

AGENDA ITEM 2C  
Action Item

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** February 3, 2022  
**TO:** El Dorado County Transit Authority  
**FROM:** Matthew Mauk, Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** Strategic Planning Request for Proposals

**REQUESTED ACTION:**

**BY MOTION,**

**Review and comment on draft Strategic Planning scope of work, and provide direction to staff regarding development of a Request for Proposals and project timeline**

**BACKGROUND**

Ridership on the El Dorado County Transit Authority's (El Dorado Transit) local routes had been trending slightly downward prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, but since lockdowns and program closures began in the Spring of 2020, the entire service has continued to experience a significant loss of ridership. Overall ridership decreased by 186,352 one-way passenger trips or 62.6% and systemwide passenger trips per revenue hour decreased from 6.4 to 3.4 (-46.9%) from Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 to FY 2021.

While ridership has started to trend up slowly on some services and the new Tahoe connector route has added a substantial number of passengers and fare revenue, overall ridership is still well below historic levels due in part to residual public health concerns, changes in school and employment related travel patterns, and the increased accessibility of home delivery and telehealth services. In addition, negative trends in labor availability and pressures on operating costs continue to impact El Dorado Transit's capability to restore services.

**DISCUSSION**

At their regular December 2021 meeting, the El Dorado Transit Board of Directors received a presentation from LSC Transportation Consultants and participated in a facilitated roundtable discussion with staff to consider the potential objectives, scope, and direction of a strategic planning effort to guide the agency's recovery from the pandemic. Among the Board directives at the December meeting was for staff to develop a draft scope of work to serve as the basis of a potential strategic planning consultant solicitation. An initial draft narrative, including a proposed scope of work, deliverables, and general timeline is included as Attachment A for Board consideration.



## 2025 Community Reconnection Plan

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

The El Dorado County Transit Authority (El Dorado Transit, Agency) is seeking to develop a strategic plan that includes a comprehensive evaluation and actionable recommendations to address El Dorado Transit's goals and objectives, service design and operations, capital improvements, funding strategy, management structure, and related policy issues. The envisioned "Community Reconnection Plan" (Plan) shall address internal and external factors influencing the use of public transit, including impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic, local and regional transit policy, service schedules, route design, fare policy, passenger tools and amenities, land use, etc. The Plan shall be informed by and incorporate extensive public engagement efforts and other relevant, adopted plans, policies, strategies, and goals. These should include but not be limited to the 2018 Short- and Long-Range Transit Plan, 2021 Zero Emission Bus Conversion Plan, Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP), and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) Next Generation Transit strategy. The Plan should focus on development of short-range strategies and actions (within a 3-year window) with consideration for longer-term objectives and improvement of overall sustainability. The intention is for Board adoption of a strategic Community Reconnection Plan in late-2022.

### RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

El Dorado County is in the Gold Country of California, stretching from the Central Valley east of Sacramento up to the peaks of the Sierra Nevada. Much of the terrain consists of the ridges and valleys of the Western Slope. The western slope of El Dorado County is comprised of nearly a dozen communities, from very small, isolated communities to larger communities along the Highway 50 Corridor. The western slope of El Dorado County (west of the Sierra Crest) includes Placerville, Cameron Park, El Dorado Hills, Pollock Pines, and Diamond Springs, as well as smaller communities. The City of Placerville is the County seat and is the only incorporated town within the area.

The major arterial east/west access is provided by US Highway 50 (US 50), connecting the area with Sacramento to the west and South Lake Tahoe and Carson City, Nevada to the east. North/south highway access to the area is provided by Highway 49, connecting the area with Auburn to the northwest and Sonora to the southeast. State Route 193 provides northern access to Georgetown.

Western El Dorado County (excluding the Tahoe Basin) is approximately 1.1 million acres in size and is a desirable location to live and visit. The region is known as an idyllic rural community and a tourist destination that has been experiencing residential and tourism growth in recent years. In particular, the area's proximity to employment opportunities in Sacramento County has generated substantial suburban growth in the western portion of the county.

The mix of urban and rural areas, some with easy freeway access, some along hilly narrow mountain roads and still others with suburban or low-density development, makes providing transit a challenge. Nonetheless, El Dorado Transit has provided a successful transit program for over 40 years, which strives to meet the varied needs of Western El Dorado County by providing a combination of local fixed-route service, commuter service, Dial-A-Ride service, and medical transportation. These services improve the quality of

life for El Dorado County residents while also helping to address traffic congestion problems along the US 50 corridor.

El Dorado Transit is formed through a joint power's agreement between the County of El Dorado and City of Placerville. El Dorado Transit is governed by a five-member Board of Directors: three members appointed by the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and two members appointed by the Placerville City Council. Additionally, a Transit Advisory Committee, made up of members representing both transit users and advocates, is responsible for reviewing the operation of the transit system, monitoring levels of service based upon budgets, and providing advice to the Executive Director. The Executive Director supervises a staff of 53 employees, including a four-person management team: Operations Manager, Human Resource Manager, Finance Manager and Planning and Marketing Manager.

The Agency owns the transit vehicles and equipment, and directly employs all the personnel necessary, to provide day-to-day operations and maintenance. Regular Transit Operators are represented by the Operating Engineer's Local 3 Union and the current Memorandum of Understanding labor agreement with this group runs through June 30, 2022. All other employees of the Agency are unrepresented.

The Agency owned, wheelchair accessible fleet currently consists of 16 over-the-road commuter coaches; 10 low-floor fixed route buses; 18 smaller, cutaway style buses; and 13 Dial-A-Ride minivans. The agency also maintains a fleet of 11 staff vehicles for internal use.

Transit operations are funded with local, State, and federal dollars. The Agency is a subrecipient of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307, 5310, 5311, and 5339 funds. The FY 2021 FTA apportionment for operations totaled \$1,683,913. Operating revenues from all State of California sources in FY 2021 totaled just over \$5 million.

El Dorado Transit's total operating expenditures in FY 2020 were \$9.4 million. The transit system served just under 298,000 passenger trips during the same period (this includes roughly 32,000 Dial-A-Ride and ADA paratransit trips). Ridership had already decreased by 6.7% between FY2014 and FY2019 and then ridership decreased sharply in early 2020 from COVID impacts and the resulting service and staffing cuts. Continuing the trend, total ridership in FY 2021 was roughly 111,000 trips including 10,465 trips on demand-response services. Monthly ridership is currently at about 30% of typical pre-COVID ridership levels.

The Agency adopted a Zero Emissions Fleet Conversion Plan in 2020 in preparation for meeting California's Innovative Clean Transit (ICT) regulation. The ICT regulation by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) mandates that all transit agencies have a goal of gradually transitioning to a zero-emission bus (ZEB) fleet by 2040. El Dorado Transit's adopted plan to go to all battery electric vehicles is based on pre-pandemic fleet replacement needs and will need to be revisited assuming any major system changes.

The Agency last updated its Short- and Long-Range Transit Plan in 2018. Agency staff provides ongoing service planning and an annual update of the operating budget and capital improvement program. The El Dorado County Transportation Commission (EDCTC) is the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for the jurisdictions. As such, EDCTC is responsible for the administration of Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds and prepares the RTP and RTIP for the Western Slope of El Dorado County. EDCTC also coordinates regional transportation planning activities with the jurisdictions and other public agencies, including El Dorado Transit, SACOG, and the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

## MAJOR CHALLENGES

Like other transit agencies, El Dorado Transit's ridership declined drastically in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ridership is still significantly below typical levels as the public's travel patterns continue to be impacted by factors such as lingering public health concerns, program reductions or outright closures, the proliferation of telehealth and home delivery services, and the widespread shift to remote work.

Other major challenges facing the agency predate the pandemic, including the following critical issues:

- Nationwide bus ridership had declined on the order of 20 percent since its peak in 2018. Contributing factors to the decrease included less expensive cost of automobile ownership and the rise in use of ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft. El Dorado County was not immune to the problem as system wide ridership declined by 16 percent between 2008 and 2018.
- Despite decreasing ridership, El Dorado County's older adult population is anticipated to increase over the long term. Therefore, it will be important to provide effective lifeline transit service to medical and shopping destinations. This "aging in place" trend impacts demand both within the study area, as well as to Sacramento and Placer Counties.
- Dial-A-Ride ridership has also declined and it's questionable if Dial-A-Ride is still meeting the needs of residents who rely on this service.
- Multiple attempts have been made to serve the community of El Dorado Hills with little ridership generated. Service to this area needs to be reexamined.
- Operating costs related to employee wages, health and retirement benefits, liability insurance, and procurement of goods and services have risen considerably, making it more challenging to provide cost efficient transit services.
- Sacramento Commuter services are one of the few service types that was increasing in ridership prior to the pandemic but lack of park and ride capacity was a long-standing constraint. Major capital investments were considered necessary to handle service expansions and to reach new markets.
- Hiring and retaining adequate, qualified staff for frontline positions in operations and maintenance was already a growing challenge that's been further exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, key senior management staff are nearing retirement and recruiting highly qualified replacements will be critical.

## LONG RANGE ISSUES

While the primary goal is to determine transit needs and how they can best be addressed over the next 3-5 years, several long-term issues remain and should be considered, including the following:

- Role of Transit: The appropriate role of transit service in Western El Dorado County should be considered, identifying how transit can be used to achieve mobility, land use, and air quality goals, as well as support economic development and tourism, particularly along the US 50 corridor.
- The long-range forecast for local transit needs and service quantities need to be reevaluated and updated based on planned development, including subdivision developments, commercial development, and other factors.
- Capital and Infrastructure Needs: As El Dorado County continues to grow and develop, and travel patterns evolve, the infrastructure related to providing transit services needs to be reconsidered.

- CARB rules dictate that all new bus purchases must be zero emission beginning in 2029 with 25 percent of new bus purchases being zero emission in 2026. The fleet composition and infrastructure to support electric transit vehicles must be accounted for.
- To meet active transportation and greenhouse gas emission goals, long-term plan elements should align with the RTP and RTIP, local pedestrian and bicycle networks, as well as the region's "Next Generation Transit" strategies where practical and mutually beneficial.

## PURPOSE

The objective of this request for proposal is to select a qualified consultant (here on referred to as 'contractor') to provide external assistance in the development of a comprehensive strategic plan. The strategic plan is to be an integrated local plan that considers all aspects of transit system administration and operations. The plan is to include a clear vision and mission as well as defined goals, objectives and priorities that are realistic, achievable, and measurable. This will be the first strategic plan of the agency and it is intended to:

- Provide clarity on our vision, mission, purpose, and what outcomes we are trying to achieve through strategic goal planning. We need to have a long-term perspective and be positioned to respond quickly to current challenges, prepare for future threats, and grasp opportunities, building on our strengths and addressing the weaknesses.
- Understand the long-term plans of external stakeholders for transportation needs (City, County, regional and state agencies, local colleges/universities, employers, organizations) and the expectations of the public to support transit requirements over the next 3 to 5 years, with an eye toward longer term sustainability.
- Opportunities to improve for efficiencies, quality of service, and productivity are identified, and prioritized.
- Internal staff development opportunities and quality workplace improvements are identified and prioritized, to improve organizational culture and ensure El Dorado Transit is a desirable work environment with competitive pay and benefits to attract highly qualified candidates to support on-going operations.

## SCOPE

The contractor should have experience with strategic planning processes at public agencies, preferably with public transit entities. Major objectives of the planning process include a facilitated needs assessment, development of organizational and operational effectiveness, resolution of difficult management problems, and building community support through focused outreach programs. The selected contractor will work with senior staff, the Board of Directors, advisory committees, and external parties (including but not limited to, the City of Placerville, El Dorado County, regional and state agencies, EDCTC, open public committees), to create a strategic plan which has medium- and long-range components (e.g., vision, mission, values, objectives, and priorities) and short-term action plans. Updated performance measures must also be a feature of the Plan to enable progress to be regularly evaluated.

El Dorado Transit understands that there are a variety of models and approaches that can be used to develop a comprehensive strategic plan. The selected contractor will need to be able to adapt or customize an approach that will best meet the needs of El Dorado Transit. It is expected that strategic planning sessions with all parties will commence once awarded. However, preliminary research should be conducted by the contractor in advance of key stakeholder meetings.

The extent of community/stakeholder consultation into the strategic planning process will be integral but has not yet been determined. The Board will make that decision concurrently with the selection of a strategic planning contractor. Accordingly, respondents shall provide detailed information on options for community consultation, including the approach to consultation, the associated cost, and the timeframe involved. Respondents are encouraged to recommend the most effective and efficient method of engaging stakeholders in the strategic planning process.

## DELIVERABLES

The contractor will be responsible for providing expert advice throughout the project and for the following deliverables (note that proponents are not limited by the listed deliverables and proposers may wish to expand on them):

Project Coordination - including regular meetings and status reports to keep the project on schedule and keep identified stakeholders apprised of the process.

Orientation/Training of Participants to the process and components of strategic planning.

Needs Assessment/Environmental Scan – reviewing existing plans and documents pertinent to the comprehensive strategic plan, identifying trends and patterns that are applicable, analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Internal and External stakeholder Input - gathering of stakeholder information and input; using appropriate and effective methods of communication and engagement.

Process and Meeting Facilitation – assisting discussion and decision-making; ensuring that conversations are forward-looking, action oriented, and move the participants towards creating a shared future.

Plan Documentation – including creation of a final plan document (and executive summary) for public review and presentation. Unless otherwise agreed, written products will be drafted by contractor, and reviewed, edited, and approved by El Dorado Transit.

## SCHEDULE

The project is anticipated to begin in April 2022 and be completed by January 2023.

## REFERENCES

1. 2018 Short- and Long-Range Transit Plan
2. 2021 Zero Emission Bus Conversion Plan
3. SACOG Next Generation Transit Plan
4. 2018/19-2020/21 TDA Triennial Performance Audit
5. MTP/RTP
6. SACOG Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan