



July 31, 2018

Regional Transit Board of Directors  
Henry Li, General Manager/CEO  
1400 29th Street  
Sacramento, CA 95816

**Re: Microtransit Pilot Project**

Dear Board of Directors and Mr. Li:

The Sacramento Transit Riders Union (SacTRU) continues to have concerns regarding the implementation of the Microtransit Pilot Project and how it may be used to justify making long term planning decisions to the system as a whole. In light of the recent articles specifically about our microtransit project, we again urge the board invest SacRT's limited resources in proven services like bus and rail.

We also have serious concerns about how TransLoc is tracking riders who are denied service because their request time or location does not fit within the program's planning functions. We are concerned that riders who might live on the edges of communities, and would benefit the most from the service, are being denied access because of program being used. We would like to see TransLoc's records of what ride requests are denied, how the system determines which requests to deny, where the request pick up location was, if alternative service is being offered, and confirm that riders are not being left out of the service because of where they live.

We oppose the replacement of traditional fixed routes with microtransit lines. Microtransit, by definition, is a low-capacity service, carrying small numbers of people at a time. This is a way to serve very few people at very high cost, compared to fixed routes. Two recent articles by Streetsblog USA called out the low performance of Microtransit compared to traditional bus and rail service. In her article, [\*The Story of "Micro Transit" Is Consistent, Dismal Failure\*](#), author Angie Schmitt describes the overhyping of the success of microtransit:

"Sacramento Regional Transit had been operating an on-demand service where riders called in advance and were picked up at their home in the low-density suburb of Citrus Heights. These types of point-to-point services are inherently less efficient than fixed-route transit and should be that much easier for micro transit firms to outperform.

Prior to TransLoc's involvement, Sacramento's "Dial-a-Ride" served around two people per hour, according to SacRT's Forward Network Plan [\[PDF\]](#). The report, released in April, notes that "early results of SacRT's 'microtransit' pilot" — the one with Transloc — "suggest that it will not exceed 3 boardings per hour." About the same.

In other words, as of April, there was no evidence that TransLoc was significantly outperforming the dial-a-ride service it replaced. (Streetsblog requested up-to-date numbers from SacRT and did not receive a response.) Nevertheless, in May the Sacramento Transportation Authority [awarded SacRT a \\$12 million grant](#) to expand the service.

Diverting resources to micro transit that could be devoted to fixed-route bus service may accelerate the downward trend in transit ridership in American cities, a scenario that [TransitCenter](#) and transit analyst Jarrett Walker have been warning about.

As [Walker writes](#), “micro transit” does little besides package dial-a-ride-type services in an app. The interface may be convenient, but it can’t overcome the geometric efficiency of fixed-route service. To pretend otherwise will make transit service less equitable.

**“On average, microtransit [seems to trigger an upward redistribution](#) of the benefits of public subsidy,” Walker writes. “This is a Very Bad Thing for the public sector.””**

In a follow up article, [The Most Successful “Micro Transit” Pilots Are Performing Like Decent Dial-a-Ride Services](#), Schmitt expands on how microtransit may improve dial-a-ride service, but is not a reasonable solution for replacing local bus route:

“Nevertheless, in April SacRT General Manager Henry Li bragged to [Metro Magazine](#) about “doubling ridership” in the first month. (The service did double ridership — from 30 trips per day to 68 — but it also doubled the number of vehicles, from two to four [[PDF](#)].) Even though the productivity of the service was similar to the in-house service it replaced, Metro wrote that its “resounding success” was the reason it was awarded \$12 million from the Sacramento Transportation Authority to expand micro transit.

Since then, SacRT’s micro transit has performed better, averaging 3.24 rides per service hour during May and June. If sustained over a whole year, that’s a 45 percent increase in efficiency over the in-house service, but still well within the typical range for dial-a-ride transit, which maxes out at around six trips per hour. (By comparison, [even the least productive bus routes get 10 or 15 trips per service hour.](#))”

The usual outcomes of microtransit include increased economic inequality, the upward redistribution of benefits, and increased vehicle miles traveled. Effective and equitable transit generates economic growth, promotes healthier lifestyles, and enables access to opportunities while minimizing the negative externalities of transportation, like air pollution and traffic congestion.

The stated goals of the pilot program are to provide:

- SacRT data and analysis to make a determination of the feasibility to provide demand response service and/or fixed route bus service in the identified areas.
- Help resolve is how SacRT may potentially address first-mile/last-mile dilemmas for riders who live too far away from fixed-route bus stops.
- Update current SacRT routes or create new routes to service areas that are underserved or were previously too expensive to serve at all.
- Replace costly underperforming fixed routes.

According to [Jarret Walker Consultants](#), if you want higher ridership, you invest in services that are physically capable of carrying lots of riders and have a proven ability to attract them when run at sufficient quality, such as big-bus fixed routes. Microtransit takes both funds and political attention away from the services that are actually relevant to ridership at a large scale.

**We urge the Board and staff to limit the reliance on and scope of the Microtransit Pilot Project and focus resources on proven methods of public transportation.** Please include this letter in the public record.

Sincerely,

Sac TRU