



CALAVERAS  
**connect**

# SHORT-RANGE TRANSIT PLAN

## 2020-2025



Final Executive Summary | January 2021

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the Short-Range Transit Plan (SRTP) is to guide the development of public transportation services for Calaveras County residents and visitors over the next five years, from FY20/21 to FY24/25. More specifically, the SRTP:

- Provides opportunities for public input regarding transportation needs and how Calaveras Connect might effectively address them
- Conducts market research to determine who is riding Calaveras Connect, how they are using the system, how satisfied they are with the services provided, and priorities for improvements
- Evaluates the recent performance of existing services
- Provides priorities for service plan and fare recommendations over the next five years
- Establishes a detailed operating and capital financial plan
- Provides an update on zero emission bus requirements

### MAJOR INITIATIVES SINCE 2016 SHORT RANGE TRANSIT PLAN

The following are the key initiatives for transit in Calaveras County since the last Short Range Transit Plan:

1. **Formed a new organization:** Calaveras Connect, the new name for Calaveras County’s public transportation service, is now operated under the responsibility of a new organizational sponsor, the Calaveras Transit Agency (CTA). The CTA was created by a Joint Powers Agreement between Calaveras County and the City of Angels Camp.

- 2. **Rebranding campaign:** During 2018/2019, the new Calaveras Transit Agency organization undertook a branding project to create a new look for the new organization. Its specific purposes included: a) create a new identity and Brand for Calaveras Transit; b) enhance resident and tourist awareness and perception of service; c) create awareness, relationships, and coordination with events, attractions, and key destinations throughout Calaveras County; and d) develop collateral specific for different target markets and services.
- 3. **Token Transit for Fare Payment:** Paying fares on Calaveras Connect has become more convenient due to the implementation of a smart phone application called Token Transit. By downloading the app, riders can purchase and store passes and tickets on their phone in advance of their ride or even as they are boarding the bus.
- 4. **Columbia College Free Fare Program:** Columbia College is an important destination for the two-county area, Calaveras and Tuolumne Counties. Calaveras Connect established during 2019 a free-fare opportunity using Low Carbon Transit Program (LCTOP) funding to off-set the lost fare revenue and with contributions from Columbia College and associated organizations including the Columbia College Foundation and Associated Students of Columbia College.



**SYSTEMWIDE PERFORMANCE TRENDS PRIOR TO COVID-19**

Table ES-1 shows the ridership, service hours, and operating costs per line (route) for the one-year period between November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019. The Red Line had the highest ridership (22,983) and accounted for 56% of systemwide annual boardings, including special event services (Figure 3). The Blue Line had a little over a third of the ridership of the Red Line, with 8,476 annual boardings. The Purple Line had about half the ridership of the Blue Line with 4,278 annual boardings.

**Table ES-1: Route-Level Performance Nov. 2018 - Oct. 2019**

	System-wide	Red	Blue	Purple	Copper	Green	Sat. Hopper
Ridership	40,978	22,983	8,476	4,278	989	149	2,611
Service Hours	13,587	5,769	1,808	2,123	1,127	90	603
Operating Costs	\$1,147,195	\$487,081	\$152,651	\$179,246	\$95,153	\$7,599	\$50,912
Passengers per Service Hour	3.02	4.0	4.7	2.0	0.9	1.7	4.3
Cost/ Passenger Trip	\$28.00	\$21.19	\$18.01	\$41.90	\$96.21	\$51.00	\$19.50

The Saturday Hopper, which is used for some special event services, had 2,611 annual boardings. The Green Line, which operates on-demand, had the lowest number of boardings at 149 for the one-year period. Operating costs per route were determined based on the total operating costs allocated by total vehicle service hours, then allocated based on the vehicle service hours per route. The vehicle service hours do not include vehicle deadhead or operator break times.

**COVID-19 UPDATE**

Approximately 80% of the work on the first four chapters of the SRTP were completed prior to March 4, 2020 when the State of California issued a State of Emergency from the threat of COVID-19. On March 18<sup>th</sup>, CTA released a notice of suspension of the Saturday Hopper service until April 11<sup>th</sup>. This was in response to the California Department of Public Health notices to postpone or cancel gatherings as well as local advisory regarding closure of certain businesses such as restaurants, bars, etc. Since the Saturday Hopper is supported primarily by visitors to these types of venues and businesses, it was determined to be in the best interest of the public to suspend the service. As described below, Calaveras Connect has implemented an array of services during the Summer and Fall 2020.

### SERVICES PROVIDED IN NOVEMBER 2020

Calaveras Connect has implemented an array of services since transitioning to only on-demand services in March 2020 when the shutdown due to COVID-19 occurred. Figure ES-1 provides a graphic of the different services that are available in November 2020 as approved in a series of votes in the Summer and Fall 2020 by the Calaveras Transit Agency. The services include:

#### Fixed Route (Monday to Friday)

- Red Line between Valley Springs and Angels Camp, every 90 minutes on a fixed schedule with fixed stops.

#### On Demand Dial-A-Ride (Monday to Friday)

Passengers need to make a reservation for a trip for an origin and destination along one of the following corridors by calling Calaveras Connect customer service:

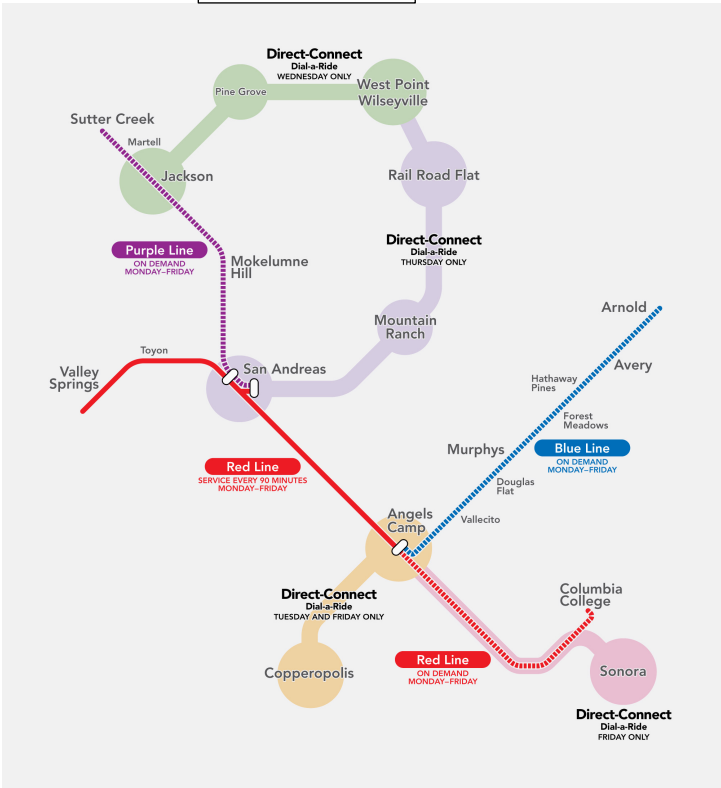
- Blue Line corridor between Angels Camp and Arnold
- Purple Line corridor between San Andreas and Sutter Creek
- Angels Camp and Columbia College

#### Direct Connect Dial-A-Ride (One or Two Days a Week)

Requires an advanced reservation by 3 pm the previous day or up to 7 days in advance.

- Copperopolis and Angels Camp on Tuesdays and Fridays
- West Point/Wilseyville to Jackson on Wednesdays
- West Point/Wilseyville to Mountain Ranch to San Andreas on Thursdays
- Copperopolis and Angels Camp to Sonora on Fridays

Figure ES-1



## KEY THEMES OF PUBLIC OUTREACH

This section explores common themes that arose from the demographic analysis, stakeholder interviews, onboard passenger survey, West Point Intercept survey, interviews with Copperopolis residents and the performance analysis, all conducted in Fall 2019. It must be stressed that all public outreach occurred before COVID-19, and the key themes likely have shifted over the past eight months. The following are the most important key themes from the public outreach:

1. **Calaveras Connect serves some mobility needs well but additional fixed-route, fixed-schedule trip needs exist.** Increased frequency from the current 90 minutes on the Calaveras Connect core Red Line, from Valley Springs to Columbia College is desirable, moving towards hourly service, like that of the Saturday Hopper. In addition, later evening service would assist many human service agency clients. Service to Sonora was particularly important to many stakeholders.
2. **For some remote communities in Calaveras County, there is distinct need for transportation, but all of the needs cannot be met effectively by traditional fixed-route public transit alone.** For West Point residents the most important improvement would be service to Jackson. There is also a need for service along the West Point, Wilseyville, Mountain Ranch and San Andreas corridor. For Copperopolis, the most important service improvement would be service to Sonora. This input was utilized to formulate the pilot projects that are now in operation.
3. **Student needs and enhanced coordination with Columbia College and Calaveras Unified School District point to additional potential riders.** 46% of onboard survey respondents indicated they were a student with 35% of all respondents indicating they were attending Columbia College. Only 3 respondents said they were attending high school. High school after school activities are often difficult to access by transit.
4. **Demographic patterns and trends show a very geographically dispersed, but growing need for mobility services for those who cannot drive.** Some of the most important statistics include:

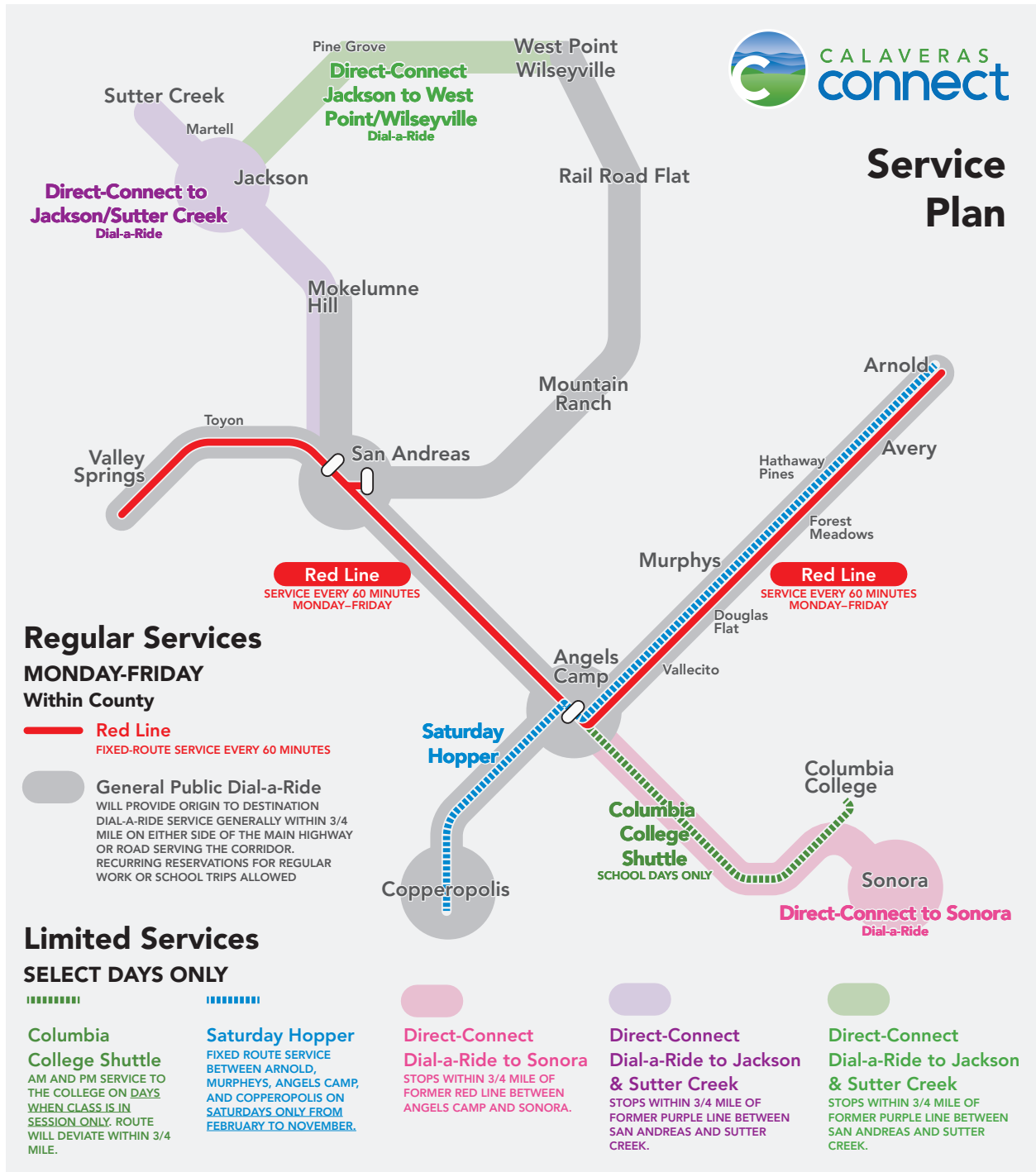
- a. The overall population of Calaveras County saw a 1.3% decline over the past five years, losing about 500 persons.
- b. Older adults increased significantly, a 18% increase with a resultant increase in the median age from 49.5 to 51.6 years. About 25.7% of the Calaveras County is over the age of 65. Older adult in poverty increased by 20.5%.
- c. Overall approximately 12.5% of Calaveras County residents are in households with poverty-level incomes.

## RECOMMENDED SERVICE PLAN

Figure ES-2 shows a map of the aspirational service plan over the next five years. It is dependent on the return of demonstrated transit demand and available financial resources. The following are the primary features:

- Red Line between Valley Springs and Arnold operating Monday to Friday every 60 minutes. This could be from Valley Springs to Murphy's if the link between Murphy's and Arnold does not generate sufficient demand. The transition from 90 minute to 60 minute service is predicated on a higher demand level than what was shown prior to COVID-19, and may not be feasible within the five-year planning horizon.
- Columbia College shuttle between Angels Camp and Columbia three times in the morning and three times in the afternoon on days that Columbia College is in operation. There would be a timed transfer at the Save-Mart stop in Angels Camp between the Red Line and the Columbia College shuttle on days that Columbia College operates. The Columbia College shuttle is dependent on sufficient demand for in-person classes at the college. The interim subscription dial-a-ride service should provide data on demonstrated demand before the Columbia College shuttle service is implemented. The Columbia College shuttle would operate in a route deviation manner for trips within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of the shuttle route. In the five-year plan, there would no longer be dial-a-ride service between Columbia College and Angels Camp.

**ES-2 Recommended Five Year Service Plan**





- Improved general public dial-a-ride service five days a week for trip origins and destinations within Calaveras County that are currently being served with public transportation. The generalized gray areas in Figure ES-2 would enable all residents in these corridor to make a reservation by 3 pm the day before the trip is needed and travel to any other destination served by general public dial-a-ride.

So, for example, anyone who lives in the service area in Copperopolis (currently served by Direct Connect two days a week) who wants to travel to San Andreas for government business, for example, would be able to book a trip to and from San Andreas between 7 am and 7 pm.

- Individuals who work or go to school can make a recurring subscription trip on dial-a-ride, for example from Copperopolis to a job in San Andreas, as long as the working hours are between 7 am and 7 pm Monday to Friday. Along the Red Line corridor, the route deviation or Direct Connect service would be discontinued, and trips with an origin or destination within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of the route would be served with the general public dial-a-ride, including ADA eligible trips. This will enable the 60-minute service on the Red Line to maintain excellent on-time performance.
- For out of county trips, Direct-Connect service on select days would be provided between eligible Calaveras County origins and out of county destinations. The three Direct-Connect services are:
  - San Andreas-Mokelumne Hill-Jackson-Sutter Creek
  - Wilseyville-West Point-Pine Grove-Jackson
  - Angel's Camp-Sonora
- Saturday Hopper would be maintained and improved as market conditions dictate. During the community outreach, there was the desire to have the Saturday Hopper extended to the new hotel that is just about to open in Copperopolis Town Square. Figure ES-2 shows this extension.

## **BASELINE OPERATING COSTS AND REVENUES**

The baseline operating costs and revenues between FY 20/21 and FY 24/25 are based on what we know in November 2020. For operating costs, the contracted rate with Paratransit Services utilizes an assumed level of 11,864 vehicle service hours and 368,000 vehicle service miles. The Paratransit Services contract is 75% of the operating budget. If demonstrated demand enables some of the improvements in the recommended service plan, the vehicle

service hours and vehicle service miles in the contract can fluctuate up to 20% without affecting the terms of the contract, allowing the Calaveras Transit Agency to increase the vehicle service hours to 14,236 without changing the terms of the contract.

The baseline operating costs are budgeted at \$1,212,942 in FY 20/21. With the built in contract rates for service delivery and normal inflation, the cost in FY 2024/25 would have a very modest increase to \$1,344,458 in FY 24/25.

Available operating revenues have a much higher degree of uncertainty than operating costs. The following are key elements of the operating revenues:

- **Farebox revenues:** Fares are free in FY 20/21, so there will be no farebox revenues in FY 20/21. LCTOP funds are being utilized as the funding source to finance the free fares. Fares are expected to be re-instated in July 2021 with a lower base fare and very likely fewer passengers. Fares revenues were \$79,417 in FY 18/19, but are projected to be \$27,00 in FY 21/22 and increase to approximately \$50,000 by FY 24/25.
- **Local Contributions:** Transportation Development Act allows local contributions to count towards fare revenues in the farebox recovery calculation. They include advertising income, interest income, proceeds from the sale of capital assets, and LCTOP monies utilized for free fares. In FY 20/21, with \$63,000 in LCTOP funds for free fares, total local contributions are expected to be approximately \$92,500 in FY 2021. With \$15,000 in LCTOP funds utilized for Columbia College free fare program, total local contributions from FY 21/22 to FY 24/25 are expected to be approximately \$49,500.
- **Local Transportation Fund (LTF):** TDA funds are derived from the state sales tax and are earmarked for public transportation purposes if there are no unmet needs that are reasonable to meet. Available LTF funds not used by transit can be used for streets and roads. LTF funds are utilized in the SRTP as the fund of last resort after all other potential funding sources are utilized. LTF funding generation is uncertain due to the current economic turndown and it is not known how fast the local economy will recover and therefore the following projections are speculative. Due to CARES Act funding, no LTF funding was utilized in FY 19/20. LTF funding is budgeted at \$375,000 in FY 20/21, a lower figure due to remaining CARES Act funding, which is being spread out over the next three fiscal years. However, in FY 24/25, with CARES

Act funding exhausted, LTF funding is expected to jump to \$580,631, reducing the amount available for streets and roads.

- **State Transit Assistance Funding (STA):** Derived from the sales tax on diesel fuel and is dependent on diesel fuel prices and diesel consumption. The funding sources have varied substantially over the past ten years. STA funds can be utilized for either operating or capital purposes and Calaveras Connect uses the funding for operations. In FY 19/20, Calaveras Transit Agency received \$383,583, but the estimate for the budget in FY 20/21 has been reduced to \$236,977. Based on expected recovery of diesel fuel sales, STA funding is estimated to increase to \$350,000 in FY 2021/22 and to increase to \$390,000 in FY 2024/25.
- **Federal Transit Administration 5311:** A federal non-urbanized formula funding program administered by Caltrans. In FY 20/21, Calaveras Connect has budgeted \$275,000 in FTA 5311. Congress needs to reauthorize Federal funding authorization, and when they do, historically FTA funding levels have increased. However, to be conservative, funding levels for regular FTA 5311 is increased to \$288,750 in FY 21/22 and held steady at that funding level through FY 2024/25.

The CARES Act funding has come through FTA 5311. The CARES Act funding has been allocated in two phases. The first phase funding was \$480,981 Calaveras Connect utilized \$382,356 of it in FY 19/20 to offset operating expenses. A second phase of funding of \$554,450 was made in July 20. In FY 20/21, \$207,753 in CARES Act. Funding is budgeted. The remaining CARES ACT funding is spread over the next three years equally at \$148,441 per year.

## CAPITAL COSTS AND REVENUES

The largest capital expense for Calaveras Connect is replacement of the fleet. TCT has a fleet of 11 vehicles with a current mix of medium and large capacity cutaways buses and two modified vans. With the transition to more general public dial-a-ride and fewer fixed routes, the service plan requires a fleet with smaller vehicles.

There is also a desire to begin the transition of the fleet to a mix of internal combustion engines and electric vehicles. The Calaveras Transit Agency Board would like to procure one electric cutaway bus and one electric modified van in the next five years to gain operating experience with these environmentally friendly buses. There is a California Air Resources

Board (CARB) Innovative Clean Transit regulation that requires the purchase of 25% zero emission buses (ZEB) in 2026. Calaveras Connect will develop a more detailed ZEB rollout plan in FY 21/22.

It should be noted that there are some important considerations with the procurement of electric buses:

- The cost for an electric bus is at least 2.5 times the cost of an internal combustion engine bus at present. For example a standard cutaway bus currently costs about \$99,000 whereas a similar electric bus is expected to cost \$266,000. The cost for electric buses is expected to decline over the new few years.
- The maximum range of an electric cutaway bus is 150 miles, but with air conditions and hilly terrain, the effective range is generally 100-120 miles. This has a limiting factor in how long a bus can be operation for a typical transit shift.

Three vehicle procurement scenarios were reviewed by the CTA Board on October 7, 2020. It approved the fleet mix objective described below over the next five years. The fleet mix transitions to a fleet of smaller vehicles of both internal combustion engine and electric vehicles:

- Two larger capacity 26 passenger buses (internal combustion engine).
- Two 17-21 passengers medium capacity buses (internal combustion engine).
- Three smaller 10-14 passenger smaller capacity buses (two internal combustion engine and one electric).
- Four 5-6 passenger modified vans (three internal combustion and one electric).

Over the next five years, Calaveras Connect is scheduled to replace ten buses in order to achieve the fleet mix objective described above. The five year cost is expected to be approximately \$ 1,527,255.

Other capital costs over the next five years include:

- Charging and charging infrastructure: \$251,000
- Bus stop improvements: \$150,000
- Equipment: \$100,00

There are two capital revenue sources to fund the capital reserve fund. This includes about \$60,000 in State of Good Repair (SGR) funds per year, and approximately \$68,000 per year of

LCTOP funding for electric buses, charging equipment and infrastructure. These funds will be utilized primarily for grant matching funds, but some of the SGR reserved will be utilized to fund bus stop improvements.

Like most rural transit agencies in California, Calaveras Connect will be relying on FTA 5339 funding for most of the internal combustion engine vehicle procurements. This is a discretionary funding program that requires approval from Caltrans. The Short Range Plan includes having an application for FTA 5339 funding for bus procurements in all five years.

A grant funding source for the electric bus, electric modified van, charging stations and charging infrastructure has not been identified. There will be need for \$632,000 in grant funding to achieve the fleet mix objective cited above.

The total needed capital revenue over the next five years is just over \$2 million.