST also operates a wide variety of specialized fixed and demand-responsive services, including the Monterey Trolley, Del Rey Oaks Shuttle, long-distance medical trips to the Bay Area, and a taxi voucher program for seniors and veterans.

Nonetheless, most people experience MST service as fixed-route buses. These account for about 75% of MST’s in-service hours and 95% of ridership.

MST’s regional role
MST’s county-wide scope and governance structure both tend to emphasize service to many communities over a large area.

This is reinforced by local geography: the Monterey Bay and Salinas Valley have historically developed as a string of small to mid-sized cities following Highway 1 and Highway 101. These communities have overlapping retail, social services and employment markets resulting in large amounts of intercity travel.

Furthermore, there has long been a gap in commercial long-distance bus service between Paso Robles and Salinas, reflecting the relatively “empty quarter” of California’s central coast.

As a result, MST has carved out a relatively unique role as a public agency that handles both local and long-distance services, with service extending as far as Paso Robles to the south and San Jose to the north.

As of early 2021, several of MST’s intercity lines have been suspended due to COVID-related service shifts. This includes long-distance services to San Jose and Santa Cruz, as well as secondary intercity lines like Marina-to-Watsonville.

MST Operations
As of 2019, approximately 60% of MST service is directly operated. The remaining 40%, including paratransit, on-call and most small-bus fixed routes were operated under contract by MV Transportation.
Most of MST’s network is in the Monterey and Salinas areas.

The MST fixed-route network in the greater Monterey and Salinas areas is represented in Figure 2. Together, these areas account for about:

- 5% of the county land area
- 65% of the county population

Because so much of Monterey County’s population is concentrated in this relatively small area, this is where buses have the most potential to connect many people to many destinations at relatively low cost to the public.

Accordingly this is where most of MST’s service is provided and where the most people ride. As of 2019, the greater Monterey and Salinas areas accounted for about:

- 85% of MST service
- 90% of MST ridership.

Figure 2: Map of MST’s fixed-route network in the greater Salinas and Monterey areas in early 2021, with lines color-coded by frequency.

1 Including Carmel, Del Monte Forest, Pacific Grove, Monterey, Seaside, Del Rey Oaks, Sand City, Marina, Salinas, Boronda and adjacent developed area.
Why does the MST network need a redesign?

This document is the first step in MST’s Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA).

The COA is an opportunity to review MST’s array of public transportation services, evaluate their performance, and help set a direction for the future.

Based on our initial assessment of the network, there are good reasons to envision a blank-slate redesign.

1. The last full system review was over two decades ago.

Many transit agencies review their entire network every five to ten years, to make sure service matches the community’s needs. The last time MST undertook such a comprehensive study was in the late 1990s.

Since then, MST has conducted several sub-area studies1, launched the JAZZ line, and responded to many community requests for shifts in service.

Many of these changes have taken place without a consistent policy on where and how much service to provide. In this context, responding to individual requests meets well-identified needs but does not always contribute to a more effective network for everyone.

The result is a network of many overlapping lines, each doing something that someone requested, but mostly running too infrequently to be worth the wait for anyone else travelling in the same direction.

2. Most lines operate at very low frequencies.

Only two MST lines consistently run every 30 minutes or better on weekdays: Line 41 in Salinas, and Line 20 from Monterey to Salinas. Almost everything else runs once an hour or less2.

In fact, nearly half of MST lines operate just a few times a day3, connecting very small numbers of people to specific buildings or facilities. These specialized and very infrequent services tend to overlap with other lines for most of their run, resulting in a very complex web of bus lines.

This is especially pronounced in the Monterey and Seaside area shown in Figure 3.

Many of the lines on this map operate less than once an hour, and have very short unique segments. Because each line has to operate on its own schedule, overlapping lines don’t result in high combined frequency.

For example, there may be four direct buses per hour between Monterey Transit Plaza and Del Monte Center on weekdays from 7 AM to 6 PM, but there is a 30-minute gap between southbound buses at least 9 times in that time period.

A number of MST lines operate just a few times per day, connecting small numbers of people to specific buildings or facilities.

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1 Including reviews of service in the Peninsula (2006), Marina (2009), South County (2010, 2019) and Salinas (2005 and 2012).

2 There are two main exceptions: (a) the JAZZ A and B, which each run every 36 minutes on weekdays, and combine to every 18 minutes on Fremont Blvd, and (b) Line 24 from Monterey to Carmel Valley, which operates every 40 minutes on weekdays.

3 As of early 2021, 14 of the 32 MST lines currently in operation run 8 times per day or less.
3. It can take a very long time to get from A to B, even when those places are nearby.

Transit is useful to people when it extends the range of places they can go. But **low frequencies** on the existing network mean that few people can use transit to get anywhere in a reasonable amount of time. This is true even when traveling relatively short distances between relatively prominent locations, as in the following examples.

**Example no. 1: How do you get from Seaside to Pacific Grove?**

Let’s imagine you are a retail worker living in the center of Seaside, and you need to reach your job at Country Club Gate Center in Pacific Grove (6 miles away) and your shift starts at noon on weekends. Here’s what you would need to do:

Notice that this trip only includes a total of 29 minutes actually riding the bus, and that you **would spend more time waiting at your destination than you would getting there**.

The **key problem in this example is the low frequency of Line 2**. If Line 2 came every 30 minutes instead of once an hour, this could halve the length of the trip. In that case, you could catch a later Jazz B at 11:15, wait only 10 minutes in Monterey to connect to Line 2 at 11:48, and wait only 6 minutes at the end, for a total of 48 minutes.

**Example no. 2: How do you get from North Salinas to South Salinas?**

Let’s imagine you are a hospital worker living near North Salinas High School, you need to reach your job at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital (4.5 miles away) and your shift starts at 9am on weekdays. Here’s what you would need to do:

Notice that this trip only includes a total of 21 minutes actually riding the bus, and that you **would spend more time waiting at Salinas Transit Center than on either bus**. A healthy adult could walk from Salinas Transit Center starting at 8:10 and arrive at the hospital at the same time as someone who had waited for Line 48.

The **key problem in this example is both low frequencies and the lack of a timed transfer at Salinas Transit Center**. If Lines 48 and 49 were timed to arrive together at Salinas Transit Center at 8:25am and leave together at 8:30am, you could leave home 15 minutes later. If they both came every half hour and were timed to leave Salinas Transit Center at 8:15 and 8:45, you could leave home 30 minutes later, for a 48 minute trip.

These are just two of many possible examples. Many prominent destinations are served once an hour or less, and people traveling to them by transit would have similar or even longer trips.
4. Where people live and work has changed.

The last 25 years have seen important shifts in where people live and work. Since the late 1990s:

- The population of the greater Monterey area and rural areas of the North County have stagnated.
- Marina experienced a significant decline in the 2000s, but has had the strongest growth of any community in the 2010s and continues to have the largest number of ongoing residential development projects.
- Salinas has grown slightly but unevenly. The population has grown significantly in North Salinas, while it has tended to decline or stagnated in East and South Salinas.
- Cities in the Highway 101 corridor south of Salinas grew strongly in the 2000s, but that growth slowed down significantly in the 2010s.
- The prominence of the military as a source of economic development has decreased following the closure of Fort Ord.
- The agriculture, retail, service, hospitality and higher education sectors have all become correspondingly more important.

Although some cities on the Monterey Peninsula are now showing renewed interest in growth and development, the structure of existing water rights means that future growth will likely be concentrated in the Highway 101 corridor south of Salinas.

Figure 4: Regional map of change in population density. Growth has largely been concentrated in the outer neighborhoods of Salinas and in the cities of Gonzales, Soledad, Greenfield and King City.
5. There is unmet demand for service in Salinas.

Salinas is the largest population and job center in Monterey County, accounting for 36% of the population and 30% of jobs. And there are good reasons to think many of the trips that happen in Salinas could be served by transit.

For one, Salinas is relatively compact and dense. The entire city of 155,000 people fits in a 5x5 mile area, and a large share of its jobs are located either Downtown or on long, straight main streets. As a result:

- Most bus stops in Salinas are located within a 1/2-mile of several thousand residents.
- Many of the places people need to go can be reached in a relatively short trip, that could be effectively served by frequent transit.

Salinas also has a relatively high poverty rate, implying that many people are in need of public services, including transportation. Many people in Salinas live in large households, where there are often fewer cars than people who need to go places.

Despite this, large parts of the city are served by lines that operate once an hour or less. With such infrequent service, an able bodied adult can walk most of the way across Salinas in the time it takes before the next bus comes. But very few people have the time to do that.

6. The pandemic has altered everyone’s reality. This is a good time to reassess MST’s future role.

The impacts of the pandemic on MST’s ridership and services are described in more detail in the following pages.
How has the pandemic impacted MST service and ridership?

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented MST with many significant short-term challenges, and establishing the way out of pandemic-era planning is another key reason for this study.

Fall 2020 patterns of ridership suggest that most pandemic-era transit users are likely essential workers with daytime hours, and people on non-work trips. These riders are using transit despite much lower service levels. In response to reduced ridership and reduced driver availability, MST reduced service by over 30% in 2020.

Ridership is way down.

As shown in Figure 7, comparing Fall 2019 to Fall 2020:

- Weekday ridership is almost 75% lower, from over 13,500 to less than 3,700 boardings per day on fixed routes.
- Weekend ridership is about 60% lower, and at par with weekdays. On weekends, boardings went from about 9,000 boarding per day to just under 3,500 per day.

Rush hour is nearly gone.

Prior to March 2020, MST experienced significantly higher ridership on weekdays between 7 and 8 AM and between 2 and 5 PM, and provided a higher level of service in response.

As schools, offices, and many hospitality businesses have either closed or significantly reduced their operations, rush hour ridership has come down to midday levels. Figure 8 shows that MST now experiences about the same level of ridership from 7 AM to 6 PM, and no longer provides additional service at peak hours.
Ridership change has been unequal

The chart in Figure 9 shows how ridership has changed by area. The maps in Figure 10 and Figure 11 give us further context for what we observe. Specifically:

- **Ridership has dropped the least in low-income areas and communities of color.** This reflects the areas that are most likely to house many essential workers, and where people are most likely to lack alternatives to transit for their mobility needs.

- **During the pandemic, college-related ridership has dropped the most.** The stops that experienced the largest drops in ridership directly serve Hartnell College, California State University - Monterey Bay (CSUMB), and Monterey Peninsula College (MPC). This can be explained by the prevalence of remote learning, and the cancellation of college-specific lines.

- **Military ridership also largely disappeared in 2020, but this is due to events that occurred just before the pandemic.** Up to late 2019, local military bases had funded 11 MST lines, 7 of which served the Presidio of Monterey. Budget shortfalls and changes in base command led to the cancellation of those services.
The Challenge of Planning a Good Transit Network in Monterey County

1. Relatively few people live in cities.

Fixed-route transit relies on the ability and willingness of strangers to share a vehicle. To make this possible, several people along any bus line need to be interested in going to places the bus is going. To achieve high ridership, you must have many people near bus lines going to many destinations.

There are people and jobs throughout Monterey County. But there are very few places where many people live in close proximity, or where many jobs are located in a small area.

Almost all of those places appear shaded in color on the map in Figure 12, and all of MST’s most productive lines (in ridership terms) focus on these areas:

- JAZZ A/B: Monterey-Seaside-Sand City.
- Line 18: Monterey-Seaside-Marina
- Line 20: Salinas-Marina-Sand City-Seaside-Monterey
- Line 41: East Salinas-Downtown Salinas
- Line 49: North Salinas-Downtown Salinas

With few exceptions,1 these are the areas where a well-funded, well-designed and well-operated transit system might be expected to generate high ridership, in the absence of a global pandemic. Taken together, they account for only half the population and jobs of Monterey County.

1 Most notably CSUMB, which does not appear in this map but is a large and growing center between Downtown Marina and Seaside.
2. There is no one “Downtown”.

Even in a spread-out community, it may be possible to generate significant transit ridership if there are places where almost everybody needs to go on a regular basis.

We can identify these places on a map, by counting how many jobs are within walking distance of any point. Offices, retail, hotels, restaurants, social services, colleges, hospitals and many other destinations are all places where there are jobs and where people need to go. Places where many such destinations are within walking distance of each other are natural hubs for transit service.

The map in Figure 13 shows us that the largest such centers are in Downtown Monterey and Downtown Salinas. This is why MST builds most of its service around the Monterey Transit Plaza and the Salinas Transit Center.

But the map also shows a major challenge in generating high ridership even with this design: neither of the county’s two largest centers account for a large share of county-wide jobs.

This reflects what anyone who lives in Monterey County already knows: there’s no one “Downtown” where someone could go for nearly everything they might need.

That means that any successful transit system in Monterey County needs to connect the centers of Monterey and Salinas with a wide variety of smaller destinations that also generate many trips, like colleges, hospitals, smaller town centers and suburban shopping centers.

1 There were over 170,000 civilian jobs in Monterey County in 2017. The most central point in Downtown Monterey was within 1.5 miles of 9,900 jobs (6%). The most central point in Downtown Salinas was within 1.5 miles of 14,900 jobs (9%).

Figure 13: Regional map showing the number of jobs within walking distance, defined as 1.5 miles, or a 30 minute walk by a healthy adult.
3. A growing number of people live very far from the places they need to go.

The places that are growing the fastest are the places that are the farthest from significant concentrations of jobs: Marina, and the cities of Gonzales, Soledad, Greenfield and King City in the southern part of the county.

Even in a future with fast bus service and more rail, when so many people live so far away from the places they need to go, someone has to pay the price of distance. Distance must be crossed, which takes time and money that can’t be spent towards other things people value.

- More people bear the cost of owning and maintaining more cars, to access opportunities that might be accessible by transit if they lived closer in.
- Those who can’t drive or get a ride from a friend spend hours on transit, and hours waiting, to cover that distance.
- To serve these often disadvantaged communities more equitably, MST needs to spend more of its budget on distance, which means less can be spent on high frequencies or long hours of service, undermining ridership potential.
- A long cascade of social, health, economic and environmental problems follow.

This network redesign will examine ways that transit access can be increased despite the high cost of distance. But unless future housing development can be redirected closer to where most people work, shop, and access services, the problems caused by distance will grow worse, and transit alone will not be the savior.

The fastest growing places are far from jobs and services. Unless future housing can be directed closer to where people need to go, the problems caused by distance will grow worse. More MST service to far-flung places can only mitigate this issue, not solve it.
Key Choice: Ridership vs. Coverage

Should MST focus more on the services likely to generate the highest ridership, or continue to focus on covering as many places as possible?

The MST COA is a unique opportunity to rethink the purpose of Monterey County’s transit system. The most basic choice is the degree to which the transit system should be pursuing ridership or coverage.

What is planning for High Ridership?
Designing a network for high ridership serves several popular goals, including:

- Enabling people to use transit to easily get to many jobs and services.
- Minimizing pollution and climate impact by replacing car trips with transit trips.
- Limiting the growth of congestion.
- Supporting dense and walkable development.

Prioritizing ridership means buses come more often and are convenient for more trips (higher frequency, longer hours) but are available only in places where many people, jobs and destinations are located.

What is planning for High Coverage?
Designing a transit system for high coverage serves different popular goals:

- Ensuring that as many people as possible have insurance against isolation through access to some transit service, no matter where they live.
- Ensuring that every community in the county has some service, even if relatively few people live and work there.

Prioritizing coverage means buses serve as many places as possible, but because they are spread out they don’t come often (once an hour or less) and aren’t convenient for many trips.

Why can’t MST do both?
MST can pursue high ridership and extensive coverage at the same time, but the more it pursues one, the less it can provide of the other. Every dollar that is spent providing high frequency along a dense corridor is a dollar that cannot be spent bringing transit closer to each person’s home.

Imagine you are the transit planner working in this fictional neighborhood.

The dots scattered around the map are people and jobs.
The 18 buses are the resources the town has to run transit.

Before you can plan transit routes, you must first decide: What is the purpose of your transit system?

Figure 15: Comparing an imaginary town where transit is run with the goal of maximizing frequency and ridership (left) vs. the same town where transit is run with the goal of providing a little service near everyone (right). The maximum ridership (left) network has very frequent service, but only on the roads where the most people live and work. The maximum coverage network has service on every road, but it doesn’t come very often.
Local vs. Regional Service

Because MST is the transit agency for all of Monterey County, there will always be a tension in deciding how much transit service should be provided for:

• Local trips, mostly in the greater Monterey and Salinas areas.
• Regional trips connecting all parts of the county to Salinas, Monterey, Watsonville and points beyond.

This tension is inevitably bound up in the ridership vs. coverage trade-off, because:

• Longer lines cost more to operate at the same frequency than shorter lines.
• Longer lines cross large areas where no one gets on the bus, so they serve fewer riders for every hour the bus runs.

This means that regional bus service tends to be more expensive to operate, while serving fewer passengers, than local lines.

This is especially true for MST’s longest lines, like Line 23 (Salinas to King City); Line 84 (King City to Paso Robles); or the pre-pandemic lines to San Jose and Santa Cruz.

The more MST spends on regional service, the fewer resources are available to provide lower-cost, higher-ridership lines in urbanized areas. But if MST did not provide regional lines to the small towns in southern and northern Monterey County, it is unlikely anyone else would step in.

Figure 16: Regional map of combined population and job density.
Almost everybody needs to go to various places on a regular basis. But some people have more choices than others about how to get around.

- **People who don’t own cars** can’t drive their car to get around. But this does not necessarily mean they strongly need transit. Many people without cars choose to live in a location where they can walk or bike to the places they need to go. They may use transit only occasionally, and even then they may have other options like a taxi or ridehailing service like Uber and Lyft.

- **Some seniors and people with disabilities** can’t drive, and so they are more likely to need to use transit to get around. Many of the people who fit this description will also have difficulty using transit and may require ADA complementary paratransit.

- **People with low incomes** generally have fewer choices about where to live, and whether or not that place is near the places they need to go. They are less likely to own a reliable car, and more likely to live in a household with fewer cars than drivers. These factors make it more likely that a low-income person might need to use transit. But if transit isn’t available or convenient enough, they are more likely to rely on friends and family to give them rides, or to walk or bike very long distances.

In 2014, Monterey County voters decided to explicitly support the transit needs of seniors, veterans and people with disabilities. Measure Q collects an 1/8 cent sales tax that goes to funding 6 fixed bus lines and most of the county’s paratransit trips.

But there has been no explicit funding commitment (by county voters or otherwise) to prioritize needs of people with low incomes, who tend to have the fewest choices about where they need to go and how to get there.

MST does not currently have the funding tools to make a commitment comparable to Measure Q. But MST could decide to prioritize low-income communities in planning its general-public services.

Would that be the right decision? It depends on your values.

If you are most interested in universal coverage with basic transit service, you might not want to see service to some communities prioritized over others. If you are most interested in a system that maximizes ridership, you might not want to prioritize service to far-flung and isolated low-income areas.

But the initial outreach suggests that such “purist” views about the ridership vs. coverage trade-off are rare. Local opinion somewhat favors a stronger focus on ridership, but overwhelmingly favors prioritizing the needs of disadvantaged people and communities in designing transit service.
What we’ve heard from the public.

Outreach Process

In preparing this report, MST and the consultant team conducted outreach to hear the community’s opinion on the key choices for the transit network.

We heard from stakeholder groups. Small group interviews were conducted with over 80 community stakeholders to secure their input regarding transit needs and priorities. Participants included representatives of:

- Jurisdictions served by MST
- Social Service Agencies
- Medical Facilities
- Seniors and Persons with Disabilities
- Employers
- Hospitality Industry
- Schools, Colleges and CSUMB
- Military Programs
- Non-English-Speaking Populations

We talked to regular MST riders. Nine focus groups were conducted with English and Spanish speaking MST riders to explore their experiences with and priorities for the transit network.

We surveyed the general public. A representative survey of 500 households throughout Monterey County was conducted via telephone. The survey provided input on how the general population believes MST should prioritize services and allocate resources. For further details on the survey, please refer to Appendix A to this report, “A Survey of the General Adult Public in Monterey County, California, 2021, for MST”.

The community values transit for ethical and practical purposes.

When asked to rate how important it would be for MST to focus on any of twelve aspects of service design, the great majority of survey respondents considered all of them to be either “extremely” or “very” important. Very few consider any of them unimportant.

Simply put: People value public transit. Also, they are decisive about this: almost everyone expressed an opinion. Very few answered “Not sure.”

Differences of opinion regarding the importance of transit priorities are matters of degree. The service design aspects with the greatest percentages rating them as “extremely important” are of two types:

- Empathetic: Ethically, people feel it is important to serve those in need because of age, disability, or lack of a personal vehicle. These factors were ranked as extremely important by the largest numbers of respondents.

- Instrumental: As a practical matter, service is important as a means to an end. Specifically, this includes getting people to jobs, to school, to shopping, and reducing pollution/greenhouse gases. Thus, for example, only 15% consider it extremely important to increase the overall amount of MST service (i.e. service increase with no specific objective), but 26% feel as strongly that MST should help reduce pollution and greenhouse gases, and get workers to places where most jobs are located. In other words, transit is important not so much as an end in itself, but as a means to valued ends.

Factors least highly valued are special services for tourists and service to all corners of Monterey County even in places where few people would use it.

How important is it for MST to provide....

- Routes tailored to needs of elderly and disabled:
  - Extremely important: 41%
  - Very important: 52%
  - Somewhat important: 5%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Affordable transportation where many people lack vehicles:
  - Extremely important: 34%
  - Very important: 56%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Help limit air pollution and greenhouse gases:
  - Extremely important: 26%
  - Very important: 50%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Routes that get workers to places where the most jobs are:
  - Extremely important: 64%
  - Very important: 37%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Routes for people to get to stores and appointments:
  - Extremely important: 25%
  - Very important: 53%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Transportation to colleges & universities:
  - Extremely important: 25%
  - Very important: 58%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Transportation to high schools:
  - Extremely important: 23%
  - Very important: 49%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Help reduce the growth of traffic congestion:
  - Extremely important: 18%
  - Very important: 48%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Increase overall amount of service:
  - Extremely important: 15%
  - Very important: 49%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Support denser, walkable development:
  - Extremely important: 14%
  - Very important: 46%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Service to all places, even where few people ride:
  - Extremely important: 14%
  - Very important: 40%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

- Special tourist services to reduce traffic congestion:
  - Extremely important: 12%
  - Very important: 45%
  - Somewhat important: 0%
  - Not very important: 0%
  - Not important at all: 0%
  - Not sure: 0%

Figure 18: How Monterey County residents rated the importance of different possible priorities for MST transit service in a phone survey.
Frequency is more valued than coverage. Serving those who need it matters most.

In discussing the choice between ridership and coverage with the public, the project team specifically referred to the most tangible elements of the trade-off:

- Whether they were most interested in high frequency or service to many places
- Whether they valued high frequency so much that they would be willing to sacrifice coverage in return.

Broadly speaking, people in Monterey County appear willing to invest more in high-frequency services, but only if the remaining coverage resources are invested on meeting the needs of high-need groups.

Stakeholder Interviews

Most interviewed stakeholders expressed a desire for more frequent transit, for reasons such as:

- “Service workers often have multiple jobs and need more frequency to make transit a viable option.”
- “Lack of frequency is a barrier to use. People would rather get a ride because transit takes too long.”
- “Frequent transit would open up opportunities for affordable housing grants.”

However, other stakeholders noted that enhanced convenience for some should not outweigh access for those who lack transportation options.

Rider Focus Groups

Among riders, there was broad belief that if lines ran more often, more people would ride and that current riders would ride more often. “People want to ride the bus, if it’s good enough.”

When asked if they would trade reduced coverage for increased frequency, many riders had difficulty choosing frequency unconditionally and offered “hybrid” solutions to avoid the choice.

- “Frequency on a few well-planned routes would be better, but please focus on people who really need the service.”
- “Increase frequency but offer special services for seniors and persons with disabilities.”
- “Frequency, but not if it is inequitable.”

These views are mirrored in what we heard from the general public. When asked directly about the key trade-offs, phone survey respondents:

- Favored frequent, high-ridership service (64%) over extensive coverage (35%).
- Favored focusing first on disadvantaged communities (69%) over treating all communities equally (30%).

The strength of feeling in favor of service for those who need it most was even more evident in questions about which types of service MST should prioritize.

Over 90% of respondents thought that “routes tailored to the need of the elderly and disabled” and “affordable transportation where many people lack vehicles” were either “extremely” or “very” important.

Telephone Survey Tradeoffs: Should MST...

Focus on providing service to as many places as possible, even if that means the bus only comes every hour or two and most trips take a very long time

OR

Focus on providing fast and frequent service, that comes every 15 minutes and takes the most direct routes, even if that means transit is only available in the areas where the most people live and work?

Focus on service every 15 minutes in areas with lots of jobs and schools, so that many people can rely on buses to get to work or school on time, but that means some people don’t have any service.

OR

Provide service every hour or two throughout the county, so everyone has a little bus service but very few people can rely on it to get to work or school on time?

Focus more on the benefits of fairness to all by providing at least a little service to everyone in all communities large and small even if it is slow and the bus doesn’t come very often?

OR

Focus more on supporting the local economy by providing fast and frequent service in the areas where many people could use it to get to work, school, shopping and other everyday needs?

Focus first on needs of communities where many people have low incomes, or don’t have reliable access to a personal vehicle?

OR

Provide service equally to all communities, regardless of need, income or access to a personal vehicle?

Figure 19: How Monterey County residents responded to key trade-offs in a phone survey.
Next Steps

Project Timeline

The Monterey-Salinas Transit COA is combining technical analysis and broad-based community input to develop a post-pandemic transit network. This will include the following steps:

- **May 2021: Choices Report.** This report provides facts about the existing network, and describes the key choices for future service. It has been developed through a combination of technical and broad-based community input.

- **May 2021: Committee Direction.** The MST Board of Directors’ Operations Committee will provide the project team with direction on the key trade-offs, based on input from the public and policymakers.

- **June-August 2021: Develop a Draft Network Plan.** The project team will develop a draft of a redesigned bus network, and any recommendations for changes to paratransit and specialized services.

- **September-October 2021: Public Review of Draft Plan.** The Draft Plan will be presented to the public. There will be multiple venues for input, including an online survey.

- **December 2021: Final Plan.** The project team will make changes to the Draft Plan, taking into account public input.

- MST is targeting implementation in the second half of 2022.

Figure 20: Project timeline.