

City called transportation 'Community of Concern'

County Transportation Authority initiating study to ID needs and solutions

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The Sonoma County Transportation Authority is developing a community based transportation plan for Healdsburg — one of four areas in the county that has been identified as a “Community of Concern.”

According to Lynne March, transportation planner with SCTA, the city was identified as a community of concern by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) due to two significant populations — seniors and Latinos — that fall within the study criteria of 200 percent below the Federal poverty level. That means significant portions of the population make less than \$42,400 for a family of four.

Because of the MTC designation, SCTA is facilitating the Community Based Transportation Plan, that will study the problems, solutions and gaps in all modes of transportation, including bus routes, bike paths, walking trails and motor vehicle transportation.

Healdsburg City Councilmember Mike McGuire serves as the city's representative on the board of directors for SCTA. He said public transportation is a high priority for the council.

“Public transit serves an underserved population of our community and it gets people out of their cars, which cuts greenhouse gas emissions within our community,” he said.

The state of California cut 100 percent of the State Transportation Assistance Fund (STA), the largest public transit fund in the state. The reverberations were felt by every region, and the County of Sonoma cut routes by 30 percent as a cost saving measure.

In Healdsburg, the city voted to keep all routes and service at its current levels, despite a lack of funding.

“We made a very conscious decision to fully fund public transit to ensure that the residents of Healdsburg, the seniors of Healdsburg and the Latino population in Healdsburg are served through Healdsburg transit,” McGuire said.

“We did this despite literally every penny being cut by the state of California.”

A survey, along with interviews and meetings with stakeholder groups have already taken place as part of the Community Based Transportation Plan. The next step in the study is a public meeting, where SCTA will present the problems and the potential transportation solutions.

The meeting will be held on Monday, July 27 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Healdsburg Public Library.

Funded by the MTC and conducted by SCTA, the planning study focused on public input in identifying transportation needs and potential solutions. Data gathering methods included field observations, individual interviews and the administration of a survey at key gathering points within the study area. The input of this information was used to identify gaps in transportation and potential projects and priorities for the Healdsburg Community Based Transportation Plan, according to March.

The purpose of the July 27 public meeting is to share the plan's findings and recommendations with residents and community leaders, and to obtain feedback on the draft priorities of the plan, she said.

March said that while money for transportation is scarce right now due to cutbacks in state funding, when there are funds available, projects identified by Community Based Transportation Plans generally receive funding first.

The most significant transportation gap that has been identified in the study is the loss of funding for Healdsburg Transit. Increasing Sonoma County Transit service and improving pedestrian/bicycle facilities in several areas within Healdsburg were also identified as priorities.

McGuire said public transit isn't the only mode of transportation that the city has prioritized.

"On SCTA, one of our priorities has been widening Highway 101, but we need to be just as focused on ensuring that Sonoma County and local communities have public transit that works," he said.

"Healdsburg is committed to smart growth and transit oriented development," he said. "Future development needs to be connected to pedestrian corridors and convenient public transit facilities."

For example, he said, the next two phases of the Foss Creek Pathway will be completed by this fall. The pathway will eventually connect the north and south ends of town and will connect to the Intermodal Station (the train depot).

Special study areas, a result of the General Plan Update approved last month, will take place and McGuire said they will focus on transit-oriented development.