

# Short-Range Transit Plan

## CUSTOMER SURVEY SUMMARY

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Submitted to:



Merced County Association of Governments

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## INTRODUCTION

Prior to initiating the Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP), Merced County Transit (MCT) conducted a Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA). This effort, undertaken in 2003, provided extensive detail of ridership and schedule reliability. In October of 2003, the Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) conducted the annual Unmet Needs Hearings. Although these hearings are specifically designed to determine if there are any unmet transit needs that can be reasonably met through reallocating Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds, these hearings can provide a barometer of the overall sentiment towards the transit system.

These two efforts provide most of the data needed to undertake the SRTP. However, in order to fill in the gaps of data needed, a customer survey was conducted. The survey was designed to gain an understanding of where most of the riders live, the most frequented destinations, frequency of using MCT and distance of residences from MCT bus stops. The survey also provides an understanding of the current quality of the MCT as perceived by the riders, and helps identify areas for improvement.

Each MCT route was surveyed throughout one day on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays in late January or early February. Mid week days were chosen as they are most representative of overall ridership. On most routes, a dedicated MCT staff member handed out the surveys to each customer boarding and collected them before the customer left the bus. These staff members could assist customers by answering questions. On selected lightly used routes, bus drivers handed out surveys to customers as they boarded and collected them as they left the bus. Surveys were designed to be filled out only once by each customer. If a customer rode another bus route or made a round trip and were approached by a surveyor on those subsequent trips they were instructed not to fill out the survey a second time.

## SURVEY RESPONSE

The total number of surveys received was 704. (An on-board survey conducted in 2000 resulted in 604 completed surveys.) The following table breaks down the number of responses received from each route.

**Table 1 – Surveys Received from each Route**

Route	Number of Surveys	Route	Number of Surveys
1	112	9	39
2	78	10	19
3	65	10A	13
4	44	11	47
5	62	12	48
6	44	14	30
7	43	16	17
8	43		



There are approximately 2,000 boardings per weekday on MCT fixed route buses. Assuming that most customers ride the bus round trip (and those who don't are offset by other customers who make multiple trips each day) about 1,000 different individuals board MCT fixed route buses each weekday. The survey response indicates that approximately 70% of the customers riding MCT during this time frame were surveyed.

The largest number of responses was received from Route 1, with Route 2 second. These two routes are essentially the same loop route with Route 1 operating in a primarily counterclockwise manner and Route 2 in a clockwise pattern. These are the two most heavily used routes; therefore the higher response rate is expected. The route that received the least responses from its riders was route 10A which has only one round trip per day and is consequently one of the least used routes on MCT.

## Origins

Riders were asked to give the block number, street and city of their home. Approximately 40% answered with their block number, 76% answered with their street name and 58% answered with their city. With this data we created a map showing where transit customers reside; however, this map is limited because only 307 respondents (44%) gave their block number. For simplicity we grouped these responses by zones. Each zone was given a number. The zones were determined by geographical barriers and logical break points in routes. The logical break points refer to street segments where due to street patterns or other geographical constraints there should not be a variation on how a bus would operate regardless on how the ultimate route network is designed.

Figure #1 illustrates the distribution of transit customers based on location of residence. The highest concentrations of transit customers are generally located in areas of higher densities and/or lower incomes.



Figure 1 A – Distribution of Transit Customers Based on Location of Residence/Merced



Figure 1 B – Distribution of Transit Customers Based on Location of Residence/Atwater



Figure 1C – Distribution of Transit Customers Based on Location of Residence/Los Banos



## Destinations

Out of a total of 704 survey responses, 450 respondents or 64% entered one or more destination on the survey cards. However, among those who did, 276 different destinations were reported. The top three destinations, in order, were Merced College, Merced Mall and the Merced Wal-Mart. These three destinations accounted for a majority of the total number of destinations (43% of 276) reported.

These three places were consistently the top two or three destinations for most routes as well. Route 16, which does not serve these three destinations, had Winton Way, Atwater and the Atwater Food4Less as their top destinations. Route 6 which also does not serve these destinations, had Turlock as the second most frequented destination. But route 6 had Merced College as the number 1 answer. This would indicate that transit customers living in the areas served by Line 6, in particular Delhi and Hilmar, commute to Merced College utilizing three buses to reach their destination.

It is important to note that most of the other destinations besides Merced College, Merced Mall and Wal-Mart, had only a couple of responses. Out of the 276 destinations reported, 230 were reported by only one or two people. There is a large gap between the number of responses for the third and fourth most frequented destinations. The following table outlines the top ten destinations.

**Table 2 – Top 10 Destinations for MCT Riders**

Destination	Number of Responses
Merced College	168
Merced Mall	121
Wal-Mart	66
East Campus /Merced Adult School	20

Destination	Number of Responses
Food4Less	17
Save Mart	13
Applegate Park	9
Golden Valley Clinic	8
Welfare Department	6

Figures 2 through 7 illustrate the relationship of residences to the major destinations. Appendix A summarizes all of the responses to this question by destination and trip purpose.



Figure 2 – Trip Destination Merced College



Figure 3 – Trip Destination Merced Mall



Figure 4 – Trip Destination Wal Mart



Figure 5 – Trip Destination Merced Adult School



Figure 6 – Trip Destination Save Mart



Figure 7 – Trip Destination Food 4 Less



## Distance from Bus Stop and Willingness to Walk

Question 3A asked how many blocks the rider lives from the nearest bus stop. The majority of riders (48%) live less than two blocks from a bus stop. We can conclude that the further away one lives from a bus stop the less likely they are to take the bus. Out of the total of 704 responses, 581 people responded to this question (83%). The following is the data received from this question.

**Table 3 – Distance Between Nearest Bus Stop & Residence**

3A. How far is your home from the nearest bus stop?	Number of Responses (Percentage of Responses)
Less than 2 blocks	278 (48%)
2-3 Blocks	172 (30%)
4-5 Blocks	51 (9%)
Over 5 Blocks, Less a Mile	43 (7%)
Over 1 Mile	37 (6%)

Question 3B asked if a rider would be willing to walk a block further to catch the bus if the bus route made fewer turns and got to the destination quicker. The majority of the respondents (77%) answered yes. The distance of a rider's home from the nearest bus stop did not have an affect on their answer. At least 72% of riders in each of the categories in question 3A answered yes to question 3B. The details of the responses are in the following table:

**Table 4 – Distance from Bus Stop & Willingness to Walk Further if Bus Reached Destination Quicker**

3A. How far is your home from the nearest bus stop?	Yes to Question 3B	No to Question 3B	Percentage of Yes	Percentage of No
Less than 1 Blocks	205	67	74%	24%
2-3 Blocks	137	32	80%	19%
4-5 Blocks	38	11	75%	22%
More than 5 Blocks, Less than 1 Mile	31	11	72%	26%
Over 1 Mile	28	7	76%	19%

- Total Number of Responders answering this question: 567
- Total Number of "Yes" Responses: 439
- Total Number of "No" Responses: 128
- Total Number of Blank Responses: 122

Question 3C asked if a rider would be willing to walk a block further to catch the bus if it operated twice as often as it currently does. Most of the riders, regardless of how far they live from a bus stop, would walk a block further in exchange for more frequent service. At least 78% of the riders in each category in question 3A answered yes to question 3C. The details of the responses are in the following table:



**Table 5 – Willingness to Walk Further if Bus Operated Twice as Often**

3A. How far is your home from the nearest bus stop?	Yes to Question 3C	No to Question 3C	Percentage of Yes	Percentage of No
Less than 1 Block	220	53	79%	19%
2-3 Blocks	149	23	87%	13%
4-5 Blocks	40	9	78%	18%
More than 5 Blocks, Less than 1 Mile	35	5	81%	12%
Over 1 Mile	31	4	84%	11%

- Total Number of Responders answering this question: 569
- Total Number of “Yes” Responses: 475
- Total Number of “No” Responses: 94
- Total Number of Blank Responses: 135

## Frequency of Use

Question 4 addresses the frequency of use during a typical month. Most of the riders surveyed reported that they ride MCT 5-6 days per week (54%). This will provide a good analysis of the opinion of the riders that use MCT the most. The details of the responses are in the following table.

**Table 6 – Frequency of Use**

4. How often do you ride MCT during a typical month?	# of Responses (Percentage of Total Answers)
5-6 days per week	363 (54%)
3-4 days per week	172 (25%)
1-2 days per week	83 (12%)
1-3 days per month	25 (4%)
Rarely	35 (5%)

## Rating the Quality of Merced County Transit Service

Question 6 asked riders to rate MCT in seven categories:

- Time/reliability
- Driver courtesy/helpfulness
- Bus cleanliness
- Bus comfort
- Bus maintenance
- Driver safety
- Bus service information



These categories were rated on the following scale: outstanding, good, fair and poor. The following tables give the responses received from question 6. The tables are organized according to ride frequency so that any correlations can be determined.

**Table 7 – Buses on Time/Reliability**

Buses on Time/Reliability	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
Outstanding	86 - 24%	43 - 25%	11 - 13%	4 - 16%	8 - 23%	152 - 22%
Good	150 - 41%	98 - 57%	46 - 56%	13 - 52%	15 - 43%	322 - 47%
Fair	92 - 25%	18 - 11%	21 - 25%	7 - 28%	6 - 17%	144 - 21%
Poor	24 - 7%	6 - 3%	2 - 2%	1 - 4%	2 - 6%	35 - 5%
Blank Response	11 - 3%	7 - 4%	3 - 4%	0	4 - 11%	25 - 4%

**Table 8 – Driver Courtesy**

Driver Courtesy	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
Outstanding	152 - 42%	72 - 44%	20 - 25%	10 - 40%	13 - 37%	267 - 40%
Good	145 - 40%	70 - 41%	47 - 57%	13 - 52%	12 - 34%	287 - 43%
Fair	34 - 9%	11 - 6%	9 - 11%	2 - 8%	5 - 14%	61 - 9%
Poor	5 - 2%	2 - 1%	0	0	0	7 - 1%
Blank Response	25 - 7%	14 - 8%	6 - 7%	0	5 - 14%	50 - 7%

**Table 9 – Bus Cleanliness**

Bus Cleanliness	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
Outstanding	125 - 34%	53 - 31%	17 - 20%	7 - 28%	9 - 26%	211 - 31%
Good	164 - 45%	90 - 52%	52 - 63%	15 - 60%	15 - 43%	336 - 50%
Fair	39 - 11%	12 - 7%	6 - 7%	2 - 8%	6 - 17%	65 - 9%
Poor	9 - 2%	0	0	1 - 4%	1 - 3%	11 - 2%
Blank Response	25 - 7%	17 - 10%	8 - 10%	0	4 - 11%	54 - 8%

**Table 10 – Bus Comfort**

Bus Comfort	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
Outstanding	103 - 28%	46 - 28%	14 - 17%	7 - 28%	8 - 23%	178 - 26%
Good	177 - 49%	92 - 53%	48 - 58%	15 - 60%	16 - 46%	348 - 51%
Fair	49 - 13%	18 - 10%	10 - 12%	2 - 8%	5 - 14%	84 - 12%
Poor	9 - 2%	0	3 - 4%	1 - 4%	0	10 - 1%
Blank Response	25 - 7%	18 - 10%	8 - 9%	0	6 - 17%	57 - 8%



**Table 11 – Bus Maintenance**

Bus Maintenance	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
Outstanding	100 - 28%	73 - 42%	16 - 19%	6 - 24%	8 - 23%	203 - 30%
Good	176 - 48%	78 - 45%	49 - 59%	16 - 64%	20 - 57%	339 - 50%
Fair	48 - 13%	5 - 4%	9 - 11%	3 - 12%	2 - 6%	67 - 10%
Poor	12 - 3%	0	1 - 1%	0	0	13 - 2%
Blank Response	27 - 7%	16 - 9%	8 - 12%	0	5 - 14%	56 - 8%

**Table 12 – Driver Safety**

Driver Safety	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
Outstanding	151 - 42%	70 - 42%	25 - 30%	10 - 40%	17 - 49%	273 - 41%
Good	145 - 40%	78 - 45%	41 - 50%	15 - 60%	10 - 29%	289 - 43%
Fair	30 - 8%	5 - 4%	7 - 9%	0	3 - 9%	45 - 7%
Poor	5 - 1%	0	0	0	0	5 - 0%
Blank Response	30 - 8%	16 - 9%	9 - 11%	0	5 - 13%	60 - 9%

**Table 13 – Bus Service Information**

Bus Service Info.	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
Outstanding	110 - 30%	41 - 24%	16 - 19%	7 - 28%	9 - 26%	183 - 27%
Good	144 - 40%	81 - 47%	45 - 54%	15 - 60%	12 - 34%	297 - 44%
Fair	58 - 16%	27 - 15%	13 - 17%	2 - 8%	8 - 23%	108 - 16%
Poor	25 - 7%	3 - 2%	2 - 2%	1 - 4%	2 - 6%	33 - 5%
Blank Response	26 - 7%	20 - 12%	7 - 8%	0	4 - 11%	57 - 8%

Overall, the quality of MCT received high ratings. The majority of the categories were given a rating of “good”. In some cases, there was a nearly even split between the percentage of “outstanding” and “good” answers. These cases are highlighted in the table.

There does not appear to be a correlation between the frequency of use and the perception of MCT. In every category the combination of outstanding and good far outstrips the other responses combined by two or three times Driver courtesy and driver safety received the largest number of outstanding/good responses and conversely the fewest fair and poor responses. Schedule reliability and bus service information has the poorest overall ratings. However, even the ranking of outstanding/good for bus service information still outstripped fair/poor by two to one.



## Desired Service Improvements

Question 7 asked riders to rank various service improvements, writing a 1 for the most important change and a 6 for the least important change. Therefore the answers should have been ranked on a scale 1-6 and each number should have been used once. However, about half of the surveys returned rated each service improvement individually instead of in relation to the others, therefore yielding multiple 1's, 2's, 3's, etc. Even though directions were stated otherwise, we recorded the responses as they were written.

The service improvements we asked to be ranked in order of importance were:

- Buses run on Sunday
- Buses run until 8 PM on weekdays
- Buses run until 10 PM on weekdays
- All bus routes operate every 30 minutes between trips consistently throughout the day
- Shelters at all busy bus stops
- Improved reliability of buses

The following tables give the responses received from question 7. The tables are organized according to ride frequency so that any correlations can be determined.

**Table 14 – Buses Run on Sundays**

Buses run on Sunday	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
1	126 - 35%	63 - 37%	34 - 41%	12 - 48%	17 - 49%	252 - 37%
2	33 - 9%	7 - 4%	2 - 2%	0	1 - 3%	43 - 6%
3	29 - 8%	14 - 8%	6 - 7%	2 - 8%	2 - 5%	53 - 8%
4	23 - 6%	7 - 4%	4 - 5%	1 - 4%	0	35 - 5%
5	17 - 5%	10 - 6%	3 - 4%	1 - 4%	3 - 9%	34 - 5%
6	63 - 17%	23 - 13%	10 - 12%	2 - 8%	2 - 5%	100 - 15%
Blank Response	72 - 20%	48 - 28%	24 - 28%	7 - 28%	10 - 29%	161 - 24%

**Table 15 – Buses Run Until 8 PM on Weekdays**

Buses run until 8 PM on weekdays	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
1	130 - 36%	57 - 33%	22 - 27%	9 - 36%	13 - 36%	231 - 32%
2	35 - 10%	12 - 7%	5 - 6%	1 - 4%	3 - 9%	56 - 8%
3	42 - 11%	10 - 6%	7 - 8%	3 - 12%	3 - 9%	65 - 9%
4	23 - 6%	17 - 10%	6 - 7%	1 - 4%	0	47 - 7%
5	17 - 5%	7 - 4%	3 - 4%	3 - 12%	1 - 3%	31 - 4%
6	37 - 10%	25 - 14%	17 - 14%	1 - 4%	3 - 9%	114 - 16%
Blank Response	79 - 22%	44 - 26%	26 - 31%	7 - 28%	12 - 34%	168 - 24%



**Table 16 – Buses run until 10 PM on Weekdays**

Buses run until 10 PM on weekdays	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
1	147 - 40%	51 - 30%	18 - 21%	4 - 16%	12 - 34%	232 - 34%
2	31 - 9%	11 - 6%	9 - 11%	2 - 8%	3 - 9%	56 - 8%
3	17 - 5%	16 - 9%	4 - 5%	2 - 8%	1 - 3%	40 - 6%
4	19 - 5%	9 - 5%	3 - 4%	1 - 4%	2 - 5%	34 - 5%
5	19 - 5%	7 - 4%	4 - 5%	1 - 4%	0	31 - 5%
6	53 - 15%	28 - 17%	18 - 21%	8 - 32%	5 - 14%	112 - 16%
Blank Response	77 - 21%	50 - 29%	27 - 33%	7 - 28%	12 - 34%	173 - 26%

**Table 17 – Bus Routes Operate Every 30 Minutes between Trips**

Bus routes operate every 30 mins between trips	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
1	124 - 34%	59 - 34%	30 - 36%	7 - 28%	14 - 40%	234 - 35%
2	38 - 10%	18 - 10%	7 - 8%	5 - 20%	3 - 9%	71 - 10%
3	39 - 11%	14 - 8%	5 - 6%	1 - 4%	1 - 3%	60 - 9%
4	31 - 9%	8 - 5%	6 - 7%	0	2 - 5%	47 - 7%
5	20 - 5%	11 - 6%	3 - 4%	0	2 - 5%	36 - 5%
6	32 - 9%	19 - 11%	5 - 6%	5 - 20%	4 - 11%	65 - 10%
Blank Response	79 - 22%	43 - 25%	27 - 33%	7 - 28%	9 - 6%	165 - 24%

**Table 18 – Shelters at all Busy Bus Stops**

Shelters at all busy bus stops	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
1	110 - 30%	53 - 31%	22 - 26%	6 - 24%	14 - 40%	205 - 30%
2	20 - 6%	11 - 6%	2 - 2%	1 - 4%	0	34 - 5%
3	22 - 6%	12 - 7%	7 - 8%	3 - 12%	1 - 3%	45 - 7%
4	25 - 7%	16 - 9%	4 - 5%	3 - 12%	5 - 14%	53 - 8%
5	39 - 1%	19 - 11	7 - 8%	0	0	65 - 10%
6	69 - 19%	17 - 10%	15 - 18%	5 - 20%	4 - 11%	110 - 16%
Blank Response	78 - 21%	44 - 26%	26 - 31%	7 - 28%	11 - 31%	166 - 24%



**Table 19 – Improved Reliability of Buses**

Improved reliability of buses	5-6 Days/Week	3-4 Days/Week	1-2 Days/Week	1-3 Days/Month	Rarely	Total - % of Total
1	112 - 31%	33 - 19%	21 - 25%	6 - 24%	9 - 25%	181 - 27%
2	14 - 4%	14 - 8%	4 - 5%	0	1 - 3%	33 - 5%
3	27 - 7%	18 - 10%	4 - 5%	2 - 8%	1 - 3%	52 - 7%
4	25 - 7%	16 - 9%	9 - 11%	3 - 12%	3 - 9%	56 - 8%
5	37 - 10%	12 - 7%	4 - 5%	3 - 12%	4 - 11%	60 - 9%
6	61 - 17%	32 - 19%	13 - 15%	3 - 12%	7 - 20%	116 - 17%
Blank Response	87 - 24%	47 - 27%	28 - 34%	8 - 32%	10 - 29%	180 - 27%

It should be noted that there was a high percentage of blank responses to question number 7. On average, 24% did not respond. In some of the service improvement questions, the percentage of blank responses was close to the percentage for the number 1 ranked answer.

“Buses run on Sundays” was ranked the most important service improvement for all rider frequency categories except for the 5-6 days a week rider. For these customers, their first priority was “buses run until 10 PM” (40%), with the second priority being “buses run until 8 PM” (37%) and their third priority was “buses run on Sundays” (35%). The desire for more night service is not surprising since

- Merced College classes run until 10 PM. Merced College is the number one destination on MCT.
- Most retail stores are open until 9 or 10 PM. Many MCT customers work at retail or food service businesses which maintain night hours.
- Transit customers who work during daytime hours primarily shop during evening or weekend hours.

Except for Merced College classes the same factors that could be driving the desire for night service would also be driving the desire for Sunday service. Most businesses that are open on Saturday are also open on Sunday. Besides shopping, employees in the retail field need access to jobs on Sunday.

In all of the categories, number 1 was given the highest ranking. This is perhaps a reflection that riders perceive all of the service improvements as important changes that need to take place.



## CONCLUSIONS

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The Onboard survey yielded data that was not available in the COA or Unmet Needs Hearings testimony. The findings can be summarized as follows:

- Approximately 70% of the number of customers who use MCT on a given day responded to the survey.
- MCT customers reside throughout the service area however the highest concentrations of customers reside south of Highway 99 or east of G Street and south of Bear Creek.
- Three destinations are the focus of most trips – Merced College, Merced Mall and the Merced Wal Mart. Over 200 other destinations are scattered throughout the MCT service area.
- Almost 80% of MCT customers live within three blocks of a bus stop. This is within the ¼ mile industry standard for the distance a customer will walk to catch a bus.
- A similar percentage would walk further to catch a bus that operates via a more direct route or to catch a bus that ran more often. The response to these questions was similar despite how far the customer currently lives from a bus stop.
- Over ½ of the respondents ride the bus 5 to 6 times per week with another 25% riding 3 to 4 days per week.
- Customers seem to be satisfied with MCT service with 69 – 84% or an average of 78%) ranking each of seven categories outstanding or good. The categories achieving the highest overall satisfaction were driver courtesy and driver safety. The areas warranting the most focus are schedule reliability and transit information. There is little correlation in how frequently a customer rides MCT and how they perceive the system.
- The service improvements most desired by customers include adding Sunday service (37%), running all buses at least every 30 minutes (35%) and running buses until 10 PM on weekdays (34%). However among the most frequent users (who account for 54% of riders), extending weekday service until 10 PM was the top improvement requested (40%), followed by service to 8 PM (36%), Sunday service (35%) and every bus running every 30 minutes (34%).



## Appendix A: Complete Summary of Trip Destinations