Transportation Alternatives for Rural Areas – A Regional Study

April 2017
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Executive Summary

In past regional planning efforts public outreach to rural populations has been challenging due to a general emphasis on planning in urban areas as part of reducing greenhouse gases as mandated in SB 375 and therefore these populations can be underrepresented in modern regional planning products. Yet in the Monterey Bay Area, these populations represent at a minimum 30 percent of the region’s total population. AMBAG sought to change this by conducting an extensive public outreach process for the 2035 MTP/SCS. The concerns voiced through the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS) public outreach process were incorporated into the Plan as implementation strategies that emphasize the need for a better regional dialogue and inclusive planning process to meet the needs of rural populations.

This study will help to implement the 2035 MTP/SCS and future plans by improving rural planning through public engagement and coordination of a diverse group of stakeholders allowing regional planners to better serve these residents. The study will establish transportation strategies and projects that can be identified and included in the local and regional plans. However, before detailed analysis could be performed, a regionally specific definition of rural needed to be established in order to target these rural communities and separate it from the more urban areas in the region.

A focused study of transportation alternatives in rural areas will help establish transportation strategies and projects that are coordinated with land use policies and economic development strategies helping to implement the 2035 MTP/SCS. The study will also result in transportation projects that better serve rural residents ensuring that the regional planning efforts provides a stronger voice to rural populations. This study accomplishes such through analysis of the following sections:

Defining ‘Rural’

AMBAG developed a sub-county designation methodology of rural and small town areas which incorporates measures of housing density and commuting index from the US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) “Rural Urban Commuting Area Code” at the Census tract level to establish a more precise measure of rural character. AMBAG applied this rural classification across the region then grouped rural areas by geographic proximity to each other to establish seven rural study areas. These study areas represent opportunities in rural areas where strategic investments in transit projects and other transportation services have the best chance for success. The seven rural study areas are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural Study Area</th>
<th>Census Designated Places</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monterey 1 (MO-1)</td>
<td>Pajaro, Los Lomas, Elkhorn, Prunedale, Castroville, Moss Landing, Boronda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey 2 (MO-2)</td>
<td>Chular, Gonzales, Soledad, Greenfield, King Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey 3 (MO-3)</td>
<td>Bradely, San Ardo, San Lucas, Pine Canyon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito 1 (SB-1)</td>
<td>Aromas, San Juan Buitista</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito 2 (SB-2)</td>
<td>South Hollister, Ridgemark, Tres Pinos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz 1 (SC-1)</td>
<td>Boulder Creek, Brookdale, Ben Lomond, Felton, Zayante, Lompico, Mt. Hermon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz 2 (SC-2)</td>
<td>Bonny Doon, Davenport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz 3 (SC-3)</td>
<td>La Selva, Larken Valley, Pajaro Dunes, Freedom, Corralitos, Amesti, Interlaken</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rural Alternative Transportation Assessment

A high level overview of the characteristics of the rural communities and the transit services that operate in the AMBAG region was conducted. This assessment is intended to help formulate an overarching problem statement regarding rural transit services in the region. Findings from this assessment include:

- Rural populations tend to be older, but not always the case
- Rural areas lag in employment and income levels with a few exceptions
- Commute times to work are longer for rural residents
- Even though a high number of people live relatively close to a transit line, transit service in rural areas tends to be infrequent
- Land use patterns in rural areas provide less opportunity for alternative transportation modes

Alternative Transportation in Rural Areas Problem Statement

Based on the findings in the Rural Alternative Transportation Assessment, along with input from the Rural Transportation Task Force, a working group that guided the development of the study, created a problem statement set to express the challenges for providing alternative forms of transportation to rural communities. That statement is:

*Transit service in rural communities often lack effectiveness and efficiency due to: cultural and language barriers that inhibit effective public engagement that hampers the planning process; lack of funding and funding partnership opportunities; land uses that do not support high quality transit service; and a lack of policies that govern the appropriate balances between providing regional connectivity and local access.*

Strategies for Rural Transportation Alternatives

The Rural Transportation Task Force instructed staff that the best way to move forward in addressing potential solutions to the rural challenges is to examine each rural study area for its own unique needs and apply best fit strategies in each rural area. Given there is no “one strategy fits all,” for all rural areas there are several high level strategies and opportunities that can be applied on a case by case basis depending on the characteristics of each individual rural area. Such strategies include:

- Expanded vanpools – Transit sponsored, schoolpools, employer incentive
- Mobility Hub Development
- Public/Private Partnerships with Transportation Network Companies
- Expanded Express Transit Service
- Workforce Housing Developments
Public Engagement in Rural Communities

The Rural Transportation Task Force emphasized the importance of public engagement with rural communities. Particularly because many of the rural areas encompassed in this study are largely lower income and minority populations that are challenging to induce participation in the transportation planning process. AMBAG regularly develops a regional Public Participation Plan which outlines public outreach strategies in more detail; however, the Rural Transportation Task Force felt it was important to outline some specific ideas to enhance public engagement in rural areas in this document. Further, these strategies will be integrated into the next update of the regional Public Participation Plan.

Conclusion

Improving the viability of alternative transportation in rural communities is a major challenge that at times is disengaged from the planning efforts the region undertakes to solve issues like congestion, greenhouse gas emission reduction and ongoing operations and maintenance. This study provides the extra attention needed to ensure that the challenges for rural areas to have access to alternative transportation are included in regional planning efforts and will provide direct input into implementation of AMBAG’s 2035 MTP/SCS as well as development of the 2040 MTP/SCS.
Chapter 1 - Defining ‘Rural’ for Our Region

**OVERVIEW**

The Rural Transit Improvement Initiative is a study that will establish transportation strategies and projects that are coordinated with land use policies and economic development strategies helping to implement the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS). The study will also result in transportation projects that better serve rural residents ensuring that the 2040 MTP/SCS provides a stronger voice to rural populations. As a part of this study, Staff has created a regional definition of rural to better target these populations.

**BACKGROUND**

In past regional planning efforts, public outreach to rural populations has been limited and therefore these populations are underrepresented in regional planning products. Yet these populations represent at a minimum 30 percent of the Monterey Bay Area’s population. AMBAG sought to change this by conducting an extensive public outreach process for the 2035 MTP/SCS. The concerns voiced through the 2035 MTP/SCS public outreach process were incorporated into the Plan as implementation strategies that emphasize the need for a better regional dialogue and inclusive planning process to meet the needs of rural populations.

This study will help to implement the 2035 MTP/SCS by improving rural planning through public engagement and coordination of a diverse group of stakeholders allowing regional planners to better serve these residents. The study will establish transportation strategies and projects that can be identified and included in the 2040 MTP/SCS. However, before detailed analysis can be performed, there needs to be a regionally specific definition of rural in order to target these communities and separate the analysis away from more urban areas in the region.

**DEFINING RURAL FOR THE MONTEREY BAY AREA**

Understanding and assessing the unique transportation needs of rural communities first requires a defined geographic scope of where these communities are located and what characteristics help define them as rural rather than urban or even suburban. Because rural communities are so diverse in make-up, there is no one size fits all definition or set of criteria that can be applied to classify a geographic area as rural or non-rural. Federal, State and even regional agencies often struggle with this problem mainly due to the issue of context when attempting to define an area as urban, suburban or rural.

For example, the City of Salinas, with a population over 160,000 and the largest jurisdiction in the AMBAG region, would be considered an urban area within the context of surrounding communities, but when considering the vast open and agricultural land surrounding Salinas and comparing metrics like population density to a city such as San Jose (just 50 miles to the north), Salinas is distinctly suburban to rural.
In order to help simplify this problem, AMBAG staff recommends defining rural based on comparing metrics and community characteristics within the AMBAG region only. AMBAG developed a sub-county designation of rural and small town areas which incorporates measures of housing density and commuting index from the US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) “Rural Urban Commuting Area Code” at the Census tract level to establish a more precise measure of rural character. This alternative residence definition includes six classifications: rural, small town, exurban, outer suburban, inner suburban and urban. This methodology is consistent with rural community analysis that the Housing Assistance Council, a national non-profit established to assist in affordable housing issues in rural or low income areas.

Beginning with the suggested thresholds for each of the six rural classifications and applied it to the region at the census tract level. In order to create classifications that were unique to the region, AMBAG modified the thresholds so that the rural classifications of specific jurisdictions and/or Census designated places would reflect what many local planning departments would anecdotally deem rural based on topographical, geo-political and other common sense observations. Additionally, in order to simplify the analysis, the six rural classifications were consolidated to four classifications.

Based off this analysis, the rural classification metrics are specifically defined in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Housing Density (Units per Acre)</th>
<th>Commute Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Tier 1</td>
<td>Less than 0.3</td>
<td>4 or Higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Tier 2</td>
<td>0.3 to 1.0</td>
<td>4 or Higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Town/Suburban</td>
<td>1.0 to 2.5</td>
<td>3 or Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban (non-rural)</td>
<td>More than 2.5</td>
<td>1 or Lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ESTABLISHING A STUDY AREA**

A rural study area was established a study area by first using the above classifications methodology by analyzing housing densities, population densities, work commute patterns and land uses to define rural areas. A tiered scale for these rural areas and then grouped them into individual study areas. These study areas represent opportunities in rural areas where strategic investments in transit projects and other transportation services have the best chance for success. A regional map of the rural study areas is included as Figures 1 through 3.
Figure 1: Monterey County Rural Classifications & Study Areas
Figure 2: San Benito County Rural Classifications & Study Areas
Figure 2: Santa Cruz County Rural Classifications & Study Areas
Chapter 2 – Rural Transit Assessment & Needs Identification

Introduction
The Rural Transit Assessment is a high level overview of the characteristics of the rural communities and the transit services that operate in the AMBAG region. This assessment is intended to help formulate an overarching problem statement regarding rural transit services in the region.

Existing Physical Characteristics
Rural areas in the AMBAG region are largely agricultural valleys, coastal mountain forests, other open lands and National Parks and Forests. Within this diverse geographic setting small incorporated cities and unincorporated census designated places or towns provide sparse population densities with limited transportation options. In the major agricultural valley in the region, the Salinas Valley, cities and towns are spread out over large distances while the coastal agricultural low lands of north Monterey County and south Santa Cruz County are restricted by coastal waterways with delicate ecosystems. In the coastal mountains and forests, topographical challenges hinder direct transportation access to neighboring communities and urban employment centers. AMBAG’s rural areas are also home to several state and national parks and forests that attract a sizeable amount of tourist every year.

Existing & Forecast Conditions

Rural Demographics
The demographics of rural areas vary widely throughout the region in terms of age and racial composition. Age is an important demographic indicator, as age statistics tend to correlate to different transportation needs. Younger populations need transportation to access education, job training, including a wider array of job types. Younger populations are also more open to using alternative forms of transportation to complete their trips. Older populations tend to have more specialized transportation needs. They require more specific job access as well as more flexibility to link trips (i.e. home to work to store to medical to home).

In rural areas of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties, the populations tend to be older, while rural Monterey County tracks younger in population. Table 1 below shows the average age in each total county verses the rural areas:
Table 1: Regional Average Age by County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Countywide Average Age</th>
<th>Average Age in Rural Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBAG Region</td>
<td>~ 35</td>
<td>~ 41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The younger rural populations in rural Monterey County could call for aligning transit service to be more direct in connecting these communities to major employment centers and educational institutions while transit service in rural San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties could be aligned with more flexibility.

The racial disparity between urban and rural areas of the region seems to be counter-intuitive. In general throughout the state, rural areas tend to have a higher percentage Hispanic/Latino population, yet in rural San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties, this is not the case. However a closer look at the numbers in Santa Cruz there is a major discrepancy between rural areas of the north (SC-1 & SC-2) and the rural areas of the south (SC-3). Rural northern Santa Cruz County is only 4.6 percent Hispanic/Latino while rural southern Santa Cruz County is 71.1 percent Hispanic/Latino. Rural Monterey County is majority Hispanic/Latino with 69.5 percent. Table 2 shows the percentage of Hispanic/Latino make-up of each county and rural area:

Table 2: Regional Hispanic/Latino Population Percentage by County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>County % Hispanic/Latino</th>
<th>Rural Areas % Hispanic/Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>23.7%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBAG Region</td>
<td>~ 38%</td>
<td>~ 43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*SC-1 (4.6%), SC-3 (71.1%)

These demographic are important in understanding the complex transportation needs of the regions rural communities. They help identify the needs for different models of transit service and underscore the importance in factoring in Title VI and environmental justice perspectives into planning improved transit services to the rural areas of the region.
Economics

A successful transportation network is at the foundation of a region’s ability to provide economic opportunity. While the region has fared better recently following the Great Recession, rural areas still lag behind in employment and income.

Meaningful access to jobs remains the top concern for rural communities. Due to the high cost of living in the urban areas, many people opt to live in the more rural areas as a way to save on housing costs. This in turn causes issues with designing rural roads and transit services that can help create better access to employment centers, education and health care services.

On average the region’s rural areas are a full percentage point higher in unemployment. This necessitates prioritizing transit services that connect rural areas with job centers. Table 3 below depicts the unemployment rate for each county:

Table 3: Regional Unemployment Figures by County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Countywide Unemployment Rate</th>
<th>Rural Areas Unemployment Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBAG Region</td>
<td>~ 7%</td>
<td>~ 8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Income levels are important indicators as they give insight to the travel needs and resources of rural communities. Median income in rural communities in Monterey and San Benito Counties are on average 11 percent lower than the counties as a whole. Santa Cruz County has a major income disparity between northern rural communities and southern rural communities with income levels the northern rural areas 28 percent higher than the county as a whole while income levels in the southern rural areas are 20 percent below the median countywide income level. This disparity is driven by the proximity to Silicon Valley employment as the northern rural areas have far better access to high paying jobs in Silicon Valley, while southern rural areas as a function of distance and lack of transportation access do not have the same level of access to Silicon Valley. Table 4 lists median income levels for all three counties:
Table 4: Regional Median Income by County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Countywide Median Income (in 000s)</th>
<th>Rural Areas Median Income (in 000s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>$58.6</td>
<td>$53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td>$67.9</td>
<td>$59.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>$66.9</td>
<td>$83.4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBAG Region</td>
<td>~ $64.5</td>
<td>$65.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*SC-1 ($93.3), SC-3 ($53.5)

Transportation Characteristics

Roadways
State Routes 1, 9, 25, 129 and 156 as well as US Highway 101 are the regions five main roadways that link rural areas to other rural areas as well as urban areas in the region.

- **SR 1:** Aligning on the Pacific Coast, SR 1 runs the length of the region from the Monterey/San Luis Obispo County line through coastal Big Sur to the Santa Cruz/San Mateo County line through Santa Cruz north coast. SR 1, which varies from two to six lanes, is the main link between Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties including the rural areas in south Santa Cruz County and north Monterey County. This highway is notorious for heavy peak hour congestion including heavy freight/agricultural usage in northern Monterey County/southern Santa Cruz County.

- **SR 9:** Linking the San Lorenzo Valley communities of Felton, Ben Lomond, Brookdale and Boulder Creek to Santa Cruz. SR 9 is a narrow two-lane highway with many turns and narrow bridges. It also serves as the main street for the San Lorenzo Valley communities.

- **SR 25:** This route provides access to the Pinnacles National Park east entrance in San Benito County, running parallel to the San Andreas Fault and to the Gabilan Range and Diablo Range. SR 25 passes through the communities of Paicines and Tres Pinos and the city of Hollister. SR 25 continues northwest from Hollister, intersecting with SR 156, and ends at U.S. Highway 101 in Gilroy.

- **SR 129:** This route begins at SR 1 before head it northeast into the town of Watsonville along Riverside Road. SR 129 is a two-lane road that roughly parallels the Pajaro River along the Santa Cruz-San Benito County line before entering San Benito County near Chittenden to end at U.S. Highway 101.

- **SR 156:** From SR 1 to U.S. Highway 101 in Prunedale SR 156 is a heavily traveled two-lane section and like SR 129, SR156 provides an east-west connection through rural communities between SR 1 and U.S. Highway 101.
- **U.S. Highway 101**: This four-lane route serves as the main corridor that links the rural cities and towns in southern Monterey County to Salinas and Monterey. Additionally, U.S. Highway 101 links the Salinas Valley to San Jose and the greater Bay Area.

**Commute Times**

Commute times and mode split are important metrics for assessing the transportation network’s ability to increase access, mobility and quality of life for rural communities. Commute times underscore the amount of resources measured in time needed to access employment opportunities while mode splits are an indicator as to the effectiveness of alternative transportation (transit, biking and walking) in providing services to meet the needs of rural communities.

As a region, commute times for rural residents are four minutes longer in each direction. This additional eight minutes a day adds up to one day and nine hours of extra commute time per year. Interestingly, in Monterey County the commute time for rural areas is slightly shorter than the overall county average. This could be in part due to quick access to the highway system in rural areas, meaning residence do not have to navigate slower local streets and roads as often to reach the highway as much as urban residents have to. On the other end of the spectrum, rural Santa Cruz County residents need an extra 10.6 minutes each way to get to work. That adds up to three days and 17 hours per year. Table 5 lists average commute times in each county:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Countywide Commute Times</th>
<th>Rural Area Commute Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBAG Region</td>
<td>~ 26</td>
<td>~ 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rural populations in the region drive alone 73 percent of the time. The remaining 27 percent trips are by carpool/vanpool, transit, bike or walking. Rural portions of San Benito County have a favorable shift in mode, using alternative transportation three percentage points higher in rural areas than in the county as a whole. Both Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties see shifts towards single occupancy vehicles in the rural areas but not by a major margin. This suggests that designing alternative transportation services can be done better in all areas of the region not just rural areas.

**Transit Service**

Monterey-Salinas Transit (MST), Santa Cruz METRO (SC METRO) and San Benito County Local Transportation Authority (LTA) are the public transit agencies for the region. Below are maps depicting
the combined geographic coverage of all three transit service areas (Figures 4-9). The service areas are overlaid on the rural study area to show that most of the rural study area has some access to fixed route transit service.
Figure 4: Regional Rural Transit Coverage
Figure 5: North Santa Cruz County (SC-1 & SC-2) Rural Transit Coverage
Figure 6: South Santa Cruz County (SC-3) Rural Transit Coverage
Figure 7: North San Benito County (SB-1 & SB-2) Rural Transit Coverage
Figure 8: North Monterey County (MO-1) Rural Transit Coverage
Figure 9: South Monterey County (MO-2 & MO-3) Rural Transit Coverage
As a region, over 94,000 transit service hours are dedicated to rural communities either as local circulator routes or intercity routes that connect rural communities to the more urban areas of the region. This amounts to 19 percent of all transit service regionally.

In a measure of effectiveness, fixed route rural transit carries about 850,000 rides per year. This equates to 9.04 passengers per hour of service, or less than half of the passengers per hour that transit in the region provides as a whole.

Table 6: List of Majority Rural Transit Routes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transit Agency</th>
<th>Transit Lines / Routes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MST</td>
<td>22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 84, 85, 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB LTA</td>
<td>County Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC METRO</td>
<td>33, 34, 35/35A, 40, 41, 42, 72, 74, 75, 79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communities access transit at one of over 600 bus stops in the rural areas. This accounts for 21 percent of all bus stops in the region. These 600 bus stops vary in type, amenities and condition. In general, bus stops in rural areas are more difficult to upgrade due to geography, right of way issues, lack of pedestrian facilities, among other challenges. It is not uncommon for a rural bus stop to be only a pole with a sign on the side of a road.

Frequency of service is the most influential factor in influencing access to transit, trip times, connectivity and overall convenience of using transit. In Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, there are rural areas that benefit from being located along intercity high-frequency service, but this is generally the exception as most rural areas are served by transit at a low frequency, some only served by fixed route service a few times a day.

Low frequency is generally a function of the difficulties of operating transit in rural areas. Longer distances and lower speeds on rural roads drive up operating costs and make it difficult to provide service in a cost effective way. Combined with low expectations for ridership, due to the low density environment, operating rural transit service more than once an hour is extremely financially challenging for transit operators. Table 7 outlines the frequency and span of rural service provided by each transit agency:
Providing transit service in rural areas is a major challenge for all transit providers. Transit agencies cite lack of density, longer and less direct distances, lower speeds, higher costs for infrastructure improvements, limited ability to thoughtfully engage the community on transportation issues and a limit of operational data as the major reasons rural transit tends to be less effective and efficient than mass transit in urban areas.

Table 7: Transit Service – Frequency and Span

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transit Agency</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Span</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MST</td>
<td>6 trips per day to every 30 min</td>
<td>5:25am – 11:06pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB LTA</td>
<td>16 trips per day at various times</td>
<td>6:55am – 5:15pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC METRO</td>
<td>2 trips per day to every 30 min</td>
<td>5:45am – 11:00pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3 - Alternative Transportation in Rural Areas Problem Statement

After initial feedback and discussion on the assessment, the Task Force brainstormed an overall problem statement. The ideas generated are listed below:

- Land uses do not support high quality transit
- Need for more centralized workforce housing and jobs centers
- Lack of interregional and/or commuter connections to Silicon Valley
- Cultural and language barriers in public engagement during the planning process
- Lack of funding and funding partnerships
- Challenging to provide adequate frequency
- Difficulty in adequately planning express service
- Unclear process for development/project review for transit impacts

Each issue is both dependent and independent of the others and could be grouped into themes based on overlapping issues.
The statement expresses the challenges for providing alternative forms of transportation to rural communities. That statement is:

Transit service in rural communities lacks effectiveness and efficiency due to: cultural and language barriers that inhibit effective public engagement that hampers the planning process; lack of funding and funding partnership opportunities; land uses that do not support high quality transit service; and a lack of policies that govern the appropriate balances between providing regional connectivity and local access.

These issues and will be used as a foundation for discussing potential transportation and land use policies, programs and projects that can help solve these problems. What is clear is that given very limited resources for fixed route transit service, alternatives such as expanded vanpools, deviated fixed route service, public/private partnerships with on demand ridesharing services and other alternatives must be explored in greater detail.
Chapter 4 - Strategies for Rural Transportation Alternatives

The following set of strategies and projects encompass only a fraction of transportation and land use ideas available to communities to address access and mobility issues for all types of communities. Through a series of collaborative meetings in 2016, AMBAG staff, consultants, and agency, municipal and non-governmental partners assembled an SCS Toolkit with examples of projects and best practices to help achieve regional and local sustainability goals and emission reduction targets through efforts to provide housing, jobs and services in proximity to one another and to better link them by transit and safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access. During that development, specific strategies were crafted for rural areas to coincide with the SCS Toolkit.

These strategies were discussed by the Rural Transportation Task Force and considered to have the most potential in making a positive impact on improving transportation options in rural areas. The strategies were customized and applied to the rural study areas on a case by case basis knowing that not all rural areas have the same characteristics. Also to be noted, these strategies are conceptual and high level in detail and should be developed in much greater detail before implementation.

Sustainable Communities Strategy Implementation Plan, Toolkits and Opportunity Areas

The SCS Implementation Plan tools are grouped into three “Toolkits”: Infill Housing, Economic Development and Transportation. Within each of these Toolkits there is a summary of all of its tools that indicates which ones are most applicable to the variety of settings or “Place Types” found in the region. These Place Types were developed prior to the Toolkits to help inform local and regional efforts to achieve MTP/SCS objectives. Because individual communities in the region may include a range of Place Types and transitions between them, tools in the Toolkit may be useful in a variety of settings. These pages include detailed descriptions of each tool, which are intended to inform community discussions and decision making by local agencies and municipalities.

Together, any number of tools from one or more sections of the Toolkit can be used to improve quality of life, support investment, and improve safety and accessibility in any of the diverse communities, including rural communities that make up the region.

Infill Housing Toolkit

The Infill Housing Toolkit is a suite of related components that help assist communities in developing a range of infill housing types in specific locations. The three components are: Model General Plan Policies, Design Standards and Guidelines and Overly Zone Policies. Thirteen infill housing types are studied in the toolkit, and guidance is given on appropriate land use designations, general or specific plan policies and appropriate locations based on communities goals.

Economic Development Toolkit

The Economic Development Toolkit is a matrix of infrastructure finance tools that are designed to raise the capital funds needed to fund economic development through infrastructure improvements. There
are six categories of financing tools and for each tool there is a comprehensive description, evaluation and case study so users can research and evaluate the various options for funding large infrastructure projects and programs.

**Transportation Toolkit**
The Transportation Toolkit is a matrix of transportation strategies that are consistent with the measures outlined in the MTP/SCS. Each strategy includes visualizations, descriptions or design guidelines and an analysis of applicability based on the characteristics of each place type. Other characteristics such as community benefits, impacts and constraints are also evaluated for each transportation strategy.

**Opportunity Areas**
Opportunity Areas are places in the region with the highest chance for successful sustainable growth in the future; they are generally located where Transit Priority Areas (TPAs) and Economic Development Areas (EDAs) overlap, within the AMBAG region.

The first step in the identification of Opportunity Areas was to connect AMBAG’s Place Type typologies to sets of transportation improvements that facilitate improved mobility, access and circulation for the region’s residents. To accomplish this an initial draft set of Opportunity Areas was identified and designated as either “existing/planned” or “potential,” as a way to help inform appropriate transportation investments and the identification of Transit Priority Projects (TPPs) in the AMBAG region.

The results of this analysis provided an initial set of draft Opportunity Areas, which include proposed boundaries, underlying land use Place Types, supporting graphics and an explanation justifying the selection. Opportunity Areas are used to identify a set of potential Transit Priority Projects that will support AMBAG’s SCS. Several rural communities were identified as Opportunity Areas and could leverage the strategies within the toolkits to improve transportation alternatives. The following strategies build off of the effort of creating tools that rural communities can leverage to improve quality of life in their areas.

**User Subsidized Program with Taxi and Transportation Network Companies**
Providing high quality fixed route transit service in low-density communities generally leads to high transit subsidies and underperforming ridership. Transit agencies around the state and nation are beginning to look for alternatives to traditional fixed route transit that is more appropriate for low-density environments and achieves improved financial and operational sustainability. Some transit agencies are engaging in partnerships with the private sector to provide service to low-density suburban and rural areas where fixed route service cannot be sustained.

By partnering with taxi companies and transportation network companies (TNC’s), transit agencies are essentially extending a user subsidy program to provide rural neighborhood based transportation at a lower cost. Generally speaking, these user subsidy programs are created by the transit agency, in partnership with the taxi and transportation network companies, by defining a geographic service area
in which user’s rides within the service area performed by the taxi and transportation network companies while the user’s fare is subsidize by the transit agency.

The advantage to this service model extends to all parties involved and is most appropriate for facilitating trips within a rural area or linking rural communities to high quality transit corridors. This strategy allows transit agencies to repurpose ineffective transit service to higher demand corridors without abandoning the unique needs of rural communities. Users in rural communities would have access to a subsidized transportation alternative that is on demand, helping user’s access destinations within their communities and high quality transit that may be inaccessible otherwise. Taxi and transportation network companies would gain access to new markets since the subsidy could increase demand for their services in areas that these companies normally do not serve.

There are some obstacles to this strategy. As a relatively new alternative, the public/private partnership between transit agencies and taxi/TNC’s has so far targeted suburban areas and it is unclear as to at what point a service area is too rural and cannot generate enough demand for all day service regardless of subsidy. This means outreach and recruitment for taxi and TNC drivers is key. Also many rural residents do not have access to a smartphone device that is typically needed to use a TNC’s service. However the option to complete the trip with a phone call to a taxicab will also be available to those without a smartphone. In addition, the taxicab option will allow the ability to use cash. In general, developing a public/private partnership for ridesharing alternatives should be done on a case by case basis to generate specific areas, neighborhoods, fare subsidy policy, reporting and data sharing and other details.

**Case Study:**
Livermore Amador Valley Transportation Authority (LAVTA) recently launched a pilot program called “Go Dublin!” in which LAVTA, in partnership with taxi/TNC’s and the City of Dublin, subsidizes 50 percent up to $5 all rides within the suburban city of Dublin. In the report outlining the program states that by the third year, “Go Dublin!” anticipates to have provided over 12,000 rides annually for a cost of around $64,000 in West Dublin alone; effectively providing more rides at a lower cost than the current fixed route transit service that is currently operating in that area.

**Potential Areas for Strategy**
The rural areas in the AMBAG region where this strategy could be effective are: MO-1, MO-2, SC-2 and SB-1.

**Transit Sponsored Vanpools**
The idea of carpools and vanpools, more broadly knowing as ridesharing, is not new. However rideshare programs are poised to better utilize in the AMBAG region. Traditionally vanpools are organized by regional transportation agencies, individual jurisdictions, public institutions, local non-profits or informal grass-roots neighborhood vanpools. However, transit agencies have recently begun supporting vanpool networks in lieu of traditional fixed route transit service.
Vanpool groups in rural areas either self-organize or are assisted in organizing by the transit agency. Then the group applies to be a transit sponsored vanpool. While arrangements vary, in general the transit agency supplies the van along with the subsequent maintenance to the group. In return the vanpool group pays a monthly fare that can be shared among members to the transit agency. Occasionally the vanpool fees are subsidized or paid for by an employer as part of an employee benefit.

This strategy is advantageous for transit agencies as it provides a transportation alternative at a lower capital and operating cost that can be more effective and specialized for the needs of rural areas. By having the administrative and maintenance support of the transit agency, vanpool groups can attract more members and have a better probability of long term success. Transit sponsored vanpool groups could have better success at recruiting people to try an alternative to driving alone because of the local organizing efforts made by friends, neighbors and fellow community members with similar transportation needs. Additionally, successful vanpool groups can potentially grow ridership and participation to a point that traditional fixed route transit could become financially and operationally sustainable, effectively demonstration to a transit agency the demand for high quality transit service in their community.

**Case Study:**
King County Metro operates the largest publically owned vanpool network in the nation and has developed the infrastructure to supply and maintain 2,100 vans which provide over 3 million rides per year. King County Metro provides the vans, fuel, maintenance, insurance, safety training, vanpool group administration support and vanpool group recruitment support all for a monthly fee. The monthly fee is based on mileage, the size of the van and the number of commuting days in a month. Group membership ranges from five members to twenty; they assign one or more driver(s), a bookkeeper and a mutually beneficial pickup and drop-off location.

**Potential Areas for Strategy**
All rural areas in the AMBAG region could benefit from this strategy.

**Combined Land Use Development with Transit Strategies**

Ultimately alternative transportation options are challenging in rural areas because of the land use patterns inherent in rural communities. Fixed route transit thrives in high live/work density corridors and walkable communities that have low vehicle miles traveled (VMT) exist where employment centers and housing are in close, dense proximity. Rural areas have neither of these characteristics.

However, as these communities grow and change there are opportunities to link land use changes and developments with higher quality transit service. Such strategies include:
• Rural Transit Oriented Development
• Workforce housing along transit corridors
• Mobility hubs

**Rural Transit Oriented Development**
Rural Transit Oriented Development, or RTOD, is a type of community development that includes a mixture of housing, office, retail and/or other amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located near public transportation station or hub. Much like traditional Transit Oriented Development, RTOD uses the same elements but at a lower intensity of development. RTOD would be best explored in rural areas MO-1, MO-2 and SC-2 where rural towns and jurisdictions are linked to a major transit corridor and basic town centers already exist. The transit service needed in these areas would need to be served by high quality express type transit service in order to link them to urban areas in a time effective manner. Essentially develop a centralized mixed use type of development along a corridor while simultaneously ramping up higher frequency express transit service.

**Workforce Housing along Transit Corridors**
This issue of inadequate workforce housing is threatening the economic vitality of many communities nationwide. While local jurisdictions continue to tackle this issue, workforce housing continues to be an attractive tool to help many working families obtain quality housing. The exact how to of developing workforce housing is beyond the scope of this study, however as jurisdictions evaluate and develop workforce housing plans and projects, jurisdictions should integrate transportation concerns into such projects. As workforce housing plans become more popular, particularly in rural areas for agricultural workers, alternative transportation options granting workforce housing residence access to destinations beyond just employment centers is key.

**Mobility Hubs**
Mobility hubs are transportation centers located opportunity that could be served by higher-frequency express transit. They provide an array of transportation services, amenities and urban design enhancements. They are places of connectivity where different modes of travel — walking, biking, ridesharing and transit services — come together seamlessly. All of these features can help travelers connect to regional transit services in addition to making short trips within the neighborhood to other destinations. These centralized multimodal developments in rural towns can be linked by rapid transit service creating connectivity to urban destinations and the greater region. Rural Areas SC-1, SC-3, SB-1, SB-2 and MO-2 have the most potential for leveraging Mobility Hubs as a tool for improved multimodal transportation options.
Table 8: Matrix of Rural Areas and Transportation Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Strategies</th>
<th>Rural Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User Subsidy Program</td>
<td>MO-1, MO-2, SC-2, SB-1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit Sponsored Vanpools</td>
<td>MO-11, MO-2, MO-3, SC-1, SC-2, SC-3, SB-1, SB-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Transit Oriented Development</td>
<td>MO-1, MO-2, SC-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Housing along Transit Corridors</td>
<td>MO-1, MO-2, SC-2, SC-3, SB-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility Hubs</td>
<td>MO-1, MO-2, SC-3, SB-1</td>
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</tbody>
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Chapter 5 – Public Outreach and Engagement in Rural Areas

Emphasis on Public Engagement in Rural Communities

Meeting the public engagement needs of rural populations poses specific challenges, such as lack of Internet access, citizen experience with planning processes and potential distrust of outsiders. AMBAG regularly develops a regional Public Participation Plan which outlines public outreach strategies in more detail; however the Rural Transportation Task Force felt it was important to outline some specific ideas to enhance public engagement in rural areas in this document. A list of strategies, method and contacts for quick reference was developed for planning departments and agencies as needed. Further, these outreach concepts will be incorporated into the next update of the regional Public Participation Plan.

Getting the Word Out:

- Incorporate public meetings, town halls, outreach event information as supplemental information in utility bills
- Use Spanish language radio to announce public outreach information
- Partner with churches and other faith base institutions to help disseminate information

Outreach Strategies:

- Pop-up events in non-traditional settings and times
- Leverage partners such as schools, businesses, churches, non-profits to host events on behalf public agencies

Role of the Rural Transportation Task Force

The Rural Transportation Task Force (RTTF) is an advisory group consisting of representatives from the Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs), transit districts, local planners, non-profits and community organizations such as Community Bridges, the California Rural Legal Assistance and the Central Coast Alliance for Health.

The RTTF was instrumental in identifying the communities of concern and guided the methodology for defining the rural study areas of this plan and were consulted on various topics ranging from economic development challenges in rural areas to transit service operations. It was the idea of the RTTF to organize the different transportation and land use strategies by individual rural areas with their understanding that not all rural areas are the same. They also brainstormed outreach strategies and reviewed the progress of the study at specific junctions in the project.

AMBAG will continue to consult with our partner agencies and rural stakeholders on planning and transportation matters as defined by the AMBAG’s Public Participation Plan. Additionally AMBAG’s Planning Directors Forum, a quarterly meeting among the regions planning departments which has also many RTTF members, could weigh in on rural transportation matters or request more specific attention from a gathering of the RTTF if needed.
Appendix

Rural Transportation Task Force Membership

- California Rural Legal Assistance
- CHISPA
- Building Healthy Communities
- South County Outreach Efforts (SCORE)
- ACTION Council of Monterey County, Inc.
- Monterey County Public Health
- City of Greenfield
- City of Gonzales
- City of Soledad
- City of King City
- County of Monterey
- Central Coast Center for Independent Living
- Community Bridges
- Santa Cruz County Public Health
- County of Santa Cruz
- City of Watsonville
- Transportation Agency of Monterey County
- Monterey Salinas Transit
- Caltrans District 5
- San Benito Council of Governments
- Santa Cruz METRO
- Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
- Hartnell College