

1 INTRODUCTION

Maintaining a high quality of life is the essence of this plan for transit and non-motorized transportation in Butte County. Curbing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by reducing congestion, providing transportation options, and developing pedestrian-oriented communities can help the County and its various cities and towns facilitate growth to maintain Butte County's unique character. To support the sustainable growth targets in the region's 2012 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)/Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), Butte County needs a transportation system that provides effective transit service and non-motorized transportation options. Through this planning effort, the potential exists for new and expanded local and intercity public transit services, improved bikeways and bicycle paths, and improved pedestrian access to transit.

Outside of its cities, Butte County is largely rural, with agricultural lands and open spaces that include mountains, forests and grasslands. Many consider the county a bicyclist's paradise, with expanses of open roads linking the various communities with bike-friendly Chico. Although Butte County will retain its rural character for many years to come, it also has fast-growing communities and is becoming somewhat of a bedroom community for jobs in counties to its south, including Sacramento, with nearly one-third of employed residents commuting to jobs outside of Butte County. The county anticipates residential growth of 50% by 2035, and a 57% increase in jobs. Much of this growth is forecasted to occur in Chico, which will account for about 40% of the region's housing growth. New development has not always been built with transit or pedestrian access in mind, and if that development accelerates as expected, Butte County may find communities on the edges of its cities that are challenging to serve by transit, and may not easily afford access to bike trails or pedestrian-oriented destinations.

Today, many of Butte County's communities support walking, bicycling and transit. Pedestrian and bicycle trips within each city benefit from close spacing of schools, entertainment, shopping, and employment as well as street grids and existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. This is especially true in Chico, where the California State University (CSU) campus serves a number of college students who do not own cars. CSU Chico is also the site of Butte County's only car-sharing program. Public transit services are provided by B-Line, offering a mix of fixed-route bus service, general public demand-response service, and ADA-complementary paratransit service in Chico, Oroville, and Paradise, and offering regional links to Biggs and Gridley.

STUDY PROCESS

The outcome of this planning process was to provide Butte County with a Long Range Transit and Non-Motorized Plan focusing on bicycles, pedestrians, and transit for integration into the region's new 2016-2040 MTP/SCS. The Plan refines and updates the goals, objectives, and policies in the 2012 MTP/SCS. Based on an assessment of existing services and programs, this plan identifies needs and service gaps, recommends a prioritized list of improvements to the bicycle and

pedestrian networks, and provides recommendations to improve and expand transit services, including better connectivity with the bike and pedestrian system.

This study was conducted in three separate phases. The first phase was an evaluation of existing conditions. This included stakeholder interviews, surveys, service maps, an analysis of demographic data, and a preliminary identification of needs and opportunities.

The second phase included the development of transit service alternatives, non-motorized alternatives and ridership forecasts.

The final phase included the development of air quality and greenhouse gas emission forecasts, a financial model, and this report for integration into the 2016-2040 MTP/SCS.

Oversight for this planning effort was provided by the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG), along with transit operations staff.

RELEVANT STUDIES/PROJECT BACKGROUND

In developing this plan, the consulting team reviewed a number of existing plans and policies to provide context. Many of these provide guidance for future growth in Butte County, and describe planning efforts specifically related to transportation. Highlights from some of the key documents, including those with specific relevance for this planning effort, are summarized in this section.

2012 Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MT/SCS) – December 2012

The MTP/SCS is the long-range regional transportation plan spanning 2012 to 2035. The plan identifies goals for transit and non-motorized travel in the county:

Transit

- Increase ridership at a faster rate than annual population growth in the county.
- Create additional routes and expand services to meet ridership demand.
- Explore innovative alternatives, such as a market-based approach, to evaluating and increasing ridership.

Non-Motorized Travel

- Support planning and construction of pedestrian projects and bike routes in local jurisdictions.
- Support bicycle interfacing with the transit system through bike racks and infrastructure.

Land Use

- Promote land uses and design criteria that are friendly to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Mobility

- Tailor transportation improvements to better connect people with activities.
- Increase use of transit, ridesharing, walking, and biking in major corridors and communities.

Sustainability

- Ensure access to jobs, services, and recreation for populations with fewer transportation choices.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and improve air quality in the region.

Unmet Transit Needs Assessment – February 2012

The Unmet Transit Needs Assessment (UTN) identifies needs in Butte County. This effort is required for BCAG to receive state funding under the California Transportation Development Act (TDA). In the past, the UTNA has enabled route restructuring for better efficiency in service.

For the 2013/2014 fiscal year, BCAG found one unmet transit need deemed reasonable to meet (met criteria for cost effectiveness, economy, community acceptance, and operational feasibility), which was the addition of one midday run on Route 7 serving east Chico. Meetings are ongoing for this year's UTNA.

Market Based Transit Study – June 2010

B-Line conducted a Market Based Transit Study in 2010 and made changes to transit services based on recommendations.

Key findings from the study included the following:

- Chico: Route 8 had the highest productivity at 39 passengers per revenue hour, while Route 7 had the lowest at 5.8 passengers per revenue hour.
- Oroville: Productivity is generally low (4.8 to 11.0 passengers per revenue hour) with Route 27 having higher than average passengers per revenue hour due to Las Plumas HS student activity
- Paradise: Routes 40 and 41 have excellent productivity (13.9 and 10.2 passengers per revenue hour, respectively)
- Other regional routes:
 - Route 20 (19.3 passengers per revenue hour)
 - Route 31 (9 passengers per revenue hour) which is low, but considered acceptable relative to comparable intercity routes

Four alternatives were developed based on the following assumptions:

- 10% decrease in vehicle revenue hours
- Reallocation of existing vehicle revenue hours to better meet market needs
- 10% increase in vehicle revenue hours
- Market-based scenario that provides a long-term vision requiring twice the current available financial resources

Overall recommendations from the study focused on maintaining the current level of vehicle revenue hours, but reallocating those hours to better meet the market needs in the county. Recommendations carried forward from the study included the following:

- **Chico**
 - Creation of Route 15, combining Routes 1, 6, and 10
 - Creation of interim transfer point at Forest Ave
 - Route 7 will connect to Chico Mall in addition to Sierra Sunrise Village and Pleasant Valley HS
 - Route 5 service reduced due to low ridership
 - Routes 2, 3, 4, and 5 evening service eliminated after 8:45 p.m. due to low ridership
- **Oroville**
 - Several improvements that provides hourly service from all four routes (20, 24, 25, 26, 27) from the previous service every two hours on three of these routes
 - Route 24 evening service expanded by one hour
 - Increase in Oroville vehicle revenue hours corresponds with a reduction in vehicle revenue hours for paratransit and other demand responsive services
- **Paradise**
 - Route 41 has minor changes to accommodate new Route 15
 - Route 46 between PTC and Feather River Hospital is found to have very low ridership (3 riders per day)
- **Other regional routes**
 - Would operate on the current service levels

Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transit Plan – July 2008

This Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transit Plan for Butte County was developed to improve mobility for Butte County seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons with low incomes through coordinated projects and partnerships.

This plan focuses on identifying needs specific to those population groups as well as identifying strategies to meet their needs. Federal planning requirements specify that designated recipients of certain sources of funds administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) must certify that projects funded with those federal dollars are derived from a coordinated plan.

Key identified needs included:

- Achieving efficient use of operational vehicles across Butte County (including B-Line and demand responsive service)
- Redefining the role of public school transportation providers in coordinated service
- Recognizing the existing B-Line service footprint in Butte County is limited for low-density areas due to farebox efficiency requirements
- Recognizing the infrastructure need to bring together public transit and human services to provide better service to targeted groups

Key goals included:

- Facilitating leadership and infrastructure: A Mobility Manager entity helps coordinate integration of human services with B-Line’s network of services
- Building services: The Mobility Manager, human service agencies, and B-Line collaborate to grow service capacity and develop/test new services in response to gaps in the existing service fabric
- Enhance information portals: Mobility Manager will provide human service transportation information, options, and training for users

The B-Line On-Board Passenger Survey – July 2008

CJI Research Corporation conducted an on-board passenger survey that summarized findings in 2008 for:

- Passenger profile
- Usage profile
- Passenger communication
- Service improvements
- Rider retention

This information has been updated in this planning process through a new on-board survey (see Chapter 4).

Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans – 2009 to 2012

All five of the cities within Butte County, as well as Butte County itself, have bicycle and/or pedestrian plans adopted by their elected officials. These plans were adopted between 2009 and 2012. The plans follow the format and contain the elements called for by California Streets and Highways Code Section 891.2. This code details the elements that a bicycle plan must include for proposed projects to be eligible for Bicycle Transportation Account (BTA) funding.

Prior to 2013, the Bicycle Transportation Account was a state funding source awarded annually to bicycle transportation projects that provide convenience and safety for bicycle commuters. In 2013, several bicycle and pedestrian funding programs, including the Bicycle Transportation Account, were consolidated into the Active Transportation Program. It is currently unknown whether or not the elements identified in California Streets and Highways Code Section 891.2 will be necessary to qualify for Active Transportation Program funding. However, this code still represents a best-practice for elements to include in a bicycle transportation plan.

Butte County

The 2011 Butte County Bicycle Plan (adopted June 14th, 2011) is the most recent master plan update for the County’s unincorporated areas. The plan complements the bicycle plans of the cities within Butte County in that it does not duplicate or supersede them but rather focuses on regional connectivity between the cities and the County’s unincorporated areas. The plan covers Existing Conditions, Goals, Objectives, and Policies, Proposed Bicycle Network Facilities, Attractors and Generators, Support Facilities, Connectivity and Gap Closures, Short Term Priorities for Grant Funding, and Funding.

City of Biggs

The Biggs Area Bicycle Transportation Plan (dated June 2011) serves as an update of the Biggs Area Bicycle Transportation Plan (dated October 2005). The policies identified in the 2011 plan are both based on concepts presented in the Draft Countywide Master Plan (dated September 1998), and the City of Biggs General Plan.

City of Chico

The most recently adopted bicycle plan for the City of Chico is the 2012 Chico Urban Area Bicycle Plan, which the City Council adopted on November 22, 2012. The City's previous bicycle plan was released in 2007 as part of a countywide planning effort.

City of Gridley

The City of Gridley Bicycle Plan was adopted in January 2011. The 2011 plan serves as an update to the City's previous plan, adopted in 2003.

City of Oroville

The current plan for the City of Oroville is the Draft 2009 City of Oroville Bicycle Transportation Plan. The plan serves as an update to the City of Oroville Bicycle Transportation Plan authored by the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG) and adopted by the Oroville City Council in December 1998.

Town of Paradise

The Town of Paradise Draft Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan is dated March 2012. The Town's previous bicycle plan was adopted in 2006. The 1994 Paradise General Plan also addresses the Town's interest in the completion of the Paradise Memorial Trailway.

ELEMENTS OF THIS REPORT

A significant amount of data was collected and analyzed in the development of this plan. Information from relevant background studies and reports are integrated in the various chapters. The remainder of this report includes the following chapters:

- Demographic data, including population densities and employment concentrations, as well as travel data is described in **Chapter 2**. This information provides a basis for identifying transportation markets in Butte County.
- Transit services are described in **Chapter 3**, with a focus on B-Line fixed-route service performance. The chapter also describes transit facilities and other regional operators. This information allows for an understanding of where services exist today, how existing services might be modified to serve additional needs, and the capacity of the existing network to accommodate new travel demands.
- **Chapter 4** provides an overview of the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in Butte County.
- Public and stakeholder input are summarized in **Chapter 5**, providing a selection of comments and concerns from representatives of key organizations. The chapter details the findings from surveys of transit users and non-users in Butte County, which include regular bicyclists and pedestrians.

- Based on the array of findings identified in Chapters 1 through 5, **Chapter 6** identifies transportation service considerations for developing a vision and set of goals for transit and non-motorized modes. It includes a set of performance measures and standards for transit.
- **Chapter 7** presents the Transit Service Plan, with a focus on short- and medium-term service changes and enhancements and direction for longer term service modifications. This chapter also includes an assessment of the modeled impacts on transit ridership and on overall greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- Non-motorized transportation facilities and programs are the focus of **Chapter 8**, which provides recommendations on which elements of existing bicycle plans should be prioritized for improvements to regional connectivity and how non-motorized transportation can better link to transit in Butte County.
- **Chapter 9** provides a financial model that focuses on transit services, because transit is managed by BCAG. Bicycle and pedestrian investments will ultimately be prioritized by the various jurisdictions, with BCAG seeking funding to support the development of local bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.