



BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

MEETING DATE: JANUARY 20, 2026 **AGENDA ITEM #: 8**

TYPE: INFORMATION ITEM

PREPARED BY: PLANNING AND MARKETING MANAGER HILLARY BLACKERBY

REVIEWED BY: GENERAL MANAGER JERRY ESTRADA

SUBJECT: PLANNING WORK PLAN FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-27 & SERVICE UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Board receive an update from the Planning Department on the service change work plan for fiscal year 2026-27, and a general service update.

DISCUSSION:

Introduction

Every year MTD Planning staff develops a work plan for possible bus service changes to go into effect in August. Items under consideration are based on a number of factors. Those factors include current ridership, demand for service, on-time performance, funding, workforce availability, and feedback from the public.

In recent years, minor service changes have taken place. In August 2025, the only service change was the addition of one PM peak inbound trip on weekdays on Line 24x (UCSB Express).

Taking a measured approach after major cuts took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, targeted service changes have been enacted. This is with a realization that due to a looming fiscal cliff and the loss of federal operating assistance due to becoming a large Urbanized Area after the 2020 census, current service levels are closer to a new normal.

Summary of Service Change Items under Consideration

Possible reductions in revenue hours
Elimination of Alpha Resource Center Booster Line 2010
Start of The Wave On-Demand service in Carpinteria
On-time performance

With a fiscal cliff looming in future years, staff is exploring what service reductions might need to be proposed if status quo revenue hours cause too much financial pressure. Scenarios of service reductions of 8 to 10 percent are being modeled in case of a need to recommend cuts, and all possible efficiencies in both non-revenue time and run structure will be explored.

Alpha Resource Center Booster Line 2010

For many years, MTD has long operated a morning booster trip that begins at the Transit Center and ends at Alpha Resource Center on Cathedral Oaks Road, which hosts a day program that serves adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Line 2010 operates at approximately 105 revenue hours annually.

After tracking ridership on this route, and in conversations with staff at Alpha, staff has concluded that the route is no longer necessary. Alpha staff agrees that they can make other transportation arrangements for those who are still using the service. This change does not need to wait until August, and is planned to end as for June 15, 2026.

The Wave On-Demand Microtransit Service

The Wave on-demand microtransit service launched in April 2025 in a portion of Goleta and Isla Vista after years of planned service and implementation delays. Service currently operates Tuesday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. MTD has one-time grant funding for the pilot of this service from the State of California's Low-Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP).

The intention of this pilot was to test it in three specific service zones. In addition to Goleta/Isla Vista, service areas have been planned for Carpinteria and Santa Barbara. The next zone to begin service is Carpinteria, and includes everything within the city limits of Carpinteria and some adjacent County unincorporated area, such as Santa Claus Lane. Staff believes there is strong demand for this service in Carpinteria as MTD has received strong community interest in bringing back service that connects different parts of the community, after suspension of the Seaside Shuttle (Line 36) service in 2020. In contrast to the Seaside Shuttle, this service would be on-demand and cover the entire community, instead of just a set circulator route. It would also connect Downtown Carpinteria and other neighborhoods with the popular Santa Claus Lane area that experiences significant parking pressures during peak times.

Staff is recommending that service in Carpinteria start this calendar year, with an exact time being dependent on workforce and fleet availability.

On-Time Performance

MTD's fixed route on-time performance (OTP) is generally meeting and beating agency performance standards. Planning staff analyzes on-time performance on a monthly and quarterly basis, and considers changes based on route conditions (such as construction or heavy loads). This monitoring helps investigate whether issues are related to traffic conditions, run structure, or other operational items. Staff is using data and bus operator feedback to look at possible OTP issues that could be resolved with small tweaks to schedules. Lines 20 and 27 are currently being analyzed, but other lines are being watched and specifics on proposed changes will be brought forward if appropriate.

Next Steps

Planning staff will return to the Board of Directors in March with a set of proposed service changes that would go into effect on August 17, 2026. Staff would then go out to the public in April with these proposals. This will include in-person meetings, a virtual meeting, and an online survey/explainer regarding the proposed changes.

As part of this process, if the proposed changes meet MTD's threshold for a "major service change", a Title VI service equity analysis would be conducted, as required by the Federal Transit Administration. "Major service change" is defined as either:

- A change of at least 25% in annual systemwide revenue hours
- A change of at least 25% in annual revenue hours by route

Staff would then return to the Board in May with final recommendations for August changes for Board approval.

