

October 2024

# Accessible Transportation Needs Assessment

Peer Review

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# INTRODUCTION

This comparative analysis of transportation programs and services in peer counties was undertaken as part of NVTAs Accessible Transportation Needs Assessment (ATNA). The analysis aims to review transportation services offered to older adults by public, private, and non-profit entities in other similar counties and consider their potential in Napa County.<sup>1</sup>

Four counties throughout northern California were selected for this peer review based on demographic, economic, and/or geographic similarities. These peer counties include: El Dorado County, Lake County, Mendocino County, and Sonoma County.

Demographically, El Dorado County is similar to Napa County in relative population totals, population densities, median household incomes, percentages of disabled residents, and residents aged over 65 years. While other peers differ in terms of overall population and population densities, each of these counties have similar demographics for populations over 65, and persons with disabilities (exception is Lake County) and due to their geographic proximity, these counties, have relevant value and points of comparison. Table 1 summarizes these counties’ key characteristics alongside Napa County.

**Table 1 2022 Demographic Data Overview, Napa County and Peer Counties<sup>2</sup>**

County	Population	Population 65 and older (%)	Disabled (%)	Median Household Income	Population per square mile
<b>Napa County</b>	134,300	21.6%	11.4%	\$100,318	178.6
<b>El Dorado County</b>	191,185	23.7%	12.5%	\$105,982	111.9
<b>Lake County</b>	68,163	25.3%	20.9%	\$51,259	54.31
<b>Mendocino County</b>	91,601	24.6%	14.8%	\$65,520	26.12
<b>Sonoma County</b>	488,863	22.0%	12.5%	\$96,830	310.3

<sup>1</sup> Note: Approximate costs for existing services and programs are included to the extent that they are readily and publicly available. When ATNA strategies are developed specifically for Napa County in future phases of the project, planning-level cost estimates will be included.

<sup>2</sup> US Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate

The menu of transportation service options available to older adults and disabled residents in the peer counties generally resembles those options available in Napa County. These services fall into the following categories:

- Fixed route bus transit routes and accompanying ADA paratransit within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of the fixed routes.
- Transportation services for older adults or other populations provided by public agencies other than transit operators.
- Transportation services offered to specific clientele, such as provided by Tribal health services or organizations serving the developmentally disabled.
- Volunteer driver programs serving older adults that are administered by non-profits and charities.
- Volunteer driver programs serving only non-emergency medical appointments such as the American Cancer Society's Road to Recovery.
- Private transportation services, including taxi service and some specialized businesses geared towards seniors.
- Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) and other transportation to medical appointments is included as a benefit for many of the health insurance plans available to seniors, such as private health insurance, Medicare Advantage, and Medi-Cal.
- Ride hailing companies including Uber and Lyft as well as various taxi services are available in all counties.

Table 2 summarizes the service options by type of provider within each county. The sections below summarize the services available in each peer county. The latter two categories, health-insurance benefits and ride hailing or taxi, are not individually detailed for each county except for specialty services focused on seniors.

One of the key takeaways from this peer review is that Napa County's accessible transportation needs are not unique. Similar issues, particularly funding limitations amid a projected rise in demand from older adults, are facing counties and communities across Northern California. Additional challenges, like providing transportation to and from medical appointments outside of local communities on short notice, are also not unique to Napa County. It will be important to highlight relevant innovations and useful lessons learned to support the ideation, prioritization, and cross-sector cost sharing opportunities towards implementation of solutions tailored to Napa County's needs.

**Table 2 Existing Transportation Services Provided by Napa County Peers**

County	Fixed Route and ADA Paratransit	Public On-Demand Transit or Flex Stop Service	Public Agency (Non-Transit Operator)	Non-Profit Services	Out-of-County Medical Appointment Services	Mileage Reimbursement Programs	Volunteer Driver Programs	Notable/Unique Services
Napa County	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
El Dorado County	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	El Dorado Transit Authority offers shared ride medical appointment transportation to Sacramento area and a driver expense reimbursement program. Health and Human Services Agency operates "Senior Shuttle."

County	Fixed Route and ADA Paratransit	Public On-Demand Transit or Flex Stop Service	Public Agency (Non-Transit Operator)	Non-Profit Services	Out-of-County Medical Appointment Services	Mileage Reimbursement Programs	Volunteer Driver Programs	Notable/Unique Services
Lake County	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	“Pay-Your-Pal” program administered by Local Consolidated Transportation Services Agency Medi-Link for out-of-county medical appointments operated by Lake Transit Authority/
Mendocino County	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	Public-private partnership between non-profit senior centers and Mendocino Transit Authority.
Sonoma County	✓			✓			✓	Volunteer driver programs and comprehensive transportation website and hotline.

## EL DORADO COUNTY

As part of the Sacramento-Roseville-Arden-Arcade Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), El Dorado County has the relative population density to support dense and diverse transportation. El Dorado County has similar demographics to Napa County, and has identified unique services, like a senior shuttle operated by the County Health and Human Services Agency.

### Existing Services

#### Public Transit Operators

The El Dorado Transit Authority provides **public fixed-route and paratransit service** in the Western Slope of El Dorado County. In the Tahoe Basin, the Tahoe Transportation District offers **fixed routes** connecting South Lake Tahoe to east shore destinations along with **parallel paratransit service**.

#### El Dorado Transit Authority

The El Dorado Transit Authority offers an **on-demand dial-a-ride service** to seniors aged 60 and older as well as ADA-qualified individuals in addition to the ADA paratransit service. The dial-a-ride service is provided in wheelchair accessible vans and passengers are given a 30-minute window for pickup and drop off. Riders can call and book a ride up to three days in advance. The dial-a-ride service area extends to communities within El Dorado County. Each one-way ride fare is \$3.00.

El Dorado County Transit Authority also offers SAC-MED, a shared ride non-emergency **medical appointment transportation service** for seniors or disabled persons to access healthcare within the greater Sacramento area. Passengers may board the service in El Dorado County at one of five transit centers and park-and-ride lots. The service brings passengers directly to the curb at their medical appointment destinations in the Sacramento area. Reservations must be made four days in advance and service can only be scheduled for medical appointments between 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM. The fare for a SAC-MED ride is \$10.00 for a one-way trip. Personal care attendants can travel at no additional cost. Based on the Fiscal Year 2022/23 Administrative Operations Report, the cost of providing the service is high at about \$257.74 per passenger. The service is

supported by Transportation Development Act (TDA), Section 5311, and State of Good Repair funds.

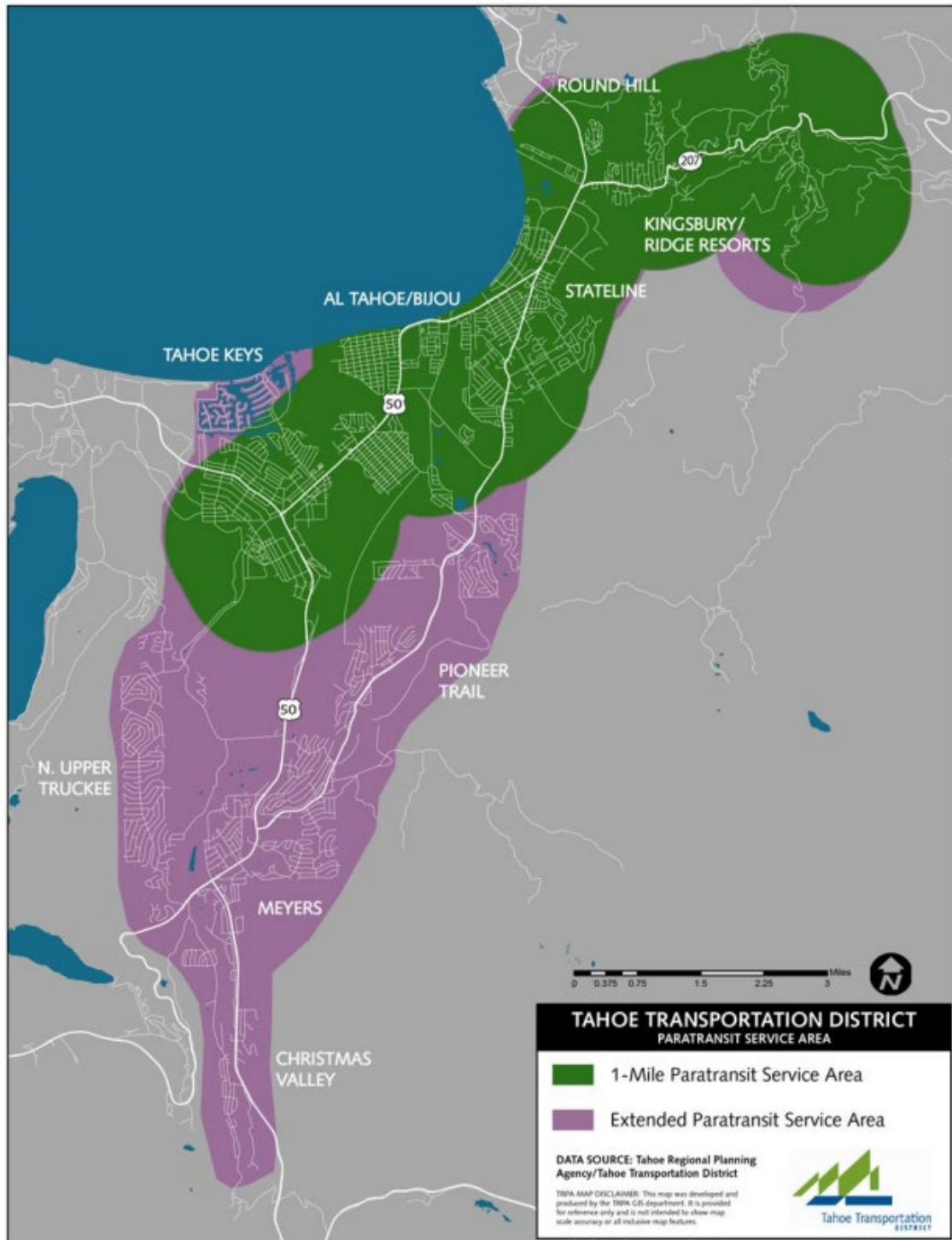
El Dorado also offers the My Ride **mileage reimbursement program**. This program allows seniors (60 or older), veterans, or disabled residents of El Dorado County (not including the Tahoe Basin) who are registered for the My Ride program at El Dorado Transit to reimburse their friends, neighbors, or family members for providing them with transportation in their personal vehicles. Trips can be for any purpose, including medical appointments, grocery shopping, other errands, and social activities. There are no fees to participate in this program and trips are free for passengers. Since the transportation is provided in drivers' personal vehicles, mileage reimbursements are the sole operational cost to the agency, with payment provided at the current Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rate of \$0.625 per mile. The only other costs involved are staff time for data entry, mailing checks, answering customer questions, and other administrative tasks. The program began in August 2022 and to date has been funded by TDA Local Transit Funds, but El Dorado Transit will pursue other grants going forward.

## Tahoe Transportation District

The Tahoe Transportation District provides **paratransit service** within a baseline service area extending one mile from fixed routes as well as an extended service area. The Tahoe Transportation District saw that there were several neighborhoods outside of the traditional paratransit zone (3/4 mile around fixed route) and developed an extended paratransit service area to serve neighborhoods not served by fixed route transit (see Figure 1). Paratransit is fare free for all passengers, personal care attendants (one per passenger), and companions (one per passenger). Fare-free paratransit began in 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to eliminate fare exchanges between driver and rider. It will continue through September 2026. Funding for free fares comes from grant funding secured by the Tahoe Transportation District. Tahoe was in the process of a zero-fare transition, but the COVID-19 pandemic expedited that transition.



Figure 1 Tahoe Transportation District Paratransit Service Area



## Services From Other Public Agencies

The El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency operates a “**Senior Shuttle**” in the Western Slope, available to seniors aged 60 and over. The program offers weekly van-shared rides to local retail destinations and periodic trips to Folsom and other locations. The goal of the program is to help seniors stay independent and connected to their communities. Riders contribute a suggested donation of \$2.00 for local trips and \$5.00 for trips outside of El Dorado County. Reservations for shuttle rides are made via telephone. The Senior Shuttle is a largely volunteer-run program offered in partnership with the El Dorado County Area Agency on Aging. The program operates at a modest cost of \$3,200 annually and is funded by a Community Services Block Grant.

## Non-Profit Providers and Volunteer Programs

Marshall Medical Center, a non-profit community healthcare provider in El Dorado County, operates a **volunteer driver program** that transports cancer patients to and from appointments in El Dorado County. Patients do not have to pay for the service. This program does recruit new drivers regularly but also faces volunteer shortages.

## County Summary

### Challenges

El Dorado County has seen a notable increase in the percentage of older residents in the county, placing strain on existing transportation services. Between 2017 and 2022, the percentage of older residents increased from 20.3% to 23.7%, representing an increase of approximately 7,100 residents over the age of 65. The California Department of Finance anticipates this aging trend will continue, with older adults comprising 73% of Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) regional population growth, including two and a half times more people 85 and over by 2060. This growth will be marked in El Dorado County especially, posing yet unseen demographic change.

This demographic change will be keenly felt in the transportation sphere. Currently, El Dorado County has a high percentage of older adult drivers (approximately 73% of the older adult population drives), and this percentage is likely to increase as the percentage of older adults in El Dorado County increases. Older adult drivers introduce safety risks, with drivers over 70 at higher risk of death in collisions compared to middle-aged

drivers.<sup>3</sup> County residents are also rapidly qualifying for demand-response transit, placing strain on existing services designed to increase older adults' and disabled residents' mobility without the use of personal vehicles.

Given these current and predicted pressures on existing services, county and regional stakeholders identified several unmet needs within the current transportation network in the SACOG Coordinated Plan's 2024 Update. Non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) poses several problems to riders, notably coordinating trips across jurisdictions in other cities and counties, scheduling same-day or appointments, navigating schedules and wait times, and overall decreasing capacity for newer riders. Paratransit can inhibit mobility with long wait times, insufficient operation schedules, and scheduling requirements. Paratransit also suffers from increasing rider demand but decreasing or stagnating capacity or service, leading to ride shortages for some riders. This is especially stark in El Dorado County, where Dial-a-Ride subscription service is full with a waiting list and operates on a first-come, first-served basis for those without subscriptions. Without supplementary voluntary programs or affordable taxi and TNC services, this service cannot adequately serve the many working older adults who require daily transportation.

## Strategies to Address Gaps and Unmet Needs

Under the SACOG Coordinated Plan, several planning efforts have been considered at the regional level.

Within El Dorado County specifically, SACOG is exploring lower and higher-cost strategies to fill transportation gaps. These strategies include informational campaigns and mobility training to encourage effective transit use, accessible pedestrian-friendly streetscape efforts, community shuttles and microtransit zones in areas underserved by fixed route buses, expanded demand-responsive and shuttle services, and community-coordinated volunteer programs.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022437521000463?via%3Dihub>

# LAKE COUNTY

## Existing Services

### Public Transit Operators

The Lake Transit Authority provides public **fixed route** and **Dial-a-Ride service** in Lake County. Lake Transit Authority (LTA) operates regional and intercity fixed routes as well as local routes within the cities of Clearlake and Lakeport. LTA offers a Dial-a-Ride curb-to-curb service within the local route service areas for ADA paratransit-eligible riders and adults over 60. In areas not covered by the Dial-a-Ride service, buses will travel up to one mile off the regular route to provide “Flex Stop” service to the curb. Flex Stop service is available to disabled and senior passengers at no additional charge while the general public must pay a surcharge. To request flex stop service, riders must call Lake Transit at least one day in advance. The general public must pay \$5.00, or a \$3.75 surcharge over the base fare of \$1.25. ADA and older adult riders ride for \$0.75, the same cost as a regular bus ride. In FY23/24, there were 51 total flex stop rides.

### Other Public Agencies

#### Lake Links

Lake Links serves as the Lake County Consolidated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA) for Lake County. As a CTSA, Lake Links is a non-profit public benefit corporation that helps coordinate social service transportation services and improve alternative transportation options available for seniors, disabled persons, and low-income individuals. The agency offers two transportation programs serving seniors and people with disabilities: Medi-Links and Pay-Your-Pal.

- The Medi-Links program provides transportation from Lake County to medical providers in Deer Park/St. Helena, Napa, Santa Rosa, Ukiah, and Willits. Reservations are required at least seven days in advance for trips Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 4:00pm. Fares to riders are \$10 one-way and \$20 round trip. Trips are provided in a van with wheelchair lift and pick up locations include several hospitals, clinics, and senior centers. The Transit Authority

- receives Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 grant funding<sup>4</sup> to help cover the cost of the Medi-Link program, which is served by its contract paratransit operator. The Transit Authority receives State Transit Assistance and State of Good Repair as well as Federal Section 5310 and 5311 funding to support its operations. Lake Links also receives Section 5310 funds through the County and TDA funding from the Lake County/City Area Planning Council to support two full-time paid staff who deliver all of Lake Links' services and programs. In 2022, Lake Links also received a \$15,000 Community Challenge grant from AARP. Lake Links supplements the Medi-Link program grant funding with rider fares, charging \$20 per round trip with no extra cost for care attendants.
- The Pay-Your-Pal **reimbursement program** is a popular and growing program with Lake County seniors. This program enables friends and family members who might otherwise be unable to afford the cost of gas to provide rides for those over 55. The service covers trips to common destinations such as medical appointments, grocery stores, pharmacies, food banks, community events, and religious/spiritual ceremonies. Riders and drivers must apply to the program in advance. After undergoing a background check, verified drivers are reimbursed monthly according to a mileage log signed by the riders. The reimbursement rate is currently \$0.40 per mile. Reimbursement costs for the calendar year 2023 ranged from approximately \$5,000 to \$6,500 each month. This program is mainly funded by two Section 5310 grant contracts, both of which cover two years. The first Section 5310 contract covers the mileage reimbursement costs. The second grant contract is designated as Mobility Management and reimburses Lake Links for staff salaries and benefits. While staff costs are not available broken out by program, there are two full time paid staff, and the County receives approximately \$275,000 for this two-year contract. A similar driver reimbursement program could be set up by NVTA or could be used to support Molly's Angels.

## Lake County Tribal Health Center

The Lake County Tribal Health Center **provides transportation to medical, dental, and other appointments** at the Tribal Health Consortium and to referred providers out of

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<sup>4</sup> FTA Section 5310 funds provide formula funding to states and designated recipients to meet the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs.

county. This service is only available to registered patients of Lake County Tribal Health with proof of Indian eligibility. It is considered the option of last resort. Rides are provided at no cost for those who qualify.

## Non-Profit Providers and Volunteer Programs

The Konocti Supported Living Services Transportation and People Services is a non-profit private organization that supports people with developmental disabilities. The Konocti Transportation Service operates a fleet of over forty vans and cars to transport clients to and from its many program sites. Clients may be transported to work programs, day programs, and out of county medical appointments.

This organization is primarily funded through the California Department of Rehabilitation and the Redwood Coast Regional Center, one of California's 21 community-based non-profits that provide services to people with developmental disabilities.

## County Summary

### Challenges

Like El Dorado County, Lake County is also increasingly aging. Between 2017 and 2022, the percentage of older residents in Lake County increased from 22.2% to 25.3%, or by approximately 3,000 residents over the age of 65. The California Department of Finance predicts 7% growth in older adult populations between 2010 and 2060. However, because of projections of overall population growth, older adults are projected to comprise 16% of the county in 2060, a marked decrease from current percentages. This bucks the trend observed in Northern California but might not translate to reduced strain on the transit system.

Considering these current and predicted population trends, county and regional stakeholders identified several unmet needs within the current transportation network in the 2021 Coordinated Public Transportation Plan for Lake County prepared for the Lake County/City Area Planning Council. These needs were further classified as "reasonable to meet" or "unreasonable to meet" to guide future policy and planning interventions. Several of the reasonable needs pertain to NEMT. Over two-thirds of residents who participated in the needs assessment process identified their need for NEMT to destinations outside the county, specifically San Francisco and parts of Santa

Rosa. Residents also advocated for expanded NEMT/Dial-a-Ride hours due to the high cost of taxis after Lake Transit Authority hours end. Residents also highlighted the need for expanded transit service and mobility training for those seeking job placement, but LTA and the Redwood Regional Center (regional association that serves people with developmental disabilities in Lake, Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino counties) already coordinate to provide jobs access.

Of the “unreasonable to meet” needs, the clearest unmet need was an individualized flexible transportation service for non-medical purposes. Although there was strong support for this kind of transportation service, there is no funding available to pursue this program in the near future. There is also limited eastbound service, both to Spring Valley and the Sacramento area, but between low demand and density in Spring Valley and delays in the Shasta Regional Transportation Agency’s plans for Sacramento feeders, there is limited potential to meet these service gaps. Similarly, it is difficult to expand NEMT to outlying areas in the county due to limited and geographically dispersed demand.

## Strategies to Address Gaps and Unmet Needs

Building on both the 2022 Lake County Regional Transportation Plan and the 2021 Coordinated Public Transportation Plan, Lake County devised 3 priority strategies to meet the needs of older adults, disabled people, and low-income individuals.

1. Support, maintain, and enhance Lake County Public Transportation Services. This strategy aims to increase access to transportation services for older adults and other transit-dependent and transportation disadvantaged groups. Through increased informational and transit training campaigns and service improvements such as expanding service area to include North Shore and along Spring Valley Road and longer operational hours, LTA aims to provide more comprehensive and flexible service to those who need it.
2. Improve and expand capacity for specialized transportation alternatives appropriate for Lake County. This strategy emphasizes the need for county-wide mobility partnerships, specifically among human service agency providers, to meet the transportation needs of older adults. To offer flexible service in a county without adequate support for a countywide all-purpose on-demand service, providers are exploring TNCs and car-sharing programs.
3. Continue to Develop Sustainable Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Solutions. Although Lake County NEMT services have expanded greatly since 2015, the county will expand services like Pay-Your-Pal and Medi-Links and

develop other alternatives. This includes informational and wayfinding tools that help riders understand how to access healthcare destinations.

## MENDOCINO COUNTY

### Existing Services

#### Public Transit Operators

Mendocino Transit Authority (MTA) is the transit operator in Mendocino County. MTA offers regional **fixed routes** connecting various Mendocino cities and Santa Rosa. In addition to fixed bus stops, buses may be waved down at any safe pullout location along the route.

**On-demand**, door-to-door Dial-a-Ride service is available in Ukiah and Fort Bragg on MTA buses designated for paratransit customers. In Ukiah, Dial-a-Ride service is available to paratransit customers only, including people with disabilities and seniors aged 62 and older. A reservation is required 24 hours in advance, and recurring rides may be scheduled as far out as needed. The Ukiah service area has been expanded to include Redwood Valley, eastern Ukiah communities such as Talmage, Rogina Heights and Deerwood, and Lake Mendocino, with new zones and fares being devised currently.

Fort Bragg-based Dial-a-Ride service (Fort Bragg and Mendocino coast area) is open to the general public. Discounted fares there are provided for seniors (62+) and people with disabilities. MTA customers in Fort Bragg are guaranteed a scheduled ride if they reserve a Dial-A-Ride bus up to two weeks in advance and at minimum 24 hours in advance.

In Willits, **ADA paratransit service** is provided by Willits Seniors, Inc (operator of Senior Center). Reservations must be made at least 24 hours in advance via phone. More information is included below.

#### Other Public Agencies

The Mendocino County Department of Social Services operates a Veteran's Shuttle to **transport veterans to the Veteran's Administration (VA) clinic** in Ukiah. The shuttle departs from the Mendocino Department of Social Services office. This shuttle completes four trips daily with service throughout Ukiah, Santa Rosa, and Fort Bragg with service to the San Francisco VA Medical Center. This service is free to all veterans.



## Non-Profit Providers

### Senior Centers

Several senior centers operating as 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations provide some transportation services as part of their programming in a public-private partnership with MTA. MTA provides funding to senior centers for scheduling transportation services, maintaining vehicles and operating the service. According to Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG), the senior centers will receive \$518,000 in TDA Local Transportation Funds to fund operations for the fiscal year 2024-2025.

The Anderson Valley Senior Center uses this funding to provide **transportation to its nutrition program lunches** on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The wheelchair accessible bus is also available on Tuesdays and Thursdays for transportation around the valley for daily errands. On Fridays, transportation is provided to Ukiah for medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other errands. An endowment funds monthly trips to Ukiah for movie matinees. Reservations for rides are made in advance by telephone. Suggested donations per ride are \$1.00 for trips within the valley and \$5.00 for trips to Ukiah. The Center also operates a volunteer driver program for older adults that operates when the bus is not in service. **Volunteer drivers** also provide service for six annual special excursion trips.

The Ukiah Senior Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides a variety of programming, including a transportation program. This program is provided through a collaboration with MCOG and relies on TDA funds to provide **low-cost, door-to-door transportation** to seniors aged 55 and older and people with disabilities. The service is provided with three buses equipped with wheelchair lifts and operates Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m. Rides are provided for all purposes, including visiting the Senior Center to take advantage of other programming such as lunches. Fares are \$3.00 per one-way ride within Ukiah and \$4.50 to \$6.00 per ride for longer trips to the surrounding areas (service is not available to all areas of Mendocino County).

The Redwood Coast Senior Center offers **on-demand rides** for adults aged 60 and over and people with disabilities in the greater Fort Bragg area. As with the Ukiah center, the transportation service is operated in partnership with MTA with wheelchair accessible buses. Drivers can assist passengers entering and exiting the vehicles and help with packages. Rides are arranged by telephone and provided from 8:00am to 3:00pm daily.

The Willits Harrah Senior Center serves seniors aged 55 and over and people with disabilities in the greater Willits area. Their **local on-demand service provides rides for shopping, errands, and appointments** Monday through Friday, 8:15am to 3:30pm. Rides are arranged by phone and provided with a seven-person passenger wheelchair bus and a four-passenger minivan. The Center's volunteer drivers can also provide rides to Ukiah, Santa Rosa, and Lake County for medical appointments. Clients pay for the out-of-town service so that the volunteer drivers can be reimbursed for their mileage.

Coastal Seniors serves the needs of seniors in the coastal communities of Mendocino County. As part of its program, Coastal Seniors operates **bus service to its senior lunch program and for local errands** within its service area. Service is provided in buses that can accommodate two wheelchairs on Mondays through Wednesdays. Advanced reservations are required, and bus fares range from \$1.00 to \$4.00 round trip, depending upon distance. Older adults who attend the lunch program are driven to their errands afterwards before being returned to their homes. Coastal Seniors also offers **regional bus service** to Santa Rosa every Thursday and Friday and to Fort Bragg on Fridays (\$10.00 per round trip). There are also occasional bus trips for cultural events.

Community Resources Connection used to operate a volunteer-oriented organization to provide rides or referrals to people in need in the coastal community from Timber Cove to Elk. This service is on hiatus with no plans to resume operation.

## County Summary

### Challenges

Mendocino County has also seen growing older adult populations. Between 2010 and 2060, Mendocino County's older adult population is expected to grow by 22%. In that same period, the population under 65 is expected to decrease by 6%. By 2060, an estimated 19% of Mendocino County residents will be over 65. This can lead to strain on existing older adult transportation systems and create demand for alternative modes of transportation. Additionally, 16.2% of the older adult population falls below the poverty line, compounding existing transportation access issues and necessitating affordable transportation options.

The 2021 Coordinated Plan prepared for MCOG elaborated further unmet transportation needs and gaps in existing service for older adults, disabled residents,

and low-income populations. The most pressing unmet needs included a need for increased operational funding for transportation services and MTA's planned (but not yet constructed) transit administration building, for new inter-city bus services between campuses in Willits, Ukiah, and Fort Bragg, and for expanded demand response services throughout the region, especially for older adults and senior centers. These needs are not all feasibly met in the short-term and may require extensive grant funding and transit planning efforts to be met in the long-term.

## Strategies to Address Gaps and Unmet Needs

The 2021 Coordinated Plan outlines several strategies to fill transportation gaps for older adults and other underserved populations. In the wake of budget decreases and fiscal cliffs, MTA aims to maintain the current level of service and expand service areas and ridership through aggressive grant applications. To expand demand response service outside Dial-a-Ride, MCOG will coordinate with senior centers to further expand service. To better serve older adults, MCOG aims to establish non-emergency medical transportation service through federal 5310 and 5311 funds alongside state TDA funds and social service funding. Given the variety of stakeholders and providers, providers will need to combine resources into a coordinated NEMT system. Other strategies for improving service include inter-city services, especially between Fort Bragg and Ukiah, expanding weekend service, and conducting a feasibility study of mobility solutions for rural communities of Inland Mendocino County. Mendocino received a Caltrans Sustainable Communities Planning Grant in 2021 to conduct this study.

# SONOMA COUNTY

## Existing Services

### Public Transit Operators

Sonoma County Transit provides **intercity fixed route service** throughout Sonoma County as well as local routes serving the cities of Guerneville and Rohnert Park. Sonoma County Transit also operates the Healdsburg Shuttle, which is a free, hop-on, hop-off circulator subsidized by the City of Healdsburg. Similarly, the Cloverdale Shuttle is fare-free and subsidized by the City of Cloverdale. **ADA paratransit services** are provided within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of the fixed bus routes.

The City of Santa Rosa operates the CityBus **fixed route service** within the city. A travel training program, Learn to Ride CityBus, is designed to introduce seniors to the bus system. **ADA paratransit service** is offered seven days a week within ¼ mile of the fixed routes to those who are unable to independently use Santa Rosa CityBus due to a disability or health related condition.

The City of Petaluma also operates **fixed route service** in Petaluma through Petaluma Transit. These six routes are offered at half fare for riders over 65 years of age. **Complementary ADA paratransit** operates within the city limits of Petaluma, as well as any areas outside the city limits which are within ¼ mile of an active Petaluma Transit fixed route. As of July 1, 2024, Petaluma Transit is a free-fare transit system and fares are free for paratransit. This is a one-year pilot program. Paratransit riders to use both fixed-route bus services and paratransit services for free, expanding access to those with fixed or limited incomes.

## Other Public Agencies

The Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging maintains Sonoma Access, **a website that brings together information on public, private, and non-profit transportation options** for seniors and people with disabilities. It's unclear how often the site is updated. The site provides trip planning and provider search services that can be tailored to specific needs such as wheelchair use or assistance with bags/packages. The site also provides a volunteer application / intake form for people who wish to serve as volunteer drivers and serves as a general information transportation clearinghouse. The Sonoma website is a rich resource that further maximizes ease of use and accessibility with a trip planning service, large font view, and multiple languages.

The Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging contracted with a website developer, Planetaria Media, to design and host this website. Costs for the original development of the website were covered by a Section 5310 grant administered by Caltrans. Ongoing maintenance of the website requires \$150 per month (also grant funded) for website hosting and about five hours of agency staff time to answer emails and update provider information.

## Non-Profit Providers and Volunteer Programs

Non-profits in Sonoma County provide several types of transportation services, many of which rely on volunteer drivers.

Becoming Independent is a community based non-profit organization supporting people with developmental disabilities. **Transportation is provided between client's homes and programs or workplaces in 15-passenger vans or wheelchair accessible vans and buses.** The BI-EXPRESS, an extension of Becoming Independent transportation, provides a critical weekend and evening service for people with disabilities and other populations in need of a ride who do not have access to alternative transportation during those times.

The Road to Recovery program of the American Cancer Society has an office in Santa Rosa. The Road to Recovery program provides **transportation to cancer-related, non-emergency medical appointments.**

The Caring Rides Transportation program is operated by Catholic Charities and provides **door-to-door transportation throughout the Santa Rosa area to anyone who completes an application process.** This service operates Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 4:00pm. Rides must be scheduled two weeks in advance.

Windsor Wheels Rides for Seniors is a service provided by a 501(c)(3), Circuit Rider, in partnership with the Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging and the Town of Windsor. **Transportation services are provided by volunteer drivers to seniors** in the Windsor and north Santa Rosa areas. All types of trips are served including medical appointments, social/recreational trips, and food shopping. Trips are provided in the volunteer drivers' vehicles, there is a screening and application process for volunteers, as well as insurance requirements. Operated in coordination with the Town of Windsor and the Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging, Windsor Wheels serves Windsor and North Santa Rosa. Most of the funding comes from the Older Americans Act, Title 3b, which is administered by the California Department on Aging with previous funding from the Section 5310 program. Circuit Riders supplements its public funding with private grants and donations, such as those from Wells Fargo Bethlehem Foundation and Bank of America.

Friends in Sonoma Helping volunteer transportation services provides **non-emergency transportation to the public with focus on seniors, people with disabilities, low-income clients, and Medicare clients.** Transportation requests are received Monday through Friday, 9:00am to 3:00pm, and rides must be reserved one week in advance. Prospective clients must complete an application and the program serves the Sonoma Valley area.

Village Network of Petaluma serves the Petaluma-Penngrove area. **Transportation services are available to anyone aged 50 and over** who is a member of the Village Network of Petaluma. Services and programs are supported by membership fees. Rides

are provided between the County's incorporated cities, as well as within the cities of Rohnert Park, Cotati, Sebastopol, and Windsor. Rides are also provided in Sonoma Valley, Guerneville and the Monte Rio area. The service utilizes volunteer drivers.

DASH is a **curb-to-curb volunteer driver program operating within the city limits of Healdsburg**. Volunteers in City-owned vehicles provide pre-scheduled rides for medical, shopping, and social activities within Healdsburg and out of town rides for medical appointments. This service combines City of Healdsburg-owned vehicles with volunteer drivers. The program is funded through a 10 percent dedication of the City's hotel occupancy tax along with a Section 5310 grant to the County. Volunteer drivers are certified, fingerprinted, background & DMV checked. This program serves seniors aged 60 and over and people with disabilities. The program is coordinated by the Healdsburg Senior Center/Department of Parks and Recreation. The program is funded through the City's Transient Occupancy Tax along with a Caltrans grant awarded to Sonoma County.

iRide is provided by People Services, a non-profit organization providing human services programming in Petaluma. **Rides for seniors are provided by volunteer drivers** Monday through Friday, 8:30am through 4:30pm in Petaluma and Rohnert Park.

MyRide provides **no-cost to riders for transportation throughout the Sonoma Valley for seniors and Medicare clients**. The service is provided by volunteer drivers and operated by Vintage House, a local non-profit service organization.

The **Volunteer Driver Transportation** program from the Sebastopol Area Senior Center operates in partnership with Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging to provide free rides to older adults. Those 60 and older in West Sonoma County can reserve rides seven days in advance for medical, social service, and shopping appointments. This service utilizes volunteers exclusively.

## Private Operators

Miss Daisy Drivers is a **personal transportation service for seniors** in the Sonoma Valley. Rides are provided seven days a week, 7:00am to 8:00pm and cost \$35 per hour with a mileage surcharge for trips outside the service area. Licensed drivers are insured and can also serve as liaisons to health care providers. Similarly, Silver Ride provides **personal transportation services for seniors** and serves Petaluma, Rohnert Park, and Santa Rosa in Sonoma County. Services may be booked by phone or online using a mobility-as-a-service platform.

**Wheelcare Express** operates in Sonoma County, providing non-emergency medical transportation. While the service may be hired by individuals, services are often covered

through health insurance providers such as Medi-Cal, Partnership Health Plan, and Kaiser.

## County Summary

### Challenges

Sonoma County faces challenges in accessible transportation needs which are shared by other counties, including a large and diverse geographic area and funding limitations. Non-profits may have a challenge recruiting and retaining a limited supply of volunteers, and some programs have limited hours of operation and a requirement for advanced booking. With multiple operating public transit providers, Sonoma County also faces some particularly unique challenges around coordination.

### Strategies to Address Gaps and Unmet Needs

Sonoma County has a variety of transportation services, supported by a network of non-profits, public agencies, and private operators. Regular public transit and paratransit services are complemented by unique ancillary services such as free local circulators and travel training programs. Additionally, the County offers a comprehensive online and hotline resource that provides centralized information on the multifaceted network of volunteer, non-profit, and private networks working to fill the gaps not covered by traditional public transit.

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Peer county analyses highlight issues common throughout the older adult transportation landscape in Northern California. Like Napa County, peer counties face rising older adult populations, increased difficulties with medical transportation (especially with bookings into other jurisdictions and/or on relatively short notice), and shortages of volunteers and other resources for non-profit transportation operations.

These peers also introduce innovative solutions for tackling older adult transportation in Napa County. While Napa County has their own equivalents of several services, the diversity of services offered by peers allows for comparison of operational structures, funding mechanisms, and challenges and strategies for future development. The following concepts have been identified across multiple peer counties. These are

options that could be applied to Napa County and will be considered as part of strategy ideation work.

- **Use of Transportation Development Act (TDA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 5310 Funds:** El Dorado’s Sac-Med service and Lake County’s Lake Links service are two examples of medical transportation programs offered by county transportation authorities. These programs are funded by TDA and 5310 funds, funding sources that NVTa uses to provide transit service and that could be used to offer a medical trips program. TDA funds have also been used for volunteer driver reimbursement programs,<sup>5</sup> a potential strategy for Napa older adults.
- **Communication Services / “One Stop Shop”:** It is crucial to disseminate information about transportation programs for older adults and disabled residents to target communities to build access and mobility. Researching and compiling information about the services available, eligibility, types of trips served, fares and application processes can be a daunting task for seniors, people with disabilities, and their caregivers. Lake, Mendocino, and Sonoma Counties have compiled directories of transportation services to provide potential riders with accurate and updated information.
- **Partnerships:** Sonoma’s Sonoma Access was created in partnership with the Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging. Mendocino’s senior centers have public-private partnerships with the Mendocino Transportation Authority. Potential public-private partnerships between NVTa, senior centers, community-based organizations, and other Napa County departments will be evaluated during strategy ideation.

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<sup>5</sup> NVTa had a mileage reimbursement program at one time, but it was discontinued due to lack of available funding and low program usage.