



San Luis Obispo Council of Governments



NORTH COUNTY TRANSIT PLAN

Draft Final Report

March 2012



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Transit Plan for North San Luis Obispo County has been a collaborative effort led by the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) with the Cities of Atascadero and Paso Robles and the San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority (RTA). The comprehensive analysis of public transportation services has resulted in this Plan with recommended changes to the services and organizational structure of transit services in North San Luis Obispo County (North County hereafter). This Plan covers a seven year time frame, from FY 2012/13 through FY 2018/19.

Transit services in North County are provided by three separate transit providers. RTA operates Route 9, a regional service running hourly north-south between Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo with limited service to San Miguel. Major transfer points are located at the route's anchors—the North County Transportation Center and the San Luis Obispo Transit Center – as well as the Las Tablas Park and Ride and Atascadero City Hall.

Local services are provided by the Cities of Atascadero and Paso Robles. The City of Atascadero provides an extensive weekday dial-a-ride service throughout the City and an hourly fixed route service called the El Camino Shuttle. On Saturdays, a limited service known as the Saturday Traveler connects major destinations within the Atascadero city limits. The City of Paso Robles operates three local routes (Routes A, B and C) on hourly headways that circulate throughout the City Monday through Saturday.

Route C and the El Camino Shuttle were implemented as a replacement to the North County Shuttle (NCS) when it was discontinued in July 2011. The NCS was a cooperative service that operated between Atascadero and Paso Robles. With the two replacement routes, riders traveling between Atascadero and Paso Robles and who choose not to use RTA Route 9 now have to transfer between the services at Las Tablas Park & Ride.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a unique plan because there are both local and regional transit services that serve markets with diverse goals and needs in North County. The Plan provides a variety of recommendations for enhancing, consolidating, marketing and monitoring transit services in North County.

Key recommendations are as follows:

- The three transit providers should adopt the goals and objectives in this plan to guide North County transit services.

- The North County Urbanized Area Technical Committee should be expanded to oversee service consolidation.
- Continue status quo service for the next two years while taking the required steps to consolidate fixed route services and Paso Robles Dial-A-Ride under RTA.
- The Cities of Atascadero and Paso Robles, RTA and SLOCOG should cooperatively work together to develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that address all key elements to consolidate services.
- Develop a plan for allocating operating savings due to consolidation. Options include further transit enhancements or returning local funds to the cities, or a combination of these options.
- To improve the public's understanding of transit service availability in North County, develop a consolidated transit brochure /map, establish one centralized call number, and update websites to reflect planned consolidated services.
- Procure one expansion vehicle for RTA Route 9; explore capital improvement modifications associated with the consolidated fixed route service plan.
- Conduct studies and plan for Park N Ride expansion opportunities at 4th/Pine in Paso Robles and in Atascadero in the vicinity of Bank of America.
- In FY 2014/15, implement the preferred service alternative (3B, described below).
- Monitor service and assess whether RTA performance standards are being met. Report results to the City Councils and policy boards.
- Pursue discretionary federal capital grants and explore opportunities for local funding enhancements.

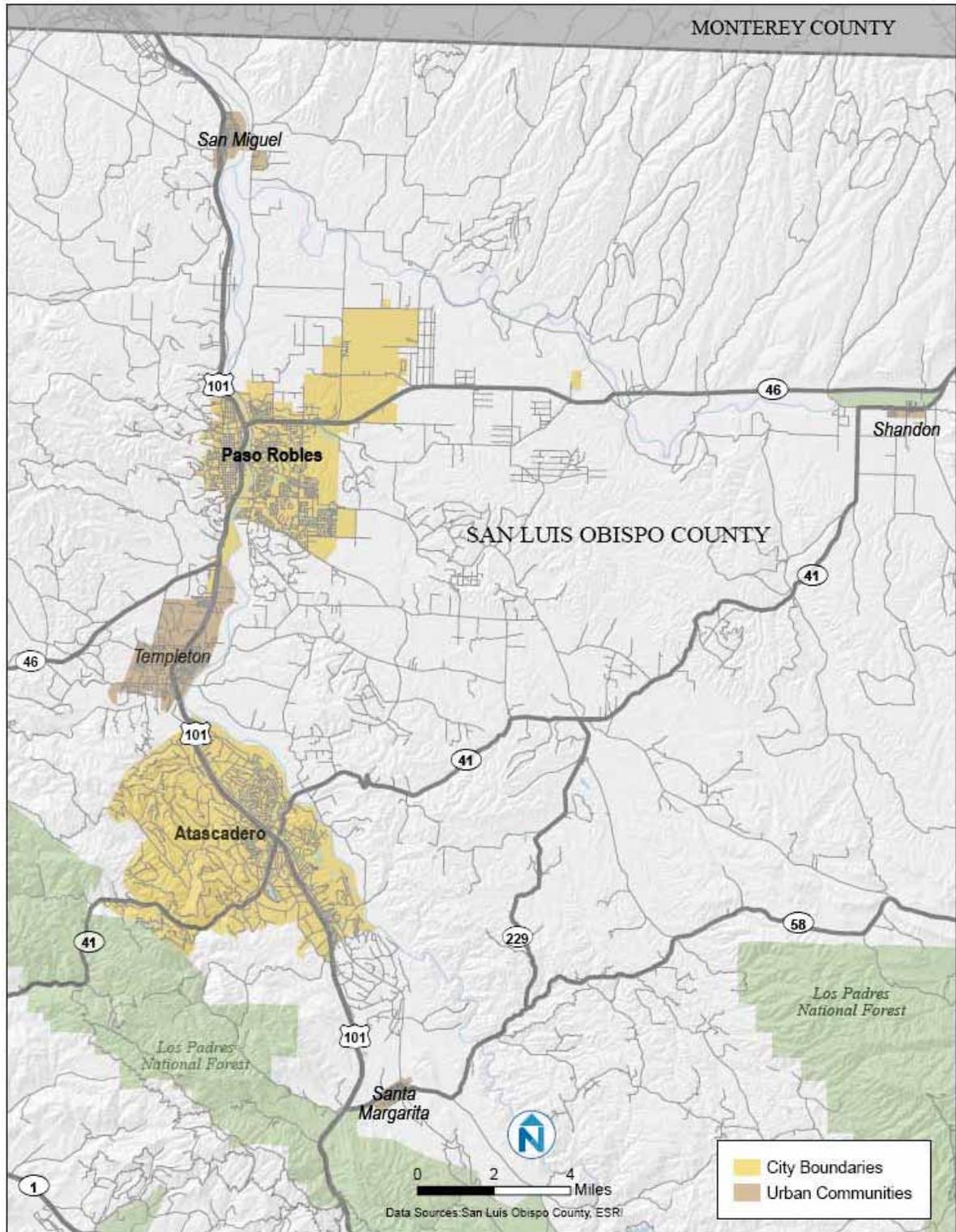
North County Profile

North County includes the incorporated cities of Paso Robles and Atascadero as well as the unincorporated County communities of Templeton, Santa Margarita, San Miguel, and Shandon. The study area has a population of 68,477, roughly a quarter of all San Luis Obispo County residents.

The North County urbanized area consists of the more densely populated Cities of Paso Robles and Atascadero as well as the non-incorporated areas of Templeton and Santa Margarita. Two rural communities outside of the urbanized area boundaries (San Miguel and Shandon) are also part of this plan study area. Figure 1-1 displays the study area boundary for the NCTP as well as cities and communities within North County.

There is a strong regional connection (in both directions) between North County and other parts of San Luis Obispo County (especially San Luis Obispo), as indicated by regional commute patterns. About 40% of employees in North County live outside of the area and about half of the workers in North County commute outside of the area for their job. Because the City of San Luis Obispo is the major cultural and employment center in the region, the vast open spaces between urbanized areas equate to long commutes for many of North County's residents, relatively high congestion, and growing travel times for both the drive alone and transit travel markets.

Figure 1-1 North County Overview



Public Outreach

Public outreach for the North County Transit Plan was conducted in two phases. The first phase, completed in July 2011, consisted of a public focus group meeting and a key stakeholder meeting consisting of technical staff and elected officials from the Cities of Atascadero and Paso Robles and SLOCOG staff and Board members. The purpose of these meetings was to share preliminary findings on existing transit services and to obtain input about transit needs and priorities for improving service before developing service scenarios and organizational alternatives. Many similar themes emerged from these meetings. Key among them was interest in more limited-stop express service between North County and San Luis Obispo for faster travel times to downtown San Luis Obispo County. Riders noted that service is difficult to navigate because there are three separate systems, and multiple transfers between routes are confusing and often result in long wait times. Improving access to information about public transit services in a variety of formats was stated as a high priority. Other common themes were restoring service to downtown Templeton, later evening and earlier morning service and better transfer connections. There was also interest in testing a summer pilot service along Highway 41 to offer access to the coast for residents and tourists alike.

Phase Two of the outreach process consisted of two public meetings held in January, 2012, one in Atascadero and one in Paso Robles. The purpose of these two meetings was to present an update on the planning process and the proposed service alternatives to solicit comments and feedback. Support and preferences were for Alternative 3 (see discussion below on service alternatives) to consolidate fixed-route service in North County under the RTA to provide seamless travel between Atascadero and Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo. The public also strongly supported providing more express service and restoring service to Templeton. When asked to rank future service enhancements among three options, later evening service and the addition of a Sunday schedule to provide service seven days a week was most important.

Service Plan

Using data from the Existing Conditions report (submitted in July 2011), feedback from various focus groups and stakeholder interviews, and direction received from the North County Urbanized Area Technical Committee (Committee) three service alternatives (assuming the same level of funding) were developed. They are:

Alternative 1: Minor Shift to Express Service – This alternative adds a moderate amount of peak-period express service on RTA's Route 9 but reduces midday service to every 2 hours during the midday period. The regional service, however, would be modified to serve downtown Templeton and Twin Cities Hospital. No changes are made to the local fixed route services provided in Paso Robles or Atascadero.

Alternative 2: Major Shift to Express Service – This alternative dramatically shifts resources on RTA's Route 9 to express services and limits regional connections to every 2 hours throughout the day. As with Alternative 1, new service would be provided to downtown Templeton and RTA's Route 9 would also serve the Twin Cities Hospital. No changes are made to the local fixed route services provided in Paso Robles or Atascadero.



Alternative 3: Consolidated Fixed Route Services under RTA – This alternative assumes a single transit operator in North County and consolidates all fixed route services (and the Paso Robles Dial-a-Ride) into RTA. Rather than shifting to express services, RTA's Route 9 would replace the El Camino Shuttle in Atascadero and Paso Express Route C, thus providing a single-seat ride to most destinations in North County. Routes A and B in Paso Robles would remain unchanged.

Based on feedback from the focus groups and Committee, it was clear that Alternative 3 was the most favorable alternative. However, prior to selecting this as the preferred alternative, the Committee agreed that it was important to develop a modification of Alternative 3 that also consolidates the Paso Robles Dial-A-Ride service (to be operated by Runabout). This alternative was referred to Alternative 3B while the Alternative 3 mentioned above was renamed Alternative 3A. To assist the Committee in selecting a preferred alternative, an evaluation matrix was developed that compared the alternatives to assess how well they satisfy the goals and objectives presented in Chapter 6. Other important criteria to evaluate the merits of each alternative include ridership estimates, projected operating costs and farebox recovery ratio for fixed route and dial-a-ride service. Figure 1-2 below presents this matrix. Based on this evaluation matrix and discussions with the North County Technical Committee, Alternative 3B was selected as the preferred option.

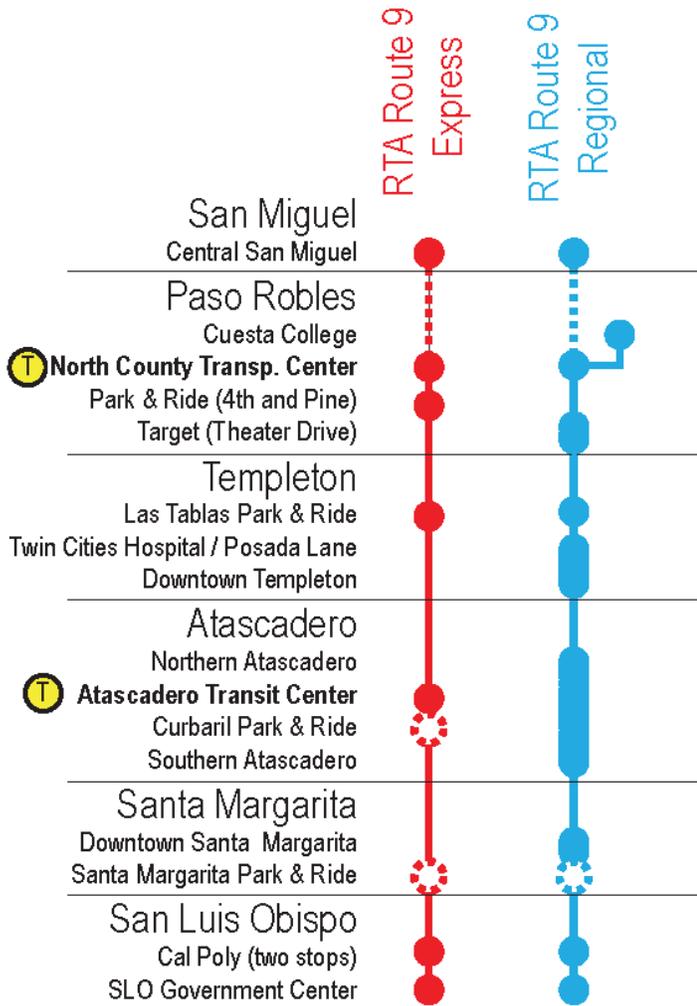
To summarize, the preferred alternative – Alternative 3B – includes full consolidation of all fixed route services in North County as well as the local dial-a-ride operated in Paso Robles. The dial-a-ride in Atascadero would continue to be operated by the City of Atascadero. A schematic of the weekday stops is shown in Figure 1-3 and a map of the route is displayed in Figure 1-4.

Figure 1-2 Service Alternatives Evaluation Matrix

	Alternative 1 Minor Shift to Express; Local Services remain unchanged	Alternative 2 Major Shift to Express; less midday service on Rte 9; local services remain unchanged	Alternative 3A All local and regional fixed routes merged into RTA; no more duplication on ECR; local DAR's remain unchanged	Alternative 3B Same as 3A except Paso Express Dial a Ride merges into RTA
Improve schedule coordination				
Enhance express service				
Minimize duplicative service				
Maximize opportunities for Park & Ride Lots				
Maintain or expand service to small communities				
Provide multimodal connections				
Explore service consolidation				
Support incentives for consolidation				
Public support				
Committee support				
Ridership Estimates				
Fixed Route Ridership (Plan year 3)	383,000	391,000	387,000	387,000
Dial-a-Ride Ridership	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
Operating Costs				
Fixed Route Farebox Recovery Ratio				
Average Rating				
Average Score	2.5	2.9	3.5	3.6

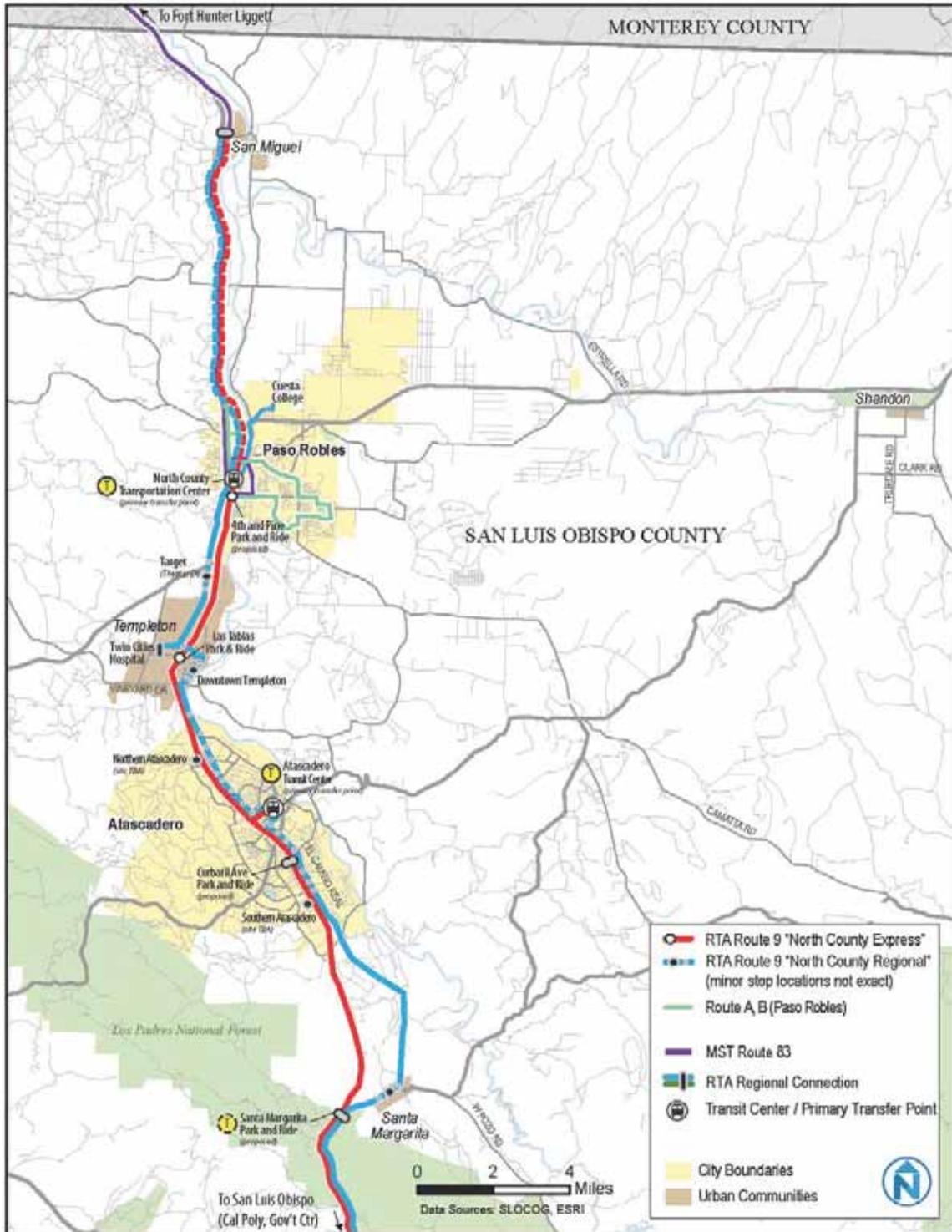
	Fully meets or exceeds	4
	Partially meets	3
	Partially does not meet	2
	Does not meet	1

Figure 1-3 Alternative 3B: Weekday Service by Existing or Proposed Stop



Note: Routes A and B in Paso Robles are not shown on this graphic but connect to RTA Route 9 at the North County Transportation Center.

Figure 1-4 Alternative 3B: Consolidated Fixed Route North County Service



Service Expansion Options

If additional funds are available for further enhancing transit services, then the following recommended transit expansion options should be considered.

- Additional Express Trips – More express service was stated as a desired service improvement. If the preferred alternative does not include additional express service in North County, it should be considered as a high priority. The cost for providing one express round trip is approximately \$50,000 annually.
- Expanded Service Hours – One of the top service expansion priorities among existing passengers was the expansion of service hours. One hour earlier service and service later in the evening should be considered for Regional Route 9 and local service in Paso Robles on Routes A and B.
- Sunday Service – Since local routes A and B in Paso Robles do not operate on Sunday, a limited service schedule on these routes would be desirable.
- Service on Highway 41 to Morro Bay - Options to test this service are a vanpool program and traditional or flexible fixed route service operating only during summer months to attract residents and tourists alike.
- Service Highway 46 - Shandon to Paso Robles – Options include a flexible fixed route service operating on a regular schedule with deviations anywhere in Shandon to pick up or drop off passengers.

Organizational Structure

An important element of the North County Transit Plan was to review the current organizational structure of North County transit services and explore coordination, integration or consolidation alternatives that could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of transit services. To initiate this effort, the consultant conducted individual interviews with key stakeholders. Based on the feedback from these interviews, the goals and objectives developed for this Plan and the consultant's experience with transit service coordination and consolidation, four organizational alternatives were developed and are summarized below:

1. Status Quo with more formalized Coordination – The three separate transit providers would remain independent under this option. The only change would be to formalize existing arrangements with the existing North County Urbanized Area Technical Committee to further support the Committee for specialized coordination and marketing activities.
2. Administrative Consolidation – This option would be to consolidate Atascadero and Paso Robles' administrative functions with RTA to streamline administrative functions. RTA would serve as the lead agency and would absorb the cities' transit-related administrative functions, alleviating city staff of these responsibilities. From a practical perspective, consolidating administrations would be challenging and require significant effort from all three agencies. Given that the potential cost savings are minimal, the North County Transit Plan Committee did not support this option.
3. Partial Consolidation – This option would consolidate all fixed route services (Paso Robles fixed route services and the Atascadero-operated El Camino Shuttle and the Saturday Traveler) plus the Paso Robles Express Dial-A-Ride with RTA. A partially consolidated system would allow for more efficient operations because all routes would be part of one transit system and local and regional services could be better integrated.

Based on the numerous qualitative service benefits of consolidating fixed route services and potential cost savings, the Committee recommended this option. This is consistent with Preferred Service Alternative 3B, described above).

4. Full Consolidation – A fully consolidated transit system in North County would consolidate local and regional transit services under a single agency inclusive of fixed route and Dial-A-Ride services. This would require a single administrative structure and policy board that combines all transit services in a way that allows it to operate as one system. This plan has made major strides in advancing full consolidation with the proposed first step of merging fixed route services and Paso Robles Dial-Ride under an RTA operation. This will make this longer-term option easier and potentially more politically acceptable to transition to a fully consolidated system at a future date.

Financial Plan

Cost Comparison

An important element of the financial plan was to demonstrate the estimated cost savings under fixed route consolidation and consolidation of Paso Robles Dial-A-Ride. Based on an agreed upon set of conservative assumptions, costs were projected and fixed route savings estimated at just under \$364,000 ¹ as displayed in Figure 1-5. The major reasons for the cost savings under a fixed route consolidation are twofold: 1) there is a reduction in service hours because there is no longer duplicative service on El Camino Real with one consolidated Route 9 and 2) Atascadero and Paso Robles would no longer incur fixed costs² associated with their fixed route services.

Dial-A-Ride costs are projected to be \$48,000 higher than existing Dial-A-Ride costs under a Paso Robles Dial-A-Ride consolidation (Alternatives 3A and 3B) because Atascadero has estimated their fixed costs would increase when their dial-a-ride is a stand-alone service (i.e., the City would no longer operate *both* fixed route and dial-a-ride service).

¹ Costs are presented in FY 2014/15 dollars because it is assumed it will require two years to complete the consolidation process.

² Fixed costs refer to cost elements such as office space, administrative support, computer maintenance costs and other non-variable cost items.

Figure 1-5 Comparative Costs

		Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3A	Alt 3B
All Figures Projected to FY 2014/15	Existing Service based on 2010/2011 service levels	Minor Shift To Express Service	Focus on Express Service	Consolidated Fixed Route Service	Consolidated Fixed Route Service incl. Paso Express DAR
Fixed Route Service					
Estimated Fixed Route Costs					
RTA	\$1,087,099	\$1,114,284	\$1,111,894	\$1,747,692	\$1,747,692
Paso Robles	\$803,351	\$803,351	\$803,351		
El Camino Shuttle & Sat. Traveler	\$221,108	\$221,108	\$222,582		
Est. Fixed Route Total Costs	\$2,111,558	\$2,138,743	\$2,137,826	\$1,747,692	\$1,747,692
Fixed Route cost savings (compared to existing services)		\$27,185	\$26,268	(\$363,866)	(\$363,866)
Dial-A-Ride Service					
Estimated DAR Route Costs					
Runabout	\$540,193	\$540,193	\$540,193	\$540,193	\$692,126
Paso Express DAR	\$162,459	\$162,459	\$162,459	\$162,459	
Atascadero DAR	\$437,806	\$437,806	\$437,806	\$485,819	\$485,819
Est. DAR Total Costs	\$1,140,458	\$1,140,458	\$1,140,458	\$1,188,471	\$1,177,945
DAR cost savings (compared to existing services)		\$0	\$0	\$48,013	\$37,487
Total savings (compared to existing services)		\$27,185	\$26,268	(\$315,853)	(\$326,379)

Notes:

Service hours and service miles for each alternative are estimated by Nelson\Nygaard.

Costs are calculated on a fixed, hourly and mileage cost basis for each alternative.

Costs are based on 2009/2010 and 2010/11 figures provided by each service provider; March 2012.

25% of total Runabout hours, miles and costs are attributed to North County.

Alternatives 3A and 3B eliminates fixed costs for Paso Express and Atascadero Fixed Route services and assumes RTA fixed costs remain the same.

Costs are shown in FY 14/15 because consolidation in Alternatives 3A and 3B are not slated to occur until FY 14/15. All alternatives (including existing) are shown in FY 14/15 dollars.

In Alternatives 3A and 3B, fixed DAR costs from Paso DAR are eliminated and replaced with the estimated DAR fixed costs based on the Nipomo DAR plus existing Runabout Fixed Costs.

Cost Projections and Funding Plan

Operating costs were projected separately for fixed route and dial-a-ride service for the preferred service alternative (3B) for seven years, beginning in FY 2012/13 through FY 2018/19. The costs assume status quo service for the first two years while steps are taken to implement the consolidated service plan. In the first two years of the plan, fixed route costs are estimated at approximately \$2 million and then decrease to about \$1.75 million in year 3 under the consolidated service plan. With constant service levels in the remaining four years of the plan, costs gradually increase to \$1.9 million in FY 2018/19.

Dial-a-ride service costs are approximately \$1.08 million in the first two years of the plan and then in year 3, there is a slight jump in costs due to increased fixed costs Atascadero expects to incur when operating its dial-a-ride as a stand-alone service. Service levels for dial-a-ride remain the same in each year of the plan.

The capital element outlines the number and type of vehicles required to support the consolidated service plan. New Park N Ride facilities are needed to support enhanced express service although they are not essential for service start-up and are programmed in outer years of the plan.

Revenues to support transit service in North County are assumed to be the same sources relied upon today with modest gains consistent with the 2010 RTP. The seven-year funding plan presented in Figure 1-6 compares the total operating and capital costs to expected funding sources. It demonstrates that funds are adequate to support the service and capital plan plus allow for additional transit enhancements, return local funds to the cities or a combination.

Implementation Plan

The implementation strategy discusses the steps that need to be taken to implement the recommendations in the plan and the sequence in which they could be carried forward. It will require a wide range of activities, most of which will be led by RTA with the cooperation and coordination of the Cities of Atascadero and Paso Robles and SLOCOG. Early endorsement and support from policy makers and agency management will be a critical component for moving forward with consolidating services.

In addition to the essential administrative first steps, the major tasks involved in implementing the recommended service plan focus on service planning, operations, marketing/public information, and capital and financial planning. Following the introduction of the new service in FY 2014/15, monitoring the effects on ridership, revenues and other key indicators will be critical.

Figure 1-6 Summary of Costs and Funding

	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19
Federal Funding							
FTA 5307	\$732,160	\$761,446	\$791,904	\$823,580	\$856,524	\$890,785	\$926,416
FTA STIC	\$272,174	\$285,782	\$300,071	\$315,075	\$330,829	\$347,370	\$364,739
FTA Summary	\$1,004,334	\$1,047,229	\$1,091,976	\$1,138,655	\$1,187,352	\$1,238,155	\$1,291,155
State Funding							
TDA Summary (LTF+STA)	\$2,239,638	\$2,269,396	\$2,299,673	\$2,330,480	\$2,361,829	\$2,393,733	\$2,426,205
Fares Summary	\$622,509	\$628,334	\$624,776	\$630,624	\$636,530	\$642,495	\$648,520
Total Revenues	\$3,866,481	\$3,944,960	\$4,016,425	\$4,099,759	\$4,185,711	\$4,274,383	\$4,365,880
OPERATING COSTS							
Total Operating Costs	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19
Fixed Route							
Atascadero ECS	\$211,053	\$215,528					
Paso Express	\$785,819	\$802,140					
RTA	\$1,041,116	\$1,063,856	\$1,747,692	\$1,785,548	\$1,824,234	\$1,863,767	\$1,904,168
Subtotal	\$2,037,988	\$2,081,525	\$1,747,692	\$1,785,548	\$1,824,234	\$1,863,767	\$1,904,168
Dial a Ride							
Atascadero DAR	\$419,878	\$428,747	\$485,819	\$496,031	\$506,460	\$517,110	\$527,986
Paso DAR	\$155,800	\$159,094					
Runabout	\$517,917	\$528,936	\$692,126	\$706,753	\$721,693	\$736,952	\$752,536
Subtotal	\$1,093,595	\$1,116,778	\$1,177,945	\$1,202,784	\$1,228,153	\$1,254,062	\$1,280,522
Total Operating Costs	\$3,131,584	\$3,198,303	\$2,925,637	\$2,988,333	\$3,052,386	\$3,117,829	\$3,184,690
Total Capital Costs	\$242,634	\$568,429	\$539,691	\$1,102,726	\$774,314	\$551,906	\$445,757
Total Costs	\$3,374,218	\$3,766,733	\$3,465,328	\$4,091,058	\$3,826,700	\$3,669,735	\$3,630,447

SUMMARY							
	FY 2012-13	FY 2013-14	FY 2014-15	FY 2015-16	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19
Total Revenues	\$3,866,481	\$3,944,960	\$4,016,425	\$4,099,759	\$4,185,711	\$4,274,383	\$4,365,880
Total Costs	\$3,374,218	\$3,766,733	\$3,465,328	\$4,091,058	\$3,826,700	\$3,669,735	\$3,630,447
Annual Balance	\$492,263	\$178,227	\$551,097	\$8,701	\$359,011	\$604,648	\$735,433
Cumulative Balance	\$492,263	\$670,490	\$1,221,587	\$1,230,288	\$1,589,299	\$2,193,947	\$2,929,380

Notes:

Except for Atascadero, the 5307 dollars have historically been set aside for operating assistance. The level of capital funding that Atascadero Transit has used varied from year to year-see current POP table below.

The Cuesta College subsidy (\$40K) is split based on Two Quarters FY 11/12 actual ridership. The amounts to each organization are: \$5,939 (14.8%) to Atascadero, \$27,366 (68.4%) to Paso Robles and \$6,695 (16.7%) to RTA. There is no year to year growth in this college subsidy that provides for free rides to Cuesta students on all three systems.

General passenger ridership is assumed to grow at a rate of 1% per year.

The preferred alternative is scheduled for partial service consolidation occurring in fiscal year 2014-2015.