

VI. MAJOR ISSUES

The purpose of this section is to frame issues that need to be addressed by policy makers in order to achieve improvements described in Section V—System Needs and Improvements. The process to determine issues included identifying organizational mandates, confirming Monterey-Salinas Transit’s mission, and assessing MST’s external opportunities and threats, as well as internal strengths and weaknesses. Special attention was paid to stakeholders – that is, individuals or organizations that can place a claim on MST’s attention or resources or are affected by MST’s service. The following three issues were identified as fundamental policy questions and challenges that affect the accomplishment of MST’s mission – leading, advocating, and delivering quality public transportation.

1. Will cities and county foster transit-friendly land-use planning?
2. How will MST successfully meet the challenges of adequately serving the redeveloping areas of the former Fort Ord?
3. How will the state and federal governments and the local community back additional funding to satisfy current and future demand?

A. Will Cities and County Foster Transit-friendly Land-use Planning?

Issue. Increasing population growth and difficult-to-serve land-use patterns (sprawl) have contributed to inefficient and costly transit routing, unserved areas, and increasing traffic congestion. Development needs to be better coordinated with existing and future transit services. This coordination will help build ridership and help to achieve operating efficiencies. As discussed in the Community Expectations section (Chapter II. System Description), the community is becoming more supportive of land use policies which concentrate development and community activities in more “town-center” or neighborhood alignments.

Factors making this issue a fundamental challenge to MST. Difficult-to-serve land-use patterns are fundamental challenges to MST’s ability to deliver quality public transportation.

Most shopping centers, for example, are not transit-friendly, causing buses to leave main thoroughfares and travel through parking lots to reach the stores. This routing adds time and expense, as well as the increased danger of operating buses in busy parking lots. These large parking lots encourage driving and do not contain park-and-ride areas. Additionally, buses frequently do not have safe turnout room on busy streets, causing passengers to have to walk in front of dangerous traffic to board buses. Lack of joint development makes it difficult for transit passengers to combine work trips with incidental errands, such as childcare or shopping.

Furthermore, pedestrian access to bus stops is frequently obstructed: cul-de-sacs and walled communities do not allow easy sidewalk access to transit stops. Passengers are frequently forced to walk in fields because sidewalks have not been constructed. Even worse, passengers have to walk on very narrow sidewalks next to multilane highways to get to their stops. Safe, secure, walkable, and attractive streets and sidewalks foster transit.

Consequences of failing to address this issue. MST has an important stake in local land-use planning. Failing to address this issue will result in continued inefficient and costly transit routing and unserved areas. Fortunately, some local jurisdictions recognize that transit can be used to facilitate smart growth, because transit helps reduce traffic congestion while improving air quality. The effectiveness of transit will be reduced and its cost increased unless transit-friendly land-use planning becomes a reality.

Influencing development patterns to promote transit use and to encourage other alternatives to driving, such as bicycling and walking, is a long-term strategy. The results, however, will have a lasting influence on community mobility.

Strategy. Because it cannot implement land-use strategies unilaterally, MST needs to advocate transit-oriented development to local government bodies. MST must strengthen alliances with city and county governments to ensure zoning regulations and development plans are transit-friendly. The County of Monterey is proposing language in its general plan update with many of the principals of New Urbanism and Smart Growth, along with transit-oriented

development guidelines as listed on page II-8. MST is actively supporting these efforts. See Strategic Goal 1.a in Section VII—Strategies for details.

B. How Will MST Successfully Meet the Challenges of Adequately Serving the Redeveloping Areas of the Former Fort Ord?

Issue. In the eleven years since its closing in 1994, the former Fort Ord still remains vastly unredeveloped. CSUMB is the largest activity center on the former military base, yet residential redevelopment has been largely limited to Seaside Highlands at its extreme southern edge. Several large-scale residential and mixed-use developments are working their ways through the entitlement and permitting processes and are nearing construction. MST will need to radically reconfigure its route network serving this area in order to meet the transportation needs of the new residents and businesses.

Factors making this issue a fundamental challenge to MST. With lack of water limiting growth throughout most of the Monterey Peninsula, the former Fort Ord is the only area that will be allowed to grow substantially, with over 6,000 new housing units slated for construction. In addition, large-scale retail and office-park developments are planned for this area, which would generate more demand for transit service. MST’s current level of service through this area on Lines 16/17 Edgewater-Marina operates hourly on weekdays and Saturdays, and only Line 17 operates on Sundays with headways at 90 minutes. As a part of the Fort Ord Reuse Authority’s Capital Improvement Program, MST is supposed to receive \$480,000 annually for 14 years to fund bus purchases and approximately \$5.1 million over the next eight years for transit facility construction, including the Monterey Bay Operations Center. These funds are generated through development impact fees. However, these funds are limited to capital improvements only – there are no operating dollars that will flow from the redevelopment of Fort Ord. In that regard, it is essential that MST find other sources of revenue to pay for expanded service in this area.

Several large projects have been approved or are in the process of being approved for the former Fort Ord. Each has been designed with varying degrees of transit-friendliness. The developer of Seaside Highlands, the first phases of which are already built and occupied, was

required by the city of Seaside to build bus pull-outs along Coe Avenue and install shelters at each location. Most homes in this development are within walking distance of a stop on Line 17 Edgewater-Marina. Similarly, Marina Heights will be built as an exclusively residential neighborhood, offering a moderate degree of access to transit for its future inhabitants. University Villages is being planned as a more integrated commercial, residential and office development that is very transit-friendly. East Garrison has also been designed with transit in mind; however, its remote location at the extreme eastern end of the former Fort Ord presents challenges in linking it to MST's existing route network.

Consequences of failing to address this issue. If the new developments on the former Fort Ord are not designed with transit in consideration, it will make serving these areas extremely difficult and expensive. Inefficient transit routing will not encourage residents to leave their cars at home, thereby increasing the number of single-occupancy automobiles on the area's roadway network. This also leads to higher levels of air pollution and a diminished quality of life due to extra time spent on the road sitting in traffic.

Strategy. MST regularly submits comments on new developments to municipal and county planning agencies during the environmental review process. However, these comments are non-binding as MST is not a regulatory agency. It is important for MST planning staff to continue to build bridges with the local communities, their leaders and elected officials as well as developers. Working closely with the developer of University Villages, MST has been able to positively impact the design of the project. MST is also on the newly formed Building/Design Committee of the Competitive Clusters program of the Monterey County Department of Economic Development. This will provide a forum for MST to educate local developers and builders on the importance of including transit in their projects. See Strategic Goal 1.b in Section VII—Strategies for details.

C. How Will the State and Federal Governments and the Community Back Additional Funding to Satisfy Current and Future Demand?

Issue. MST faces a major capital and operating funding shortfall of \$100 million over the next five years. Federal funding has remained in limbo for nearly two years as of this writing because Congress has not passed a transportation authorization bill. MST's funding is stuck at FY 2004 levels while its costs – fuel, insurance, labor – are at FY 2006 prices. For the last several years, the state has been withholding Proposition 42 funds from transportation in an attempt to balance the budget. In all, over \$5 billion in state transportation money has been diverted to the general fund, while Monterey County stands to lose even more money due to cost overruns on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. Counties and municipalities have been feeling the pinch, too, as the state withholds local sales tax money that should go to local government. Drastic cuts in services have resulted, including the closing of Salinas' libraries – an unfortunate action that has garnered notoriety around the world. To satisfy current and future demand, MST needs an adequate and predictable local and regional funding source.

Factors making this issue a fundamental challenge to MST. Lack of adequate funding prevents MST from fulfilling its mission of delivering quality public transportation. The five-year funding shortfall is composed of \$49 million in operating improvements and \$58 million in capital requirements. These unfunded items are listed in Section V—System Needs and Improvements. Funding is needed in the following areas:

- *Expanding and Improving Service.* Population growth in Monterey County requires a corresponding growth in public transit. As documented in Section V, many new and redeveloping areas of the community do not have adequate transit services. Additionally, long term funding of feeder bus service is needed to support rail service in Santa Clara County. Current customers also will need improvements in types of service, higher frequency, and expanded spans of service to meet growing demand for transit service as the business cycle again creates more jobs and traffic congestion worsens.

- *Expanding and Improving Fleet.* During the five years covered by this plan, 17 buses need to be replaced. Furthermore, if service were to expand as shown on Exhibit V-1 an additional 29 buses and 2 trolleys will be needed. Additionally, the RIDES program needs 17 replacement vans.
- *Facilities.* The Thomas D. Albert Division in Monterey continues to operate at a level far beyond its intended use. A new operations and maintenance facility is planned for construction at the former Fort Ord; however, funding is short by \$27.5 million. A transit station will be constructed in Marina during the 5-year period, with a funding shortfall totaling \$2.6 million.

Consequences of failing to address this issue. If adequate funding is not available, then service will not keep pace with increased population and development. Since FY 2001, MST has cut its core services by 12.5%. If there are no additional federal, state and local operating dollars, MST will continue to have to cut service and/or raise fares. This will lead to less mobility for the members of the community, and transit will not be able to contribute as much to reducing traffic congestion, air pollution, and energy consumption.

Strategy. MST needs to promote the value of transit so that the community comes to understand the benefits of transit and is willing to support it in securing additional funding sources. In recent years, TAMC has researched several ways to raise these additional funds for transportation, including a sales tax, development impact fees, an agricultural based tax and an increase in the transient occupancy tax (TOT) levied on visitors staying at local hotels, motels and lodges. The first of these measures to be put before voters is a half-cent sales tax for transportation, currently scheduled for June of 2006. Because it is a dedicated tax, it must receive a 2/3rds majority – no small feat for an electorate that is traditionally anti-tax. Over the course of FY 2006, TAMC is also asking local city councils and the county board of supervisors to implement a development impact fee. See Strategic Goal 1.c in Section VII—Strategies for details.