

B-Line Routing Study Public Workshop Summary

Project Overview

The Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG), owner and operator of Butte Regional Transit (B-Line), is performing an in-depth routing study of the B-Line services. This study will provide a thorough and comprehensive analysis of all aspects of B-Line operations to determine how best to improve the transit system within available resources. The study will evaluate current routes, schedules, passes, technologies, ridership, marketing, fare policy, media, finances, vehicle size and fleet, facilities, and other assets. The goal of this study is to figure out how riders use the B-Line system, what routes best serve riders, and how to improve the user experience for the region's future mobility needs.



To carry out the goal of this study, BCAG hosted a virtual workshop that analyzed the existing conditions, asked residents in the community for feedback, and discussed the future of transit in Butte County. This meeting took place on July 14th, 2022, online via Zoom, with a total of sixteen community members who joined.

Meeting Format

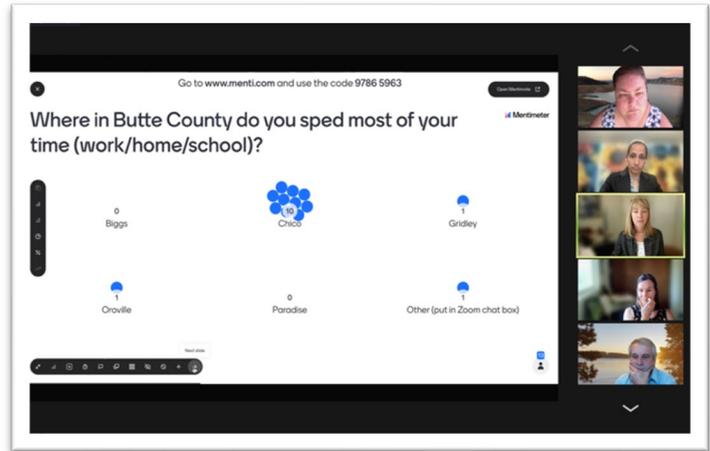
The meeting started with a welcome given by Gladys Cornell, of AIM Consulting. Cornell then explained how attendees would be able to participate and provide input throughout the meeting using Zoom chat or emoji reaction features. She also let the audience know that the recording will be posted on the BCAG and B-Line websites along with a summary and encouraged them to share it with their family, friends, and personal networks who may not have been able to join that evening. Afterward, she presented a rundown of the meeting's agenda, giving participants an idea of how it would flow. The agenda was outlined in the following way:

- Meet the Project Team
- Live Polls
- Project Introduction
- Existing Conditions and Service Evaluation
- Survey Outreach and Results
- Potential Improvement Options
- Questions and Answers
- Stay Involved – Next Steps

Cornell then led the attendees to an introduction of the project team. The project team includes:

- Sara Cain of BCAG
- Jon Clark of BCAG
- Victoria Proctor of BCAG
- Amy White of BCAG
- Gordon Shaw of LSC
- Selena McKinney of LSC
- Andrew Ittigson of AECOM
- Gladys Cornell of AIM Consulting
- Katie DeMaio of AIM Consulting
- Angelika Williams of AIM Consulting

Cornell then gave instructions on how participants would be able to answer a couple of live poll questions through the Mentimeter website, an interactive and engaging approach for presenting live questions and answers. We found that most participants do not currently use the B-Line service, with only 3/14 responding that they use it. We also discovered that these community members spend most of their time in Chico, with 11/14 choosing that city over Biggs, Gridley, Oroville, and Paradise.



Gladys Cornell guiding attendees through a set of live poll questions on Mentimeter.

Concluding her welcoming remarks and introduction questions, Cornell handed over the presentation to Sara Cain, of BCAG.

Presentation

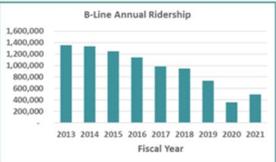
Sara Cain of BCAG greeted the attendees and introduced herself before giving some background information on what BCAG is – a Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA), a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and the owner and operator of B-Line. She stated that BCAG is responsible for preparing all state and federally required transportation plans and programs that are necessary for securing transportation funding for highways, streets and roads, transit, bike, and pedestrian facilities, and other transportation modes. Cain then introduced the Routing Study, which will analyze routes and schedules; review fare policies and media; evaluate technologies, vehicles needs and other assets; identify B-Line’s strengths and weaknesses; evaluate service options to improve the functionality of transit in the region; and identify preferred service options to develop a plan for implementation through public input. She lastly turned it over to Gordon Shaw of LSC, who reviewed the study’s goals.

Shaw began by introducing himself and stating the goal of this study. The main goals he mentioned were: to provide recommendations to effectively expand mobility; identify, and thoroughly evaluate alternative routing options (i.e., where the bus goes and at what times, extended services like on weekends, service types that would be more appropriate in rural areas); and develop innovative solutions that make the best use of B-Line’s existing resources. He explained that the idea is to be realistic on funding and employment limits that public transit has, emphasizing the focus on utilizing existing resources in the short term. He acknowledged the change in the needs of people in the last decade and especially the last two years. He stated that in the big picture, the objective is to make sure we are developing a transit plan for the future that also meets the current needs.

Existing Conditions:

Service Evaluation – What We Have learned

- Butte County has a high proportion of residents in need of transit services, including low-income residents, senior residents, and residents with a disability
- Transit service is important for Chico State and Butte College
- Transit ridership declined prior to and after the pandemic
- Recent ridership has increased by about 35%
- Ridership will rebound but it is expected to be lower than in the past
- Transit still has important functions!



Virtual Community Meeting – July 14, 2022

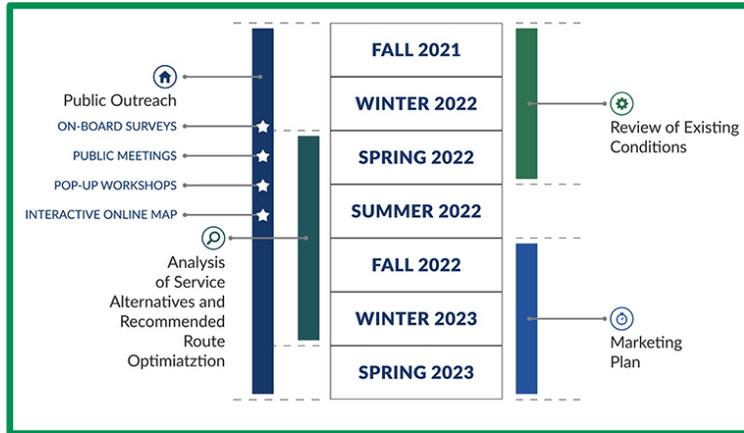
Gordon Shaw describes the existing conditions of B-Line’s ridership.

Shaw then followed up by discussing the existing conditions of B-Line. He expressed that for Butte County, there is a high portion of residents in need of transit services, including college students, low-income residents, senior citizens, and those with disabilities. He talked about the steady decline in ridership prior to and after the pandemic, but also how there has been a recent increase of about 35%, proving that transit still has important functions (i.e., day-to-day functions, social service trips, getting to work, and the possible

increasing need due to the rise in gas prices). Shaw pointed out some areas of Chico that generate low ridership, as well as high ridership that occurs between downtown/Chico State and the Chico Mall/Butte College areas, and the potential to better serve northern Chico, especially North Valley Plaza. He also identified that the core area of Oroville, east of Highway 99 and south of the river, has higher ridership compared to outlying areas. He suggested that smaller vehicles could serve expected passenger loads in Oroville, especially because there is a problem with on-time dependability.

After that, Shaw talks about the survey outreach that took place in December 2021. There were 280 people who participated in the survey. Outreach for this included flyers and other awareness materials and signs in English, Spanish, and Hmong. Of the findings, it was discovered that 1/3 of respondents were students, while another 1/3 were local employees. The survey results also showed where transfers are most common – between Routes 3 & 4 and Routes 14 & 15. There were 87% of respondents who ranked the B-Line service as good or excellent, revealing that the people who use the service find it useful. Survey-takers ranked affordability and driver courtesy the highest but ranked bus stops, shelters and B-Line information at bus stops the lowest. They also requested more frequent weekend services and more shelters at bus stops.

Lastly, Shaw went into the potential improvement options for transit services. He explained how this study will look at route maps to make sure they are on the right streets or finding alternative routes, and if there is too much service in an area, where it can be resourced elsewhere. He also mentioned analyzing the schedules, span of service, and frequency of service. Shaw made sure to reference the idea of using microtransit service in low ridership areas and explained to the audience how it works, comparing it to Uber or Lyft where one can use their phone or web browser to request a ride. The main improvement options include expanding hours of service, expanding weekend service, and providing buses with priority at key traffic signals. Before heading into the final set of live polling questions by Gladys Cornell, Shaw provided the schedule of this Routing Study (image below).



Cornell then presented the last two live poll questions for attendees to respond to through the Mentimeter website again. We found that all who answered the first question admitted to being more inclined to use microtransit after learning about it during the presentation. A participant commented that they would be more likely to use B-Line microtransit over Uber or Lyft services. The last question asked participants to rank three potential improvement options in their order of

preference. The number one option chosen was expanding weekend service. An attendee recommended that Sunday would specifically be an ideal day to expand those service hours.

Feedback

Towards the end the presentation, Cornell opened up the floor to allow attendees to ask questions they had or to give their feedback. Participants either had already asked some questions in the chatbox during the presentation or formed questions and comments during this time. These were some exchanges:

- Q: “How would you increase public transit usage and market your new and existing services? B-line to Sacramento? What about free transportation for low or no-income riders?”
 - A: Gordon – “Earlier this year, BCAG completed a commuter study to Sac, it goes into the San Joaquin train system because there are buses today that provide that, but there is space to shift it to local ridership service (train).”
 - A: Sara – “We are looking at extending rail service from Natomas to Butte County as part of the North Valley Passenger Rail Study, which will be complete in the next year or so. The B-Line to Sacramento commuter bus service will be further reviewed as part of this study, as it would be supplemental to the rail service (both in partnership with SJJPA). Currently, there is a bus operated by San Joaquin’s Amtrak available for service to Sacramento from Butte County. We may explore options for free transportation for low or no-income riders.”
- Comment: “Suggestion to connect from Yuba-Sutter first to see the numbers there first.”
- Q: “What have been the ridership impacts in the 9 zones for Sacramento’s microtransit?”
 - A: Gordon – “It has been modest, about 3 passengers per hour. There are areas that are higher than that and communities that have seen higher than that, though. Combining paratransit and microtransit may see the best use.”
 - A: Andrew – “Sometimes we minivans or small vans that are meant to provide for lower numbers.”
- Q: “Does the study include Paratransit routes?”
 - A: Sara – “Yes it does. The main focus is fixed route, but it will look at paratransit.”
- Q: “Hello. Passenger rail service would not be implemented for many years (I believe the estimate is 2030); if there is time, can you elaborate on why the bus study implementation would need to happen after completion of the rail study when it's a much shorter-term project?”

Also, SJJPA Thruway buses are not open to bus-only tickets Chico-Sacramento which is a barrier to transit access in the north state.”

- A: Sara – “The bus service would be supplemental to rail service, so they are both being considered as part of the passenger rail study. In addition, there have been other delays on SJJPA's side and variations in ridership due to COVID/remote work.”
- Comment: “Butte College is interested in possible options for bus stop(s) to be added at our Main Campus location (3536 Butte Campus Drive on Durham Pentz Road) onto the Chico to Oroville routes and Paradise to Oroville routes. Also, additional service coverage for the south county areas (Biggs/Gridley/Palermo) as well as Paradise.”
- Comment: “I am disabled and would be more interested if improvements were made.” – referring to microtransit services
- Comment: “As I understand it, microtransit could be great for door-to-door for short trips that are within the same zone.”
 - Response: “Typical zones are a few square miles that can connect to a transit hub but are mostly used for shopping trips, school commute, etc.”
- Q: “What are the anticipated fare structures for microtransit?”
 - A: Gordon – “It is to be determined. It would be around the same fare as the fixed route but maybe a little higher like 15-25 cents more.”
- Q: “If the zones are that small, I would never use it; I would use my bike.”
 - A: Gordon – “You’re right. There are people who would choose their bicycle. Maybe three-square miles is small, but it can get larger than that. With a smaller radius though, there is less opportunity to pick up other passengers for a short trip.”
- Comment: “I support the concept of microtransit in areas that already exist and weren't built in a way that supports fixed route. I would love to see it used in a way that nicely feeds into the fixed route :) Kind of like an alternative to biking for first/last mile, for people who don't/can't bike.”
- Comment: “I believe Butte College students would be interested in this type of service depending on location.” – referring to microtransit services
- Comment: “If the microtransit zones are crafted carefully around social service hubs, or low-income housing areas, it could be very useful for low-income residents.”
- Q: Will microtransits have availability to be accessed by populations to call to make appointments for pick up and drop off?
 - A: Gordon – “There is the opportunity in the software to do that and make a reservation. There can also be a “standing order” reserved. For example, every Tuesday at 8am, you need to get to Dialysis or something like that, and if there is a standing order in place, we would come pick you up without a call.”
- Q: “I'm also curious about the above question on phone call requests. Also, curious about how we may support riders who don't have smartphones or even cell phones. Do we have a lot of passengers who don't have phones/smartphones?”
 - A: Sara – “With the rollout of our mobile ticketing app, we haven't heard from many that don't have a smartphone. However, of course, there are exceptions.”
- Comment: “Chico has weeknight service; Magalia does not. We need a span of service more than weekend service up here.”
- Comment: “Providing buses with priority at key traffic signals would help buses to be on time for classes and transfers to other buses for connections. Butte College.”
- Comment: “I think it would be great for my low-income elder clients to get to stores, appointments.” – referring to microtransit services

Wrap Up

Before close, Sara Cain came back to acknowledge the next steps of the project. She first thanked the audience for their time and input. She mentioned that B-Line is committed to robust and ongoing public engagement throughout the project and provided the link to the B-Line website where community members could stay involved and updated. Sara also offered her contact information to anyone with questions, comments, or concerns – scain@bcag.org.