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Tehama County Transportation Commission SB 125 Allocation Amendment – TRAX Operations Support

Summary of Changes

The Tehama County Transportation Commission is requesting approval of an amendment to its previously submitted SB125 Transit Program Allocation.

Under the original SB125 allocation plan, funds were programmed primarily to support transit facility planning and future zero-emission vehicle transition activities.

Due to the expiration of federal COVID-19 transit relief funding and significant increases in transit operating costs, the Commission is requesting approval to reprioritize a portion of the County's SB125 allocation to support ongoing operations of the Tehama Rural Area eXpress (TRAX) transit system.

The proposed amendment would program approximately \$600,000 annually in SB125 funds toward transit operations for four fiscal years (FY 2025-26 through FY 2028-29), totaling \$2,400,000.

This amendment does not increase the County's total SB125 allocation but instead reallocates previously programmed funds in order to stabilize transit operations while the County continues planning for long-term transit system improvements, including zero-emission fleet transition and facility development.

Introduction

The Tehama County Transportation Commission respectfully requests approval of an amendment to the County's SB125 transit funding allocation to support continued operations of the Tehama Rural Area eXpress (TRAX) transit system. TRAX provides essential public transportation services throughout Tehama County, connecting rural communities to employment centers, healthcare services, education, and other critical destinations.

With federal pandemic relief funding that previously supported transit operations now fully expended and operating costs continuing to increase, the Commission is proposing to utilize a portion of its SB125 allocation to stabilize transit operations during this transition period. This approach will allow the County to maintain existing service levels while continuing to advance long-term transit system improvements, including planning for the transition to zero-emission vehicles and identifying sustainable funding sources to support those investments.

Maintaining stable transit operations is critical to preserving mobility for transit-dependent populations and ensuring the long-term viability of the County’s public transportation network.

Background

Federal COVID-19 Transit Relief Funding

Between 2020 and 2021, the Tehama Rural Area eXpress (TRAX) transit system received federal pandemic relief funding through several emergency programs administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), including the CARES Act, CRRSAA, and ARPA programs. These funds were intended to support transit agencies in maintaining operations and workforce stability during the COVID-19 emergency and subsequent recovery period.

The funding allowed the County to sustain transit services despite severe disruptions in ridership, economic uncertainty, and increasing operating costs. The funds were reimbursed over multiple fiscal years as operating expenses were incurred, allowing TRAX to maintain service levels and avoid significant service reductions during the pandemic.

All federal pandemic relief grants have now been fully drawn down through the Federal Transit Administration grant reimbursement system, with the final reimbursement occurring in July 2025.

Program	Grant ID	Total Award	First Drawdown	Final Drawdown	Status
CARES Act	CA-2020-054	\$669,719	Dec 8, 2020	Jan 12, 2023	Fully Expended
CARES Act	CA-2020-285	\$772,018	Jan 17, 2023	Jul 14, 2025	Fully Expended
CRRSAA	CA-2021-136	\$37,674	Jun 15, 2022	Jun 15, 2022	Fully Expended
CRRSAA	CA-2022-053	\$1,054,601	May 9, 2024	May 9, 2024	Fully Expended
ARPA	CA-2022-051	\$680,000	Oct 19, 2023	Jan 10, 2024	Fully Expended
Section 5310 Expansion	CA-2022-235	\$375,000	Oct 17, 2023	Oct 17, 2023	Fully Expended

**Total Federal Pandemic Relief Funding:
\$3,589,012**

With the expiration of these one-time federal funding sources, the County is now transitioning back to a traditional transit funding structure primarily supported by Transportation Development Act revenues and other state and local transportation funding programs.

Increasing Cost of Transit Operations

TRAX transit services are operated through a contract with Paratransit Services, which provides fixed-route and demand-response operations for the County.

Since the beginning of the current operations contract in FY 2020-21, the cost of operating the TRAX system has steadily increased due to rising labor costs, insurance premiums, vehicle maintenance expenses, and administrative support requirements.

Fiscal Year	Maximum Contract Cost	YoY Increase
2020-21	\$1.53M	—
2021-22	\$1.57M	+2.6%
2022-23	\$1.61M	+2.5%
2023-24	\$1.66M	+3.1%
2025-26	\$2.13M	+28.3%

The FY 2025-26 contract amendment increased the County’s maximum obligation for transit operations to \$2,125,758.83, representing a significant increase compared to prior contract years.

Contractor cost breakdowns indicate that the increases are primarily driven by:

- Increased workers’ compensation costs
- Higher vehicle maintenance and repair costs associated with an aging fleet
- Increased administrative, dispatch, and software costs required to operate the system
- Significant increases in liability and vehicle insurance premiums

These increases have occurred simultaneously with the expiration of federal COVID-19 stimulus funding that previously supported TRAX operations.

As a result, the County now faces a structural gap between available transit operating revenues and the cost required to maintain current service levels.

TRAX Service Description

The TRAX transit system provides both fixed-route and demand-response public transportation services throughout Tehama County.

Fixed-route service primarily operates along the State Route 99 corridor, connecting the communities of:

- Red Bluff
- Corning
- Los Molinos
- Tehama
- Shasta & Butte Counties

These routes also provide connections to regional destinations, including Orland and the Rolling Hills Casino employment center.

In addition to fixed-route service, TRAX operates ParaTRAX demand-response service, which provides door-to-door transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities who are unable to utilize fixed-route transit.

Together, these services form the backbone of public transportation in Tehama County and provide essential mobility for residents who may not otherwise have access to reliable transportation.

Ridership Trends and Recovery

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the TRAX transit system experienced steady demand across both fixed-route and demand-response services. During FY 2019-20, the ParaTRAX demand-response program provided 12,605 passenger trips, while the fixed-route network carried approximately 82,796 passenger boardings across routes serving communities throughout Tehama County.

Ridership declined during FY 2020-21 as travel patterns were affected by pandemic-related restrictions and economic disruption.

Year	Fixed Route	ParaTRAX	Total Riders
FY 2019-20 (Pre-COVID)	82,796	12,605	95,401
FY 2020-21 (COVID)	61,954	8,974	70,928
FY 2025-26 (Projected)	~124,700	~15,400	~140,100

Ridership has since steadily recovered as economic activity and community travel patterns have stabilized. Between July 2025 and January 2026, the ParaTRAX program provided 9,013 passenger trips, already exceeding the total number of trips provided during FY 2020-21 in only seven months. Based on current monthly trends, ParaTRAX ridership is projected to reach approximately 15,400 trips during FY 2025-26, representing a significant increase compared to both pandemic-era ridership and pre-pandemic levels.

Fixed-route ridership has also remained strong. Between July 2025 and January 2026, the TRAX fixed-route system recorded approximately 72,714 passenger boardings across all routes, including Route 1, Route 2, Routes 3A and 3B, Route 5, Glenn Connect, and the Red Bluff Transit Center circulator. Based on current monthly trends, fixed-route ridership is projected to reach approximately 124,700 passenger trips during FY 2025-26.

Combined ridership across both fixed-route and demand-response services is therefore projected to exceed 140,000 passenger trips during FY 2025-26, demonstrating continued demand for public transportation services throughout Tehama County.

The continued growth in ridership reflects the importance of the TRAX system in providing access to employment, healthcare, education, and other essential services throughout the County's rural communities.

Service to Transit-Dependent and Disadvantaged Communities

TRAX serves a wide range of transit-dependent populations, including:

- Seniors
- Veterans
- Students
- Residents without reliable access to private vehicles

Demand-response services are particularly important for seniors and persons with disabilities who rely on door-to-door transportation to access:

- Medical appointments
- Grocery stores
- Social services
- Community activities

TRAX routes also serve several communities identified as disadvantaged communities under California environmental justice screening tools, including:

- Red Bluff
- Corning
- Los Molinos
- Tehama
- Gerber
- Rancho Tehama Reserve

Maintaining reliable transit service for these communities is essential to supporting transportation equity and access to employment, healthcare, and education.

Commitment to Zero-Emission Transit Transition

The Tehama County Transportation Commission and the Tehama County Transit Agency Board remain committed to transitioning the TRAX transit system toward zero-emission vehicles and supporting infrastructure in accordance with California's Innovative Clean Transit (ICT) regulation.

As a rural transit provider, TRAX faces unique challenges in implementing this transition due to long travel distances, limited charging infrastructure, and the financial constraints associated with operating transit service in rural environments.

Despite these challenges, zero-emission fleet transition and supporting facility improvements remain long-term priorities identified in the County's transit planning documents, including the Short Range Transit Plan and Regional Transportation Plan.

Maintaining stable transit operations today is essential to preserving the service platform required to successfully implement future zero-emission transit investments.

Proposed SB125 Programming Amendment

The Tehama County Transportation Commission is considering an amendment to the County’s SB125 program funding request to address the operating funding shortfall facing the TRAX transit system.

This amendment would allow the County to program a portion of available SB125 funds toward transit operations during the transition period following the expiration of federal pandemic relief funding.

Programming SB125 funding toward operations would allow the County to:

- Maintain existing transit service levels for rural residents
- Stabilize transit operations during the transition away from federal relief funding
- Avoid immediate service reductions
- Continue progress toward long-term system improvements, including zero-emission transit fleet transition

This amendment is intended as a temporary stabilization measure while the County continues pursuing long-term funding solutions and implementing planned transit system modernization initiatives.

To support this transition, the Commission proposes programming approximately \$600,000 annually in SB125 funds toward TRAX transit operations for a period of up to four fiscal years. These funds will supplement existing Transportation Development Act revenues and other local funding sources in order to maintain current service levels during the transition away from federal pandemic relief funding.

Fiscal Year	SB125 Operations Support
FY 2025-26	\$600,000
FY 2026-27	\$600,000
FY 2027-28	\$600,000
FY 2028-29	\$600,000

Total Proposed SB125 Programming \$2,400,000