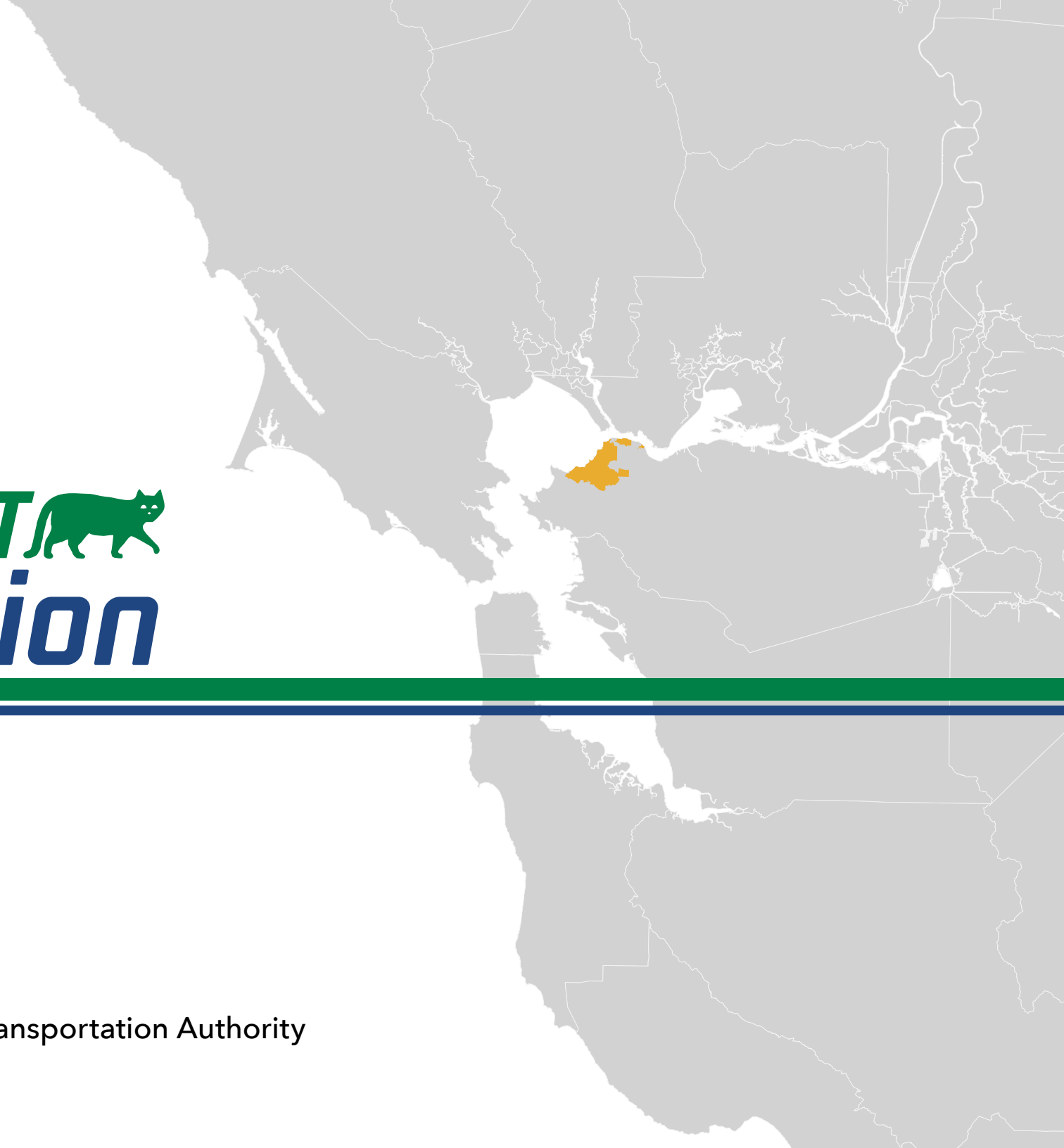

# WESTCAT Evolution

## FINAL PLAN

Adopted August 13th, 2026

Western Contra Costa Transportation Authority

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APPENDICES (separate document)

A. Microtransit Service Suitability Assessment Memorandum

B. Existing Conditions Report - Full

C. Public Engagement Results Summary - Full

# I. INTRODUCTION

WestCAT Evolution is a planning effort to take a fresh look at how WestCAT's transit services are working today and where practical improvements can be made. WestCAT has served Hercules, Pinole, and nearby unincorporated communities for decades, providing local bus service, regional connections, Dial-a-Ride, and school-oriented service that help people reach work, school, shopping, medical care, and other daily destinations.

This study focused on potential operating improvements that are within WestCAT's control, including changes to the fixed routes, such as how often the bus comes, and other improvements, such as expanded outreach. The purpose is to identify realistic strategies that make services more useful, reliable, and easier to understand for current and potential passengers, while making the best use of available resources.

The work presented in this report is guided by a set of service goals for both the WestCAT Evolution project and for WestCAT's overall service delivery. These goals, summarized in Figure 1, reflect the themes that consistently emerged through the planning process: effective service that responds to community needs, dependable operations, strong connections, accessibility and equity, customer satisfaction, and greater community awareness. Together, they provide a clear framework for evaluating existing conditions, understanding what passengers and community members need most, and shaping recommendations that are both practical and forward-looking.

The study combines several layers of analysis. Assessment of the existing conditions examined WestCAT's services, ridership patterns, characteristics of service area residents and workers, and the regional context. The broad public engagement process gathered input from current riders, non-riders, community members, and stakeholders to better understand travel needs and priorities. Fixed-route opportunities were then developed and tested using an evaluation framework and financial analysis to identify a cost-neutral set of recommended service changes. Separate analyses were also conducted for the Dial-a-Ride programs and exploring service to schools in order to identify practical improvements in those areas.

Figure 1: **WestCAT Evolution Goals Summary Graphic**

The project also included a microtransit service suitability assessment to evaluate whether flexible, on-demand service would be an appropriate fit for WestCAT's operating environment. That assessment found that microtransit would not be an efficient or practical replacement for fixed-route service in the WestCAT context and is included in this report as Appendix A.

In addition to the service recommendations, the study also includes development of a Marketing Plan intended to serve two related purposes: first, to support clear communication, outreach, and implementation of the recommended WestCAT Evolution service changes; and second, to strengthen WestCAT's ongoing community awareness, rider communication, and local support for transit.

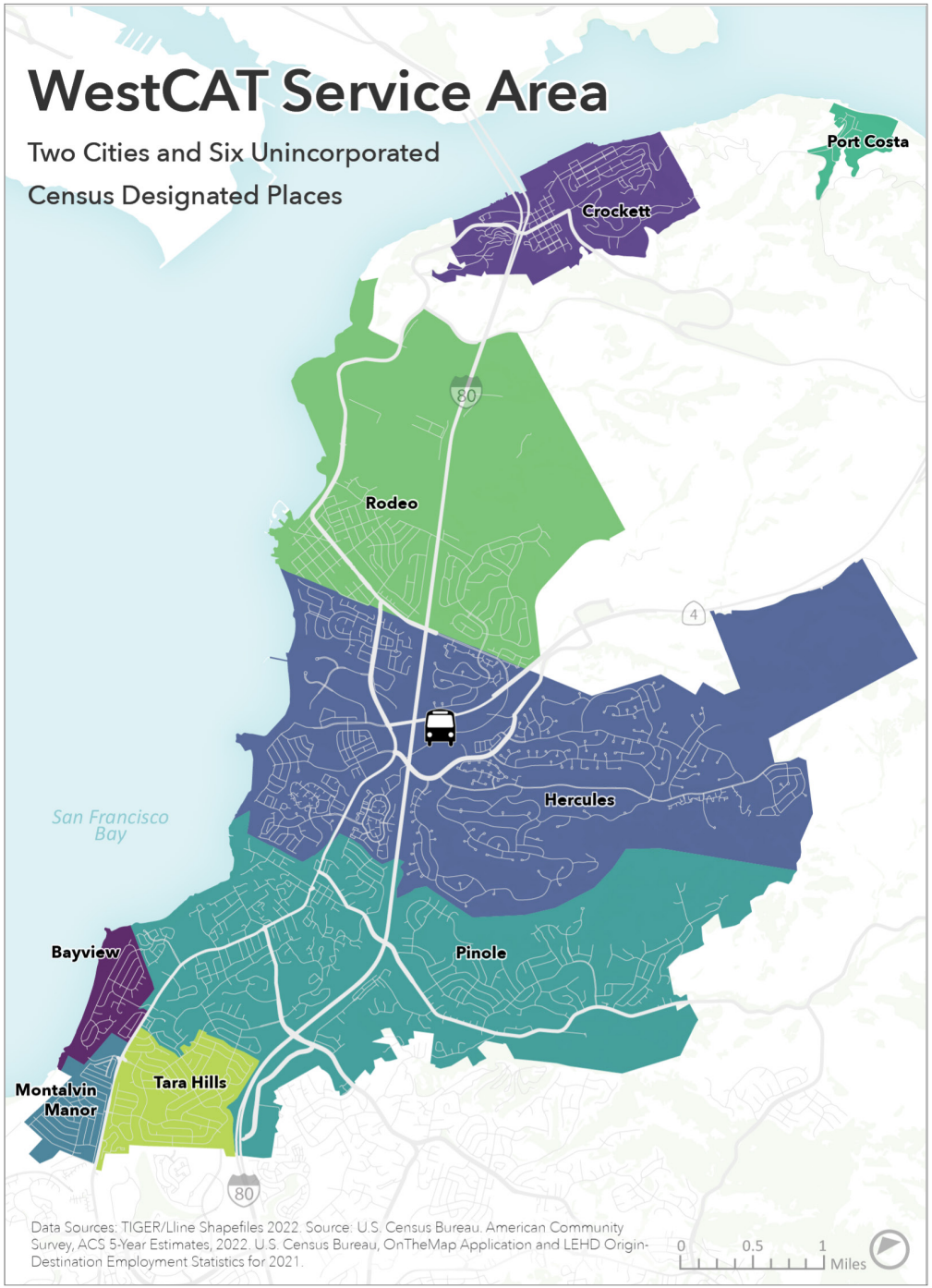
This report includes the following chapters:

- Chapter 2 summarizes the WestCAT system and the context in which it operates
- Chapter 3 describes the public engagement process and key findings
- Chapter 4 presents the fixed-route analysis and recommended fixed-route service changes
- Chapter 5 presents presents the Dial-a-Ride analysis and recommendations
- Chapter 6 presents the public transit to schools analysis and recommendations

# II. EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

This chapter summarizes the most important existing conditions findings from the WestCAT Evolution planning process. It provides an overview of WestCAT's current transit services, the characteristics of the service area and its residents, and the travel patterns that shape demand for transit. Together, these findings establish the context for the service recommendations that follow by identifying how WestCAT functions today, who the system serves, and where the strongest needs and opportunities are emerging. The full Existing Conditions Report can be found in Appendix B.

WestCAT public transit services are operated by the Western Contra Costa Transit Authority. Formed in 1977, the agency provides public transit service within an approximately 18-square-mile service area in western Contra Costa County, including the incorporated cities of Hercules and Pinole and the six unincorporated communities of Montalvin Manor, Bayview, Tara Hills, Rodeo, Crockett, and Port Costa. WestCAT is governed by a seven-member Board of Directors composed of two elected officials from each city's City Council and three members appointed by the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors.



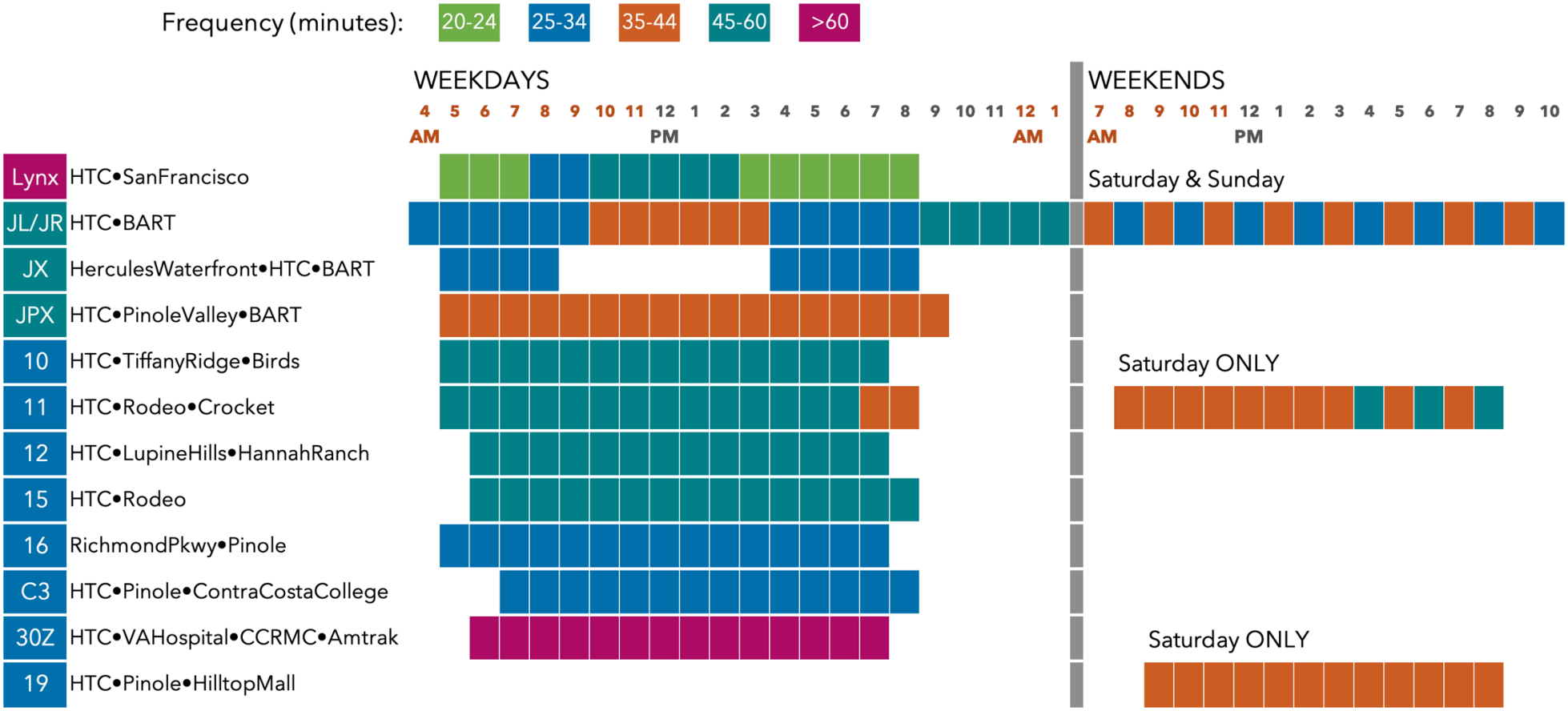

Map 1: **WestCAT Service Area**

# WESTCAT TODAY

WestCAT operates local and regional fixed-route bus services, including Regional Express connections to the Bay Area Rapid Transit network and a transbay commuter bus to downtown San Francisco branded as Lynx. WestCAT also operates two Dial-a-Ride programs: ADA Paratransit and Senior Dial-a-Ride. WestCAT has not made any major changes to its fixed routes in the last 20 years, making this study an important opportunity to take a fresh look at how the system is functioning today and where practical improvements can be made.

WestCAT's fixed-route network includes three different service types. The local routes are primarily designed to provide geographic coverage within the service area and to connect neighborhoods with key destinations and transit hubs. The Regional Express routes connect the service area with the El Cerrito del Norte BART station. Lynx provides weekday transbay service between Hercules and downtown San Francisco. Most fixed routes connect at the Hercules Transit Center, which functions as the main hub for the system and supports transfers between routes, BART parking access, and other travel options.

## Fixed Route Spans and Frequencies of Service




"HTC" - Hercules Transit Center
"BART" - El Cerrito Del Norte BART Station
"CCRMC" - Contra Costa Regional Medical Center

Figure 2: **Fixed Route Spans and Frequencies Infographic**

# SYSTEM OVERVIEW AND PERFORMANCE

WestCAT's current service structure reflects a mix of local coverage and regional connectivity. The local fixed-route network consists of eight routes, generally operating at 30- to 60-minute headways on weekdays, with very limited weekend local service. Two of the local routes extend beyond the WestCAT service area boundary. The Regional Express network consists of the three J routes, which provide direct connections to BART, while Lynx extends WestCAT's reach into San Francisco.

Among the fixed routes, the Regional Express routes account for nearly half of all fixed-route ridership. In August 2024, the four Regional Express routes together carried 47% of all fixed-route passengers and also represented the largest shares of service hours and service miles. This is a notable pattern for a relatively small suburban service area and indicates that regional travel is a central function of the network rather than a secondary one. Combined ridership on the fixed routes has been rising since the low point of 2020, although productivity dipped slightly between FY 2022/23 and FY 2023/24.

The strongest route-level performers further reinforce this pattern. Route J has the highest ridership in the system. Lynx has the highest passengers per revenue hour in the system, despite some recent decline in ridership. Among the local routes, C3, 16, and 11 consistently perform best in terms of ridership, while local service overall remains important for neighborhood access, school travel, shopping, and connections to regional service.

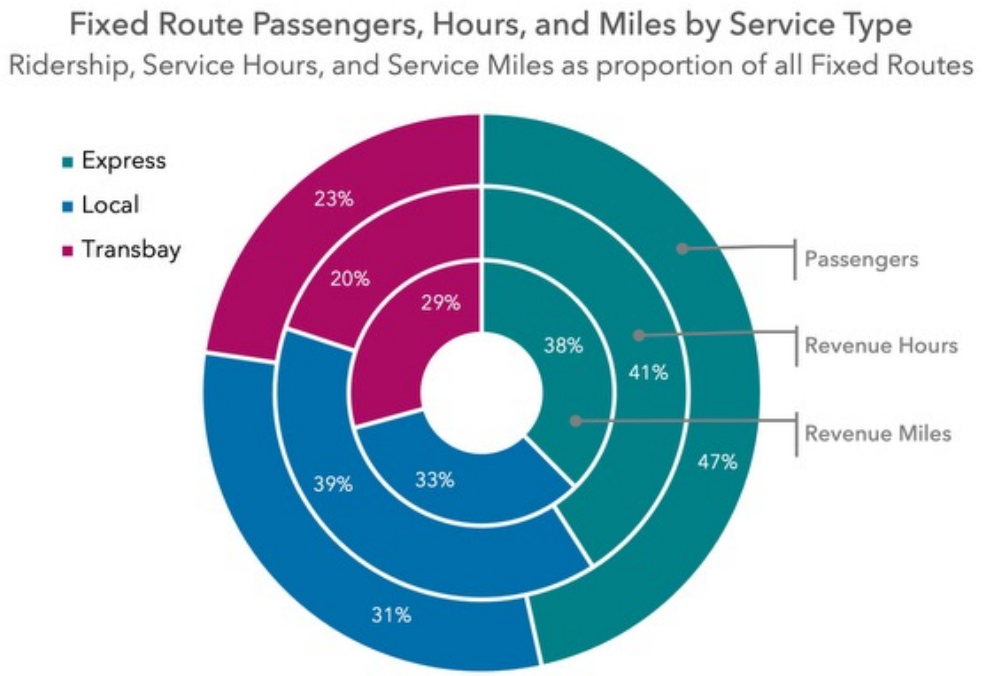



Figure 3: **Fixed Route Passengers, Service Hours, and Service Miles, Aug. 2024**

# SERVICE AREA AND TRANSIT MARKET CONTEXT

WestCAT's service area includes 68,072 residents, 23,905 households, and 11,869 jobs. The area is primarily suburban in character, with concentrations of housing, shopping centers, schools, and employment along key corridors. Hercules and Pinole contain the largest resident populations by far and together account for about two-thirds of the service area population. At the same time, the eight communities that make up the service area vary meaningfully in terms of age, race and ethnicity, language, housing, and income.

## Transit Service Area Highlights

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Population:** | 68,072 | **Population/Acre:** | 6.0 |
| **Households:** | 23,905 | **Households/Acre:** | 2.1 |
| **Jobs:** | 11,869 | **Jobs/Acre:** | 1.0 |
| **Size:** | 17.8 miles$^2$ | **Average household size:** | 2.7 people |

**Ethnicity:** **74%** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

**Education:** **90%** high school graduate or higher
**30%** bachelor's degree or higher

**Language:** **41%** speak a language other than English at home
**15%** speak English less than "very well"

**Poverty:** **16%** living in poverty

**Housing:** **28%** renter occupied

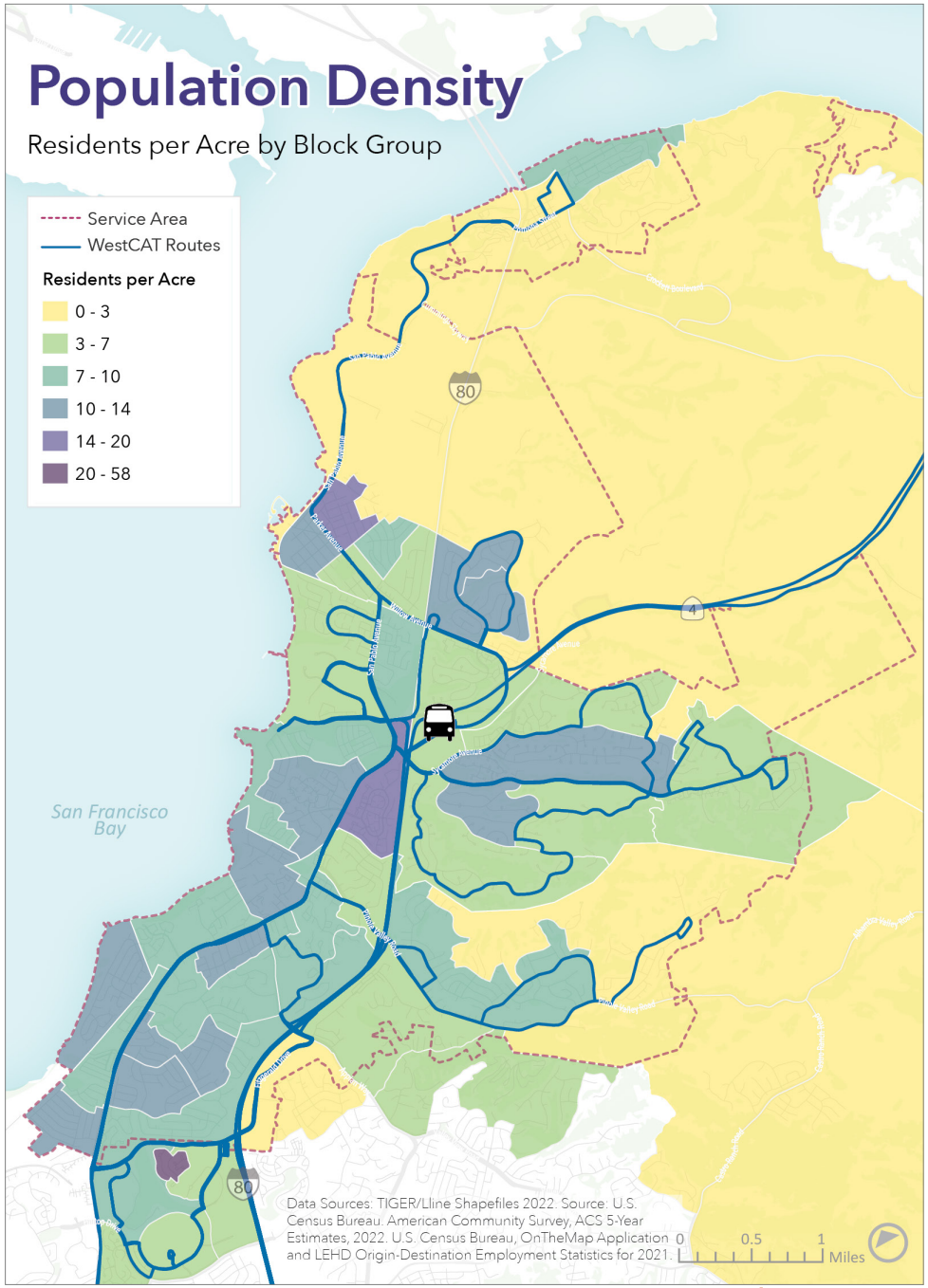
**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2022.

Figure 4: **Transit Service Area Highlights**

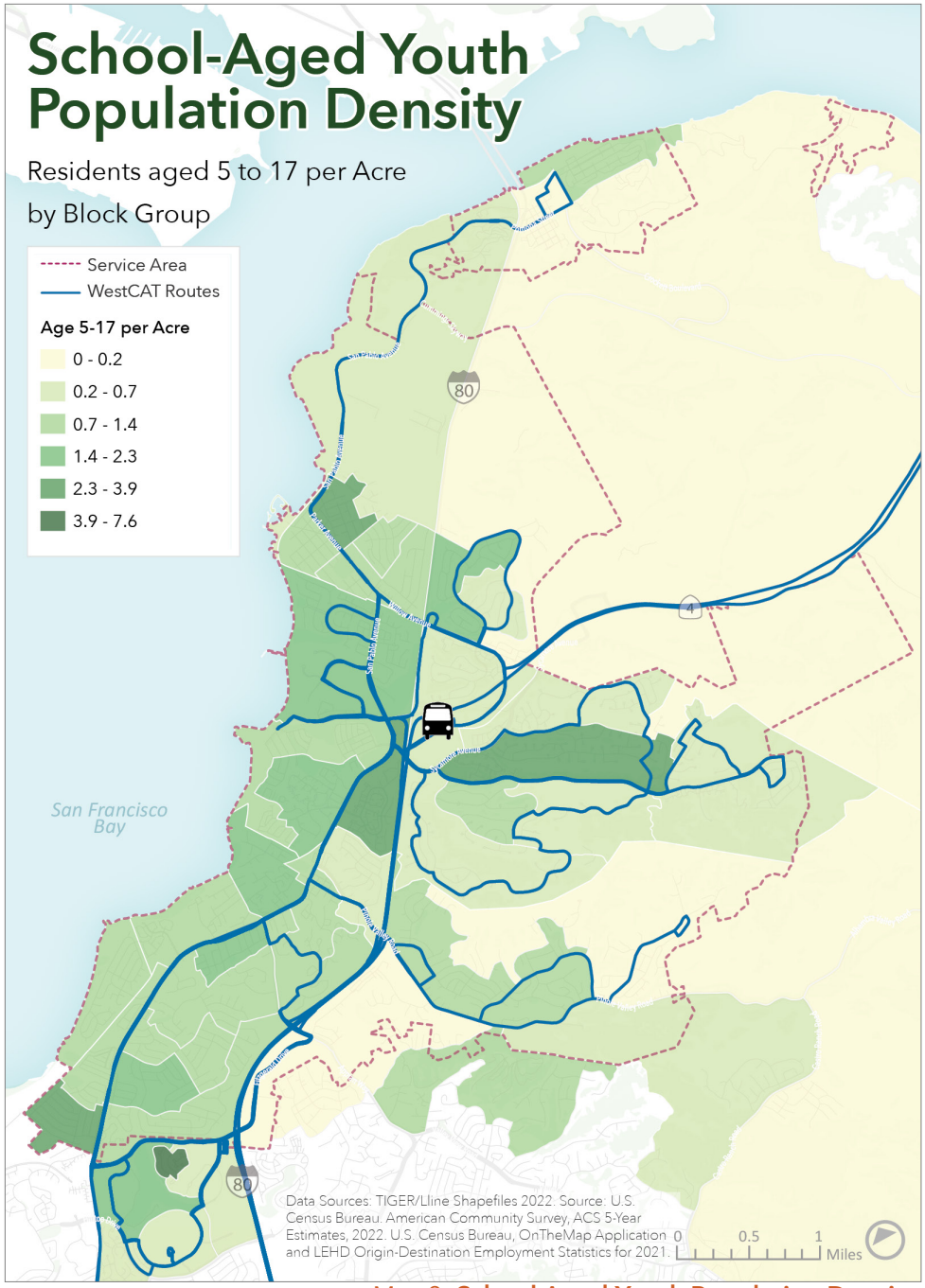
Several service area characteristics are especially relevant to transit planning. Overall, 74% of the population identifies as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, 41% speak a language other than English at home, 15% speak English less than "very well," and 16% live in poverty. About 19% of residents are age 65 or older, which is slightly higher than the countywide and statewide averages. These characteristics point to the continued importance of transit for a range of market sectors, including older adults, school-aged youth, people with disabilities, and low-income households.

The service area also includes substantial variation between communities. Montalvin Manor has the largest share of school-aged youth and the highest proportion of residents with limited English proficiency. Rodeo and Crockett have among the highest proportions of renter households. Port Costa is a clear outlier in terms of size, age, and remoteness. These differences matter because they affect both the level and the type of transit demand across the service area.

Public transit is especially relevant to several population groups in the service area. Older adults represent a growing market sector and are concentrated in several parts of the service area, especially the Bayview neighborhood. School-aged youth are another important group, and WestCAT already operates school trippers serving Hercules Middle and High Schools and Pinole Valley High School. Approximately 8,130 people with one or more disabilities live within the service area, and an estimated 57% of renter households are rent burdened. These conditions underscore the importance of maintaining a transit system that supports both everyday local access and broader regional mobility.




Map 2: **Service Area Population Density**




Map 3: **School Aged Youth Population Density**

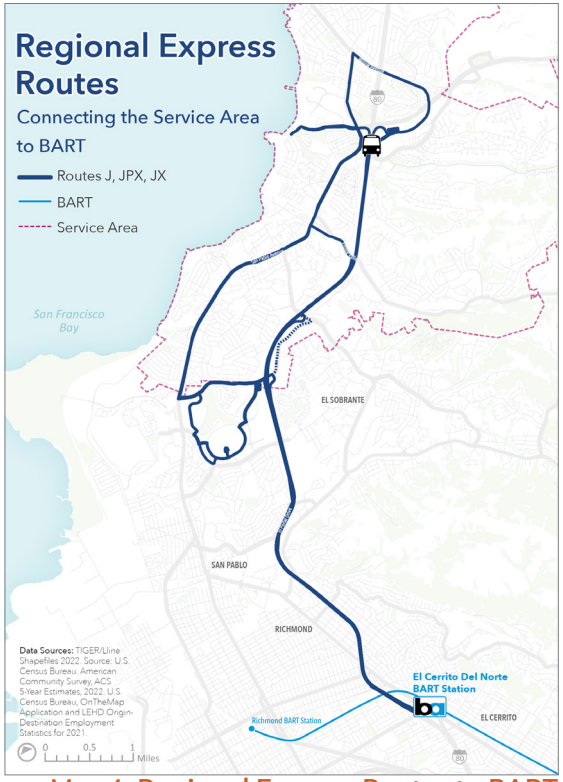
# REGIONAL TRAVEL PATTERNS

One of the clearest findings from the existing conditions analysis is that WestCAT's service area is strongly oriented toward regional travel. There are far more workers living in the service area than jobs within it: 31,139 employed residents compared with 11,869 jobs, for a net outflow of 19,270 workers. Only 7% of employed residents both live and work within the service area, while 93% commute to jobs outside it. At the same time, 82% of the people who work in the service area live elsewhere.

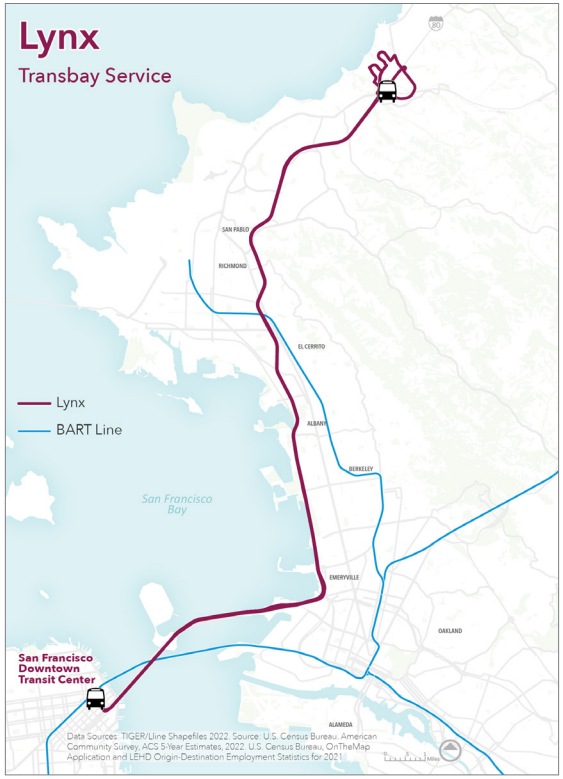
These commute flows are also relatively long. About 49% of service area residents who work outside the area commute between 10 and 24 miles, and another 25% travel more than 25 miles. The most common destinations for residents include San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond, and Berkeley. Workers coming into the service area most commonly live in Richmond, Hercules, Vallejo, and Pinole. These patterns help explain the importance of WestCAT's regional connections, particularly to BART and other transit providers.

The spatial distribution of jobs and commute destinations reinforces this same point. Jobs within the service area are concentrated along Interstate 80 and San Pablo Avenue, while residents commute throughout the Bay Area and beyond, including to all nine Bay Area counties as well as places such as Sacramento and Santa Cruz. WestCAT's role, therefore, is not only to circulate passengers within the service area, but also to connect local communities to a much wider regional transit network.

WestCAT's existing transit connections reflect this geography. The fixed-route network connects with several bus and rail systems, including AC Transit, Tri Delta Transit, County Connection, Golden Gate Transit, SolTrans, Vine, BART, Capitol Corridor, and Amtrak. These connections are a defining strength of the system and an important consideration for future improvements, particularly where transfer timing, route directness, and service frequency affect how well the network functions as a whole.




Map 4: **Regional Express Routes to BART**

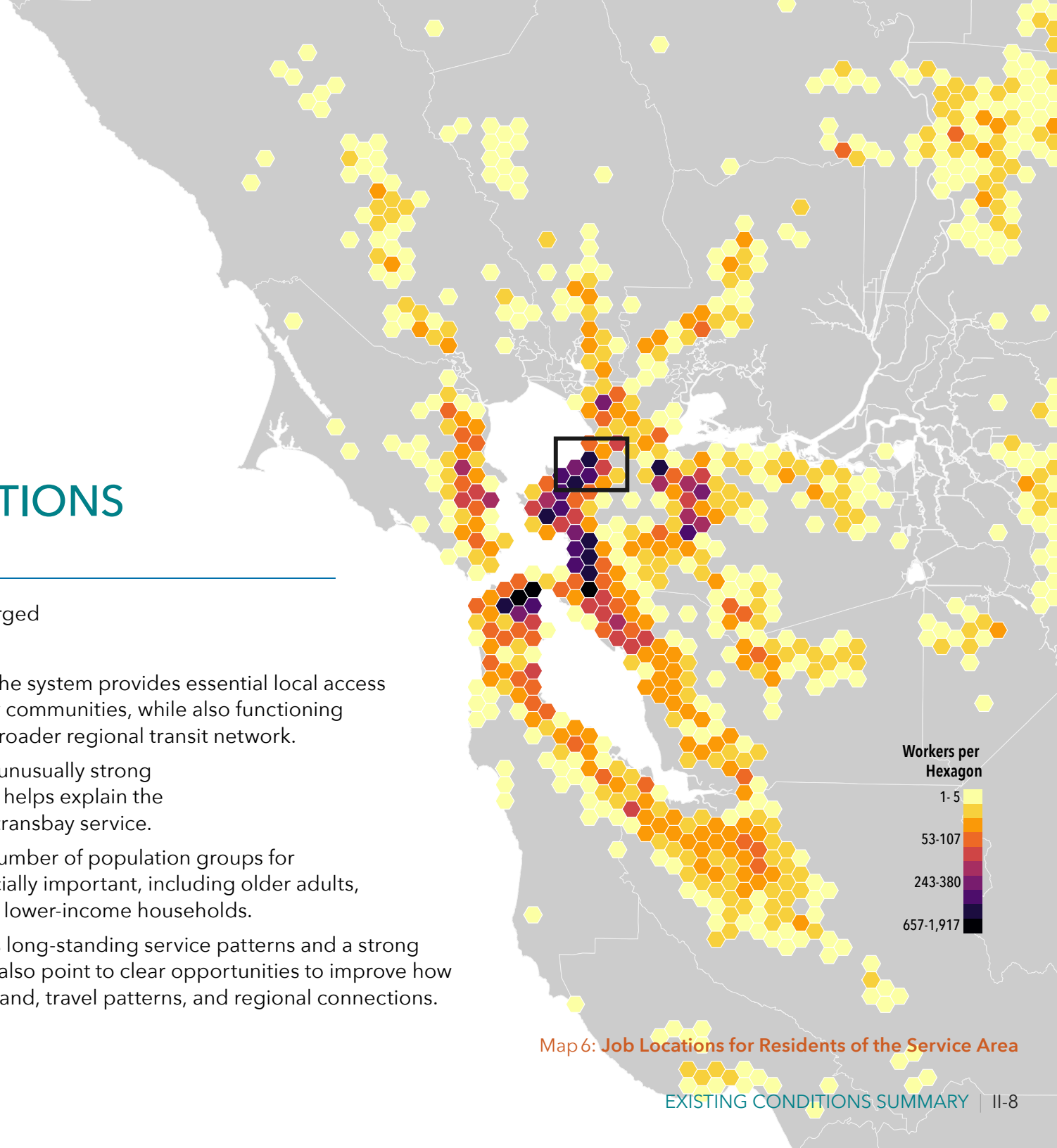



Map 5: **Lynx Transbay Service**

# EXISTING CONDITIONS TAKEAWAYS

Several overarching conclusions emerged from the existing conditions analysis.

- First, WestCAT serves a dual role: the system provides essential local access within Hercules, Pinole, and nearby communities, while also functioning as an important connector to the broader regional transit network.
- Second, regional travel demand is unusually strong for a service area of this size, which helps explain the importance of BART-oriented and transbay service.
- Third, the service area includes a number of population groups for whom transit access remains especially important, including older adults, youth, people with disabilities, and lower-income households.
- Finally, the current network reflects long-standing service patterns and a strong coverage orientation, but the data also point to clear opportunities to improve how service is aligned with current demand, travel patterns, and regional connections.




Map 6: **Job Locations for Residents of the Service Area**

# III. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

This section summarizes the public engagement conducted for WestCAT Evolution and the key findings that emerged from that process. Public engagement was a core part of the planning effort and was designed to ensure that passengers, stakeholders, and community members had meaningful opportunities to share input on transit needs, priorities, and potential improvements. The findings in this summary informed the service recommendations presented in the subsequent chapters of this report. The full Public Engagement Summary Report is included in Appendix C.

## Public Engagement Activities

- **Onboard Passenger Survey** – 640 responses; collected rider demographics and service feedback
- **Online Non-Rider Survey** – 179 responses; gathered input from residents and workers who don't regularly use WestCAT, 250 responses total
- **ADA & Senior DAR Phone Interviews** – 27 interviews; insights from Senior Dial-a-Ride and Paratransit riders
- **Open House Workshops** – 40+ attendees; 1-on-1 discussions, interactive boards, and comment cards
- **Stakeholder Interviews** – 6 interviewees; input from community-based partners
- **Special Events** – 75+ interactions; brief rider conversations at stakeholder organization events
- **Pinole Senior Center Discussion** – 8 participants; group feedback from older adults
- **Customer Requests** – 337 customer comments reviewed

Figure 5: **Public Engagement Methods Results Summary**

# METHODOLOGY

The public engagement process was designed to reach a wide range of people with different relationships to WestCAT, including current riders, non-riders, Dial-a-Ride users, community members, and local stakeholders. Input was gathered through surveys, interviews, open houses, customer comments, special events, and digital outreach, creating multiple ways for people to participate and share feedback based on their own travel needs and experience with the system.

The largest source of input came from the onboard survey, which collected 642 completed questionnaires from current fixed-route passengers. The online survey generated 230 total responses, including 179 from people who were not regular WestCAT riders. The project also included 27 telephone interviews with ADA Paratransit and Senior Dial-a-Ride riders, approximately 50 public open house attendees, 337 customer comments, and dozens of additional interactions through stakeholder events, special outreach activities, the project website, and the email list.

# KEY FINDINGS

Several clear themes emerged across the public engagement process. While different groups emphasized different aspects of the service, the findings were notably consistent in pointing to a common set of needs and priorities. The sections below summarize what was heard from current riders, non-riders, community members, stakeholders, and Dial-a-Ride users, with an emphasis on the findings that most directly informed the recommendations in this plan.

## Passenger Survey

The onboard passenger survey was one of the most important parts of the public engagement process because it gathered input directly from the people currently using WestCAT's fixed-route services. A total of 642 completed surveys were collected, providing a strong picture of how passengers use the system, what they value, and where they most want to see improvement. The findings below highlight the themes that emerged most clearly from the survey and informed the broader planning process.

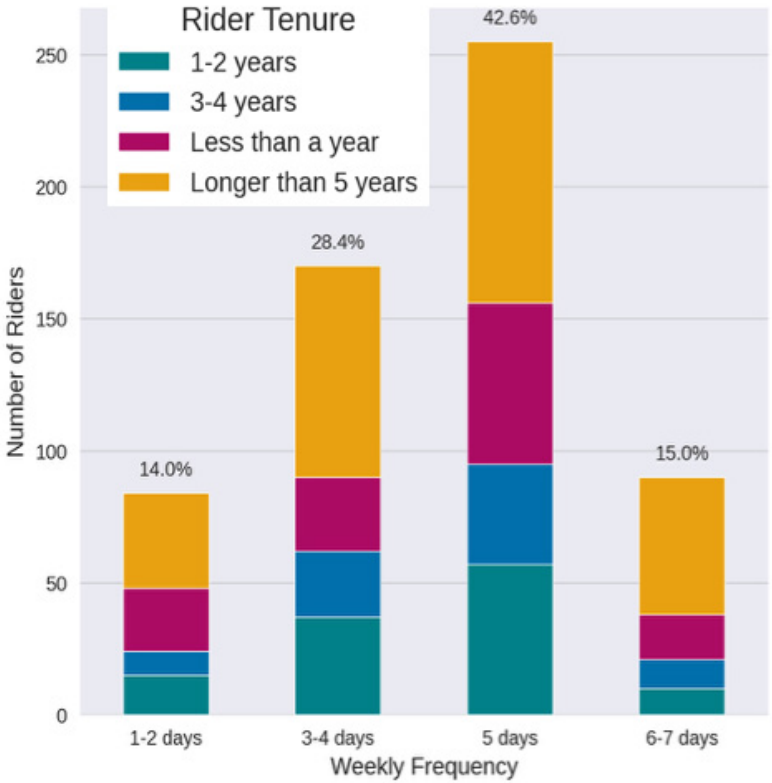



Figure 6: **Passenger Survey: "How many days in a typical week do you ride transit?" By "How long have you been riding WestCAT?"**

### Transit Usage

The survey showed that WestCAT passengers are largely regular riders and that the system plays a central role in weekday travel. Most passengers are employed either full or part time, and about one in five identified as a student. Nearly half of surveyed riders have used WestCAT for five years or more, and the most common riding pattern is five days per week. Work is by far the most common trip purpose, but riders also use WestCAT for recreation, school, medical trips, and other daily needs. Many respondents also reported working early mornings, late evenings, and on weekends, which suggests a rider base with travel needs that are outside of the typical weekday peak commute times.

The onboard survey also reinforced the importance of regional connections. Nearly three-quarters of riders said they usually transfer to or from another

transit system. BART was by far the most common connection, followed by AC Transit and Muni. Most riders walk to their first WestCAT stop, though driving was relatively common on some regional routes. More than half of respondents said they could have driven or gotten a ride for the trip they were making, and the most common reasons for riding WestCAT were that it is cheaper than driving and more convenient than driving. Together, these results suggest that WestCAT serves both people who depend on transit and people who actively choose it when the service works well for their trips.

## Improvement Priorities

Current riders expressed clear and fairly consistent priorities for improving the system. One of the strongest messages was a desire for more frequent service on the routes they use most. Riders also showed a strong preference for more frequent service within the existing service area over expanding service more broadly at lower frequency. In the service tradeoff questions, most respondents favored frequent service over closer stops, more frequent service within the current service area over expanded geographic coverage, and 20-minute all-day J service over stronger peak-only frequency. A strong majority also prioritized additional service to regional destinations over additional local service.

Real-time information emerged as another major priority. “Real-time information displays at major bus stops” received the highest average importance rating of any potential improvement and was one of the most common answers to the question of which improvement would matter most personally. Requests for real-time information also appeared repeatedly in open-ended comments about

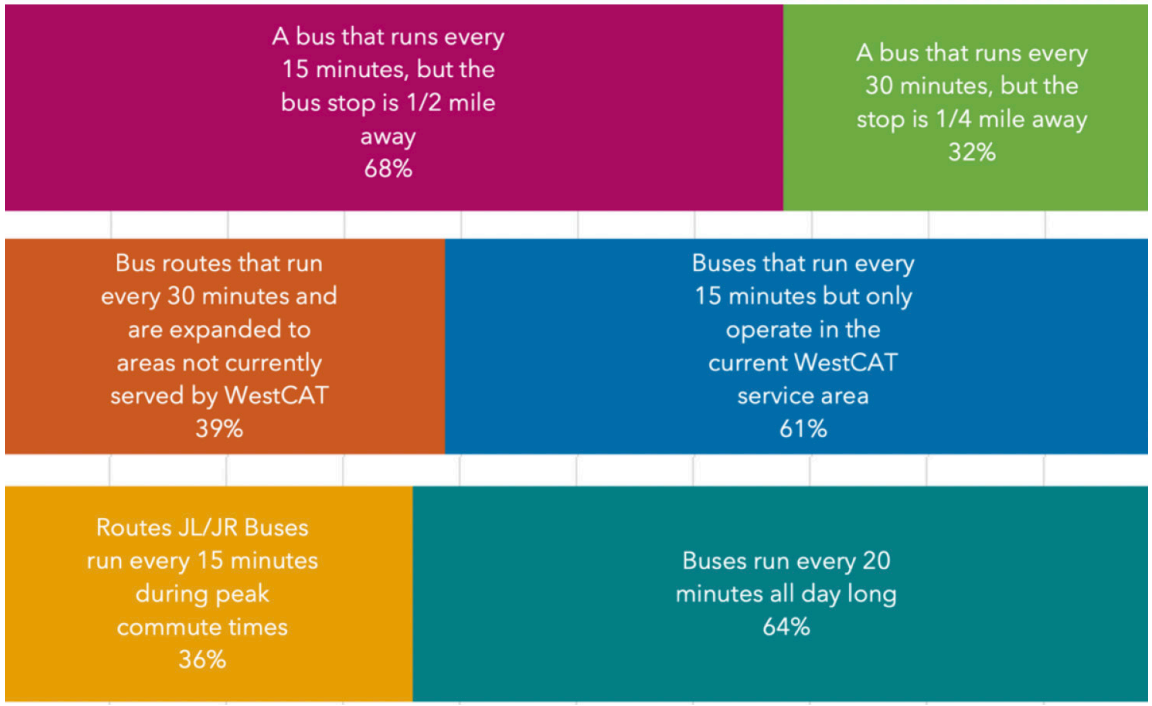



Figure 7: **Passenger Survey: Service Priority Tradeoffs - "Would you rather have..."**

communication, where riders asked for bus tracking, arrival times, better digital tools, live signage, and stronger communication during disruptions.

Weekend service and stronger regional connections also emerged as important themes. Riders often named BART, San Francisco, and East Bay destinations when asked where they most want WestCAT to go, and many of those places are already served by the system. This suggests that the strongest need is not necessarily to create entirely new corridors, but to improve the usefulness of existing ones through frequency, timing, and connections. Comments about BART often focused on both the importance of the destination itself and the need for better schedule coordination. Open-ended feedback also showed strong demand for better weekend service, especially on key routes and connections.

## Non-Rider Survey

The online non-rider survey provided an important complement to the onboard survey by capturing input from people who live or work in the service area but do not regularly use WestCAT. The survey was available from January to March 2025 and was advertised widely through the project postcard, the website, flyers, and partner communications. A total of 230 responses were collected, of which 179 were from people who were not regular WestCAT riders.

Non-riders pointed to a familiar set of barriers. The most common reasons for not using WestCAT were personal vehicle use or convenience, service that takes too long compared with driving, limited route access, limited service hours, and lack of familiarity with how the system works. Many respondents also mentioned that they no longer commute regularly because they work from home or are retired, but might consider using transit for occasional trips. These findings suggest that while many non-riders have access to a car, there is still meaningful openness to transit if the service is easier to understand, closer to where people need to go, and more competitive in terms of frequency and convenience.

When asked what improvements would make them consider using WestCAT, non-riders most often chose more frequent service, real-time arrival information, faster travel times, routes closer to home or work, service to specific destinations, and better connections to other transit systems. These responses reinforce the broader picture that emerged from the rider outreach: regional connectivity, service usefulness, and access to good information are major factors in whether people will choose to use transit.

## Customer Comments, Open Houses, and Stakeholder Input

The project also drew from 337 customer comments submitted through WestCAT's online and telephone customer requests portals, approximately 50 participants at two public open houses, and direct conversations with stakeholders and community members. These sources helped confirm and deepen the survey findings. Many of the customer comments relevant to planning had to do with communication during service disruptions, signage and stop information, real-time information, later evening and weekend service, and better alignment with school schedules.

At the open houses, participants were able to rank service priorities and discuss tradeoffs. "More frequent service on the route you ride most often" received the highest number of weighted points, followed by "More frequent bus service on weekends" and "Real-time information displays at major stops." Open house comments also reinforced interest in stronger weekend service, better connections, and more useful regional access.

Stakeholder outreach added another layer of input, particularly from organizations serving older adults and other key groups. WestCAT directly contacted stakeholder organizations, including senior centers and advocacy groups, to gather feedback from older adults, low-income residents, and other community members likely to be affected by transit service changes. Project staff also participated in wellness fairs, outreach events, and a Pinole Senior Center discussion. Feedback from these

conversations was folded into the broader public engagement findings and was particularly useful in shaping the study's attention to seniors, students, and community-facing communication needs.

## Dial-a-Ride Interview Findings

To better understand the experiences of ADA Paratransit and Senior Dial-a-Ride users, structured telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of riders who had used the service in December 2024. The interviews took place from January to March 2025 and included 27 completed interviews with ADA riders, Senior DAR riders, and caregivers. Most participants used the service for medical appointments, grocery trips, and errands.

The clearest challenge raised in these interviews was the process of booking rides by phone. Many participants described long hold times, uncertainty about whether requests had been received, and anxiety around confirming return trips after appointments. Some riders also said they were not always sure how the system worked, especially if they were newer users or helping a family member. At the same time, riders consistently expressed strong appreciation for WestCAT's drivers, often describing them as patient, respectful, and attentive. The interviews suggest that the strongest opportunities for improving Dial-a-Ride have less to do with the rides themselves and more to do with communication, clarity, and the booking experience.

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TAKEAWAYS

Several clear conclusions emerged from the public engagement process:

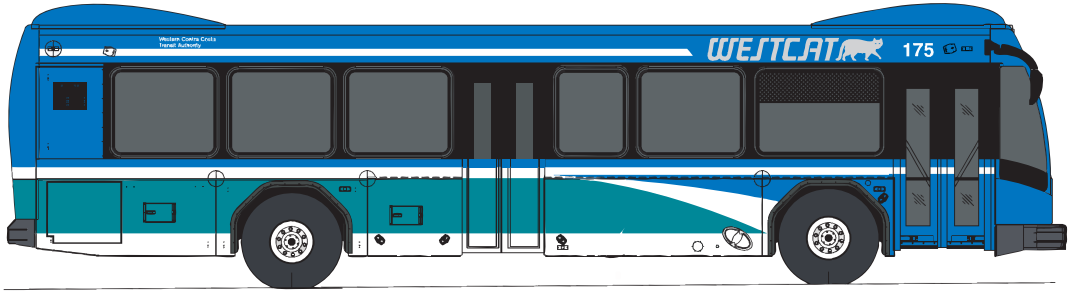
- Current riders and non-riders alike pointed to more frequent service as one of the most important ways WestCAT could improve
- Many WestCAT riders choose transit even when other options are available
- Real-time information was a major priority across multiple outreach methods
- The findings consistently reinforced the importance of regional connectivity, especially to BART and other transit systems
- Weekend service remains a meaningful unmet need for many riders

The feedback suggests that WestCAT already provides a service many people value, but that the strongest opportunities for improvement lie in making key routes more useful, making information easier to access, and making the system work more clearly as part of a larger regional network

# IV. RECOMMENDED FIXED ROUTE SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

This chapter presents a set of recommended operational service improvements to selected WestCAT fixed routes that arose during the analysis of current service and local conditions, as well as from stakeholders, passengers, and the community during the numerous public engagement activities. The analysis focused on areas where WestCAT can make direct service design choices and are within the agency's direct control, including:

- **Frequency:** how often buses operate throughout the day
- **Span of service:** the hours and days when routes operate
- **Travel speed and delay:** addressed through tools such as bus stop spacing and streamlined route alignments
- **Connectivity and transfers:** ensuring strong links to BART and other regional services, and key destinations within the service area




Other potential improvements arose from factors affecting transit performance, but that are outside of WestCAT's direct control, such as the location and condition of key transit hubs, the availability of bus-only lanes or transit signal priority (TSP) measures, roadway congestion, illegal use of carpool lanes, and bus stop amenities. These are acknowledged, but fall outside the scope of this project. While these elements affect service quality, they are dependent on regional partners and/or capital investment processes. However, all of the valid potential improvements that arose from this planning process, including capital improvements, have been well documented for future development opportunities.

# METHODOLOGY

## Data Analysis

The majority of the data analysis that was conducted for this phase of the project used a two-month period of March 1st to April 30th, 2025. The purpose of this analysis was to gain understanding of stop- and route-level ridership, as well as on-time performance activity. In some cases, data from the month of October 2024 was used. Both time periods represent a "typical" service period when school is in session. While these snapshots provide a reliable picture of typical conditions, it does not capture every seasonal fluctuation or unusual event, and therefore results should be understood as planning-level estimates rather than exact measurements.

## Financial Analysis

The main premise of the financial analysis is to recommend service improvements while holding the operating budget constant. Costs for each opportunity were determined based on estimating the variable cost impacts of the service changes, a.k.a. marginal costs. This required analysis of how many total hours and total miles (including deadhead), would be added or reduced as a result of each service change opportunity.

The impacts and costs of the opportunities were assessed using "planning-level" calculations of total hours, total miles, and operating costs. These calculations provide a consistent framework for comparing the marginal impacts of various changes, though they are not detailed scheduling, budget, or ridership projections. Final implementation may require adjustment based on scheduling efficiencies, operator requirements, or vehicle availability.

## Opportunity Evaluation Framework

Each potential service change opportunity was evaluated using the following factors, which include all of the relevant WestCAT Service Goals:

- **Effectiveness:** the potential for the opportunity to improve transit service for current and prospective passengers. Eminent construction projects that would likely increase demand were mapped and factored in to this evaluation.
- **Public engagement feedback:** support shown from the passenger and community survey results, stakeholder input, passenger comments, and open house feedback that identifies improvements most valued by riders and the community.
- **Operational feasibility:** considering whether proposed changes can be delivered within existing infrastructure, vehicle, and staffing constraints.
- **Cost and budget neutrality:** ensuring the proposed service scenario does not increase overall operating costs.

# J Regional Express Routes to BART

## Combine JL & JR into One Streamlined Route

### Context

Currently, there are two different versions of the J route, which alternate every trip. The two routes split in the southern end of the service area and beyond. One alignment travels along Lakeside Drive and serves Hilltop Mall. The other serves the Richmond Parkway Transit Center (RPTC) and takes a shorter course along Richmond Parkway. Each of the RPTC and Hilltop Mall stops in both directions are among the five busiest stops that the J serves. They are also key connection points for transferring to routes 16 and JPX, as well as AC Transit.

### Description

This service change opportunity combines the JL and JR routes into one single alignment that serves the Richmond Parkway Transit Center and the Hilltop Mall stops. Traveling southbound, the bus will:

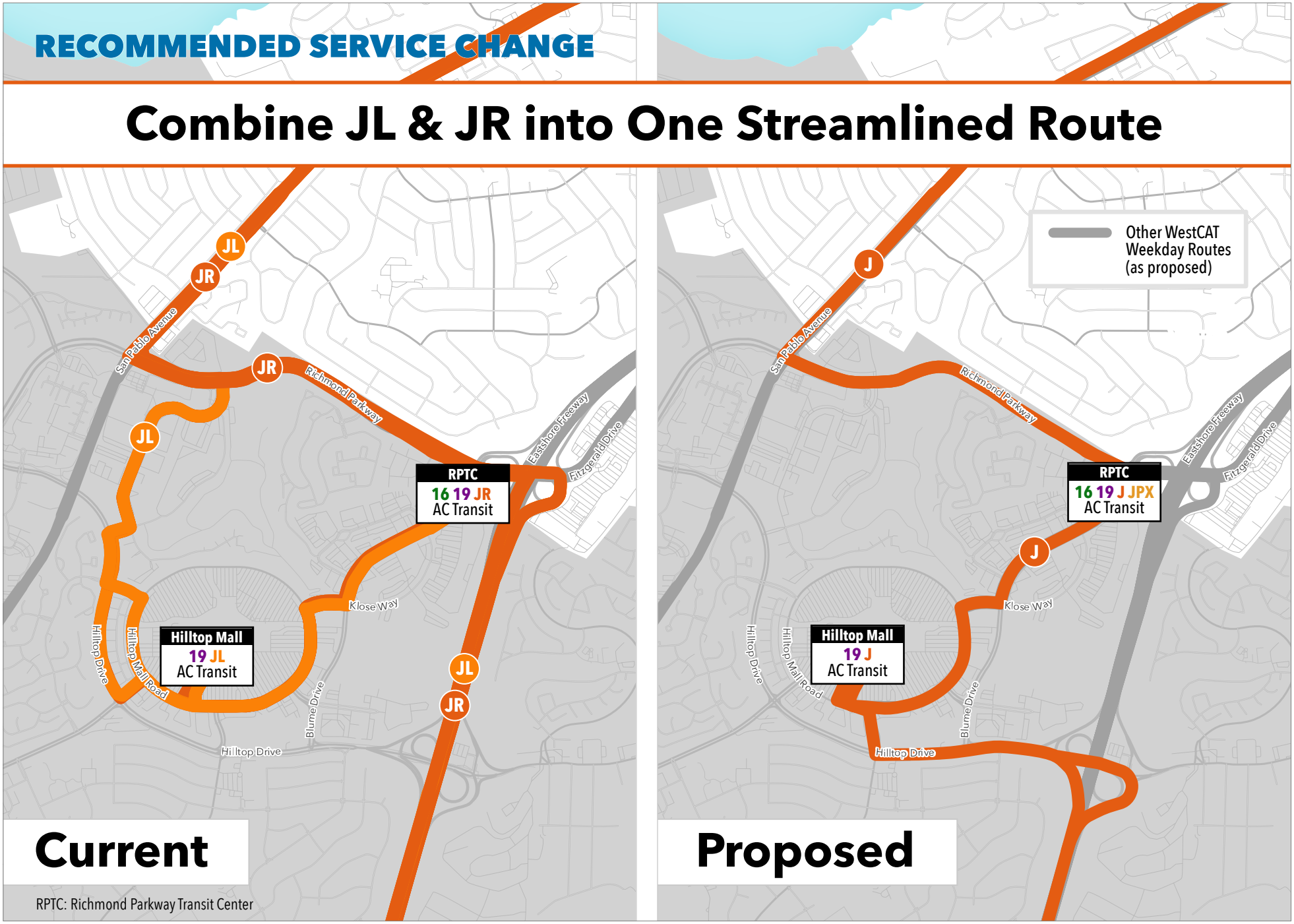
- head east along Richmond Parkway,
- serve the Richmond Parkway Transit Center,
- travel south along Blume Drive to serve Hilltop Mall,
- travel east along Hilltop Drive,
- and enter Highway I-80 at the intersection of Hilltop Drive onramp towards BART.

The new alignment is shorter than the current JL and longer than the JR, resulting in a net increase of 0.41 miles per trip, which is equal to about 21 service miles per day. The net increase in service hours is 0.4 hours per day.

### Why

Benefits to this realignment include:

- Simplifies the schedule, making it easier for passengers to plan trips and for the community to understand
- Each J bus serves both key stops - RPTC & Hilltop Mall - allowing for transfer to/from other WestCAT routes, as well as AC Transit
- Eliminates the discrepancy in travel time between the two alignments
- Avoids traffic congestion during school start and stop times along Lakeside Drive
- The net increase in service costs is negligible




Map 7: **Recommended Service Change - Combine JL & JR**

# Increase the Frequency of J & JPX to Better Align with BART

## Context

Frequency is one of the strongest determinants of overall service quality, directly affecting travel time, reliability, and ease of transfers. National research consistently shows that when service is available at 15–20 minute intervals, passengers perceive transit as convenient and allows them the freedom to "show-up-and-ride," rather than something that must be scheduled around.

The West Contra Costa County Express Bus Implementation Plan (2020) identified San Pablo Ave as a key corridor in which to provide frequent regional express service. This Plan built on the 2017 West County High-Capacity Transit Study, which showed that there was sufficient demand in the corridor to support Bus Rapid Transit service and provided several recommendations for enabling the transition, including transit signal priority treatments.

The 2023 West County Action Plan contains several supportive actions for increasing transit service along San Pablo Ave and connecting with regional services, such as BART and AC Transit. These include, but are not limited to:

- Transit-7: Improve the reliability, efficiency, frequency, and travel time of transit (e.g., bus) service along RRS, especially on San Pablo Avenue.
- Transit-10: Implement plans and support ongoing plans that promote regional express buses and enhance bus rapid transit along transit corridors and RRS.
- Transit-16: Work with CCTA, local jurisdictions, and local public transit operators to: (1) Link transit service within the West County subregion, more directly to communities outside the West County subregion, between BART stations, and between adjacent counties.

## Description

This service change opportunity will increase the frequency and shorten the headways of routes J and JPX to 20 minutes for 10 hours of each weekday. Staggering the arrival times will allow for either a J or JPX to meet each BART train at Del Norte Station, which arrive every 10 minutes. The same is true of the other stops that the two routes share, which are the heavily utilized Hercules and Richmond Parkway Transit Centers (as proposed).

The proposed hours for 20-minute service are from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. and from 3:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on weekdays.

## Why

Frequent service, typically every 15–20 minutes, improves travel time, reliability, and connections while allowing passengers to ride without planning ahead. For WestCAT, this principle is especially important on the J and JPX, which together carry a significant share of system ridership and serve as the backbone of regional travel.

The proposed service hours for 20 minute headways capture approximately 70% of commute trips, according to American Community Survey data. This is important because 77% of J and 78% of JPX passengers reported using WestCAT for work trips. In addition, 68% of J riders and 62% of JPX riders said that they ride WestCAT five or more times per week on average. These are also the same windows when J and JPX ridership is at its highest and when transfer

demand to and from BART is strongest. Aligning headways to meet each BART train not only improves reliability but also reduces wait times for passengers.

Across open houses and stakeholder outreach, increased frequency on the J and JPX corridors was among the most frequent requests. The extended 20-minute service windows will address J and JPX riders' strong preference for 20-minute all day service, rather than more frequent service during peak commute periods only.

## Reallocate All JX Service to Increase Frequency on J & JPX

### Context

The JX route currently serves three stops, including the Waterfront, Hercules Transit Center (HTC), and Del Norte BART Station (BART). Key ridership and service characteristics include:

- The average number of passengers per hour are particularly low
- The cost per passenger is high among all WestCAT routes
- The majority of ons and offs along the route are at the HTC and BART, while the Waterfront stop sees an average of 13 boardings and 10 alightings per weekday
- The route has the highest proportion of time and mileage where the vehicle is not in service
- The route was reintroduced in 2023, however it did not result in an increase in overall ridership. Instead it shifted current riders from the J and JPX routes.

In addition, there is a new development project planned for the Waterfront area that will physically inhibit the ability to provide bus service to the current stop.

### Description

This service change involves discontinuing the JX route service, which operates during peak periods on weekdays.

### Why

The JX route duplicates key connections already provided by the J and JPX, but does so with low productivity. Further, a high proportion of JX's total time and mileage is spent out of service, making it an especially inefficient use of resources.

Reallocating service to J and JPX strengthens the reliability of the high-ridership corridor. From a planning perspective, reallocating JX's service hours is the most effective way to fund improvements that riders consistently prioritized in public engagement: increased frequency and reliability on core routes.

# Local Routes

## Expand Routes 11 & 19 to Provide Service on Sundays

### Context

Route 11 currently connects the communities of Rodeo and Crockett with key destinations in Hercules, such as grocery stores, and connects passengers with all but one of the other WestCAT routes at the Hercules Transit Center (HTC). The route operates weekdays from 5:30 a.m. to 9:20 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 9:20 p.m. On Saturdays, most of route 11's headways at the HTC range from 40 to 67 minutes, with an average of 47 minutes.

Route 19 currently operates only on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 9:20 p.m. The route complements the J Saturday service by serving key shopping destinations along the I-80 corridor, as well as Hilltop Mall. Changes to the alignment of route 19 are proposed as a separate opportunity in this document, which would eliminate duplicative service and improve connections.

### Description

This opportunity would add Sunday service to routes 11 and 19 at the same levels that they currently operate on Saturdays. This will mean that WestCAT provides the same service on the same routes on Sundays as it does Saturdays. The impacts of this opportunity assume the slightly modified hours and miles that result from the proposed service changes for Route 19, as described on page IV-13. No other changes to either route were included.

### Why

This opportunity largely arose from public engagement feedback, including the onboard Survey:

- Route 19 had the highest proportion of riders that said they ride WestCAT six or more times per week
- When asked about service improvements, the addition of Sunday service was a recurring theme
- 39% of route 19 riders and 32% of route 11 passengers work weekends
- Many respondents wrote in comments requesting Sunday service on the local routes that currently only run Monday–Saturday
- Route 19 riders especially favored enhanced local service over new regional destinations
- Routes 11 and 19 had the highest proportion of riders that walk to their first WestCAT stop (91% for each)
- The importance score for "Additional routes running on weekends" was highest for route 11 and 19 riders, compared to riders of other routes
- 91% of route 19 passengers reported that they either do not have a vehicle, don't drive, or that WestCAT is their only form of transportation

Open Houses:

- At both the Hercules and Pinole open houses, the interactive boards and sticky-note comments included multiple mentions of the need for local Sunday service
- Expanded weekend service was among the top three service priorities raised at each event

In addition, both routes provide essential access to grocery stores, transfers at the HTC, and neighborhood connections in Rodeo and Crockett, which were highlighted as critical destinations by public engagement participants.

# Optimize Route 15 & Serve the Waterfront

## Context

Route 15 is a coverage route that currently operates on weekdays from 5:20 a.m. to 9:20 p.m. with most headways ranging from 40 to 73 minutes and averaging 55 minutes. The route serves the HTC and the areas north of the HTC, including the Foxboro Downs and Victoria by the Bay neighborhoods, Willow Ave Shopping Center, a business park in western Hercules, and the Safeway on San Pablo Ave.

One part of route 15 loops northeast along Viewpointe Boulevard and southwest along Coral Drive. The route has relatively low ridership overall, which is acceptable for a coverage route, but the entire Viewpointe/Coral loop and its 10 stops only see an average of 12 total combined ons and offs per day. This looped portion of route 15 is 2.1 miles long and uses seven minutes of travel time.

There is another loop built in to the current route 15 where the bus turns off of San Pablo Avenue to serve a business park along Linus Pauling Drive and Alfred Noble Drive. This loop also sees very low average ridership per day. The busiest stop along the loop, at Employment & Human Services, is only 400 feet from an adjacent stop on San Pablo Avenue.

## Description

This opportunity includes the combination of the following four streamlining measures:

- Remove the unproductive Viewpointe/Coral loop - this would reduce the route by 2.11 miles and approximately seven minutes per trip
- Remove the business park loop - this would reduce the route by 0.6 miles and 2.5 minutes per trip
- Return to HTC along Willow Ave - this would save about four minutes and half a miles per trip
- Reduce frequency slightly to once per hour - this would increase the average headway from 55 minutes to 60, thus reducing the overall route by two full trips per day

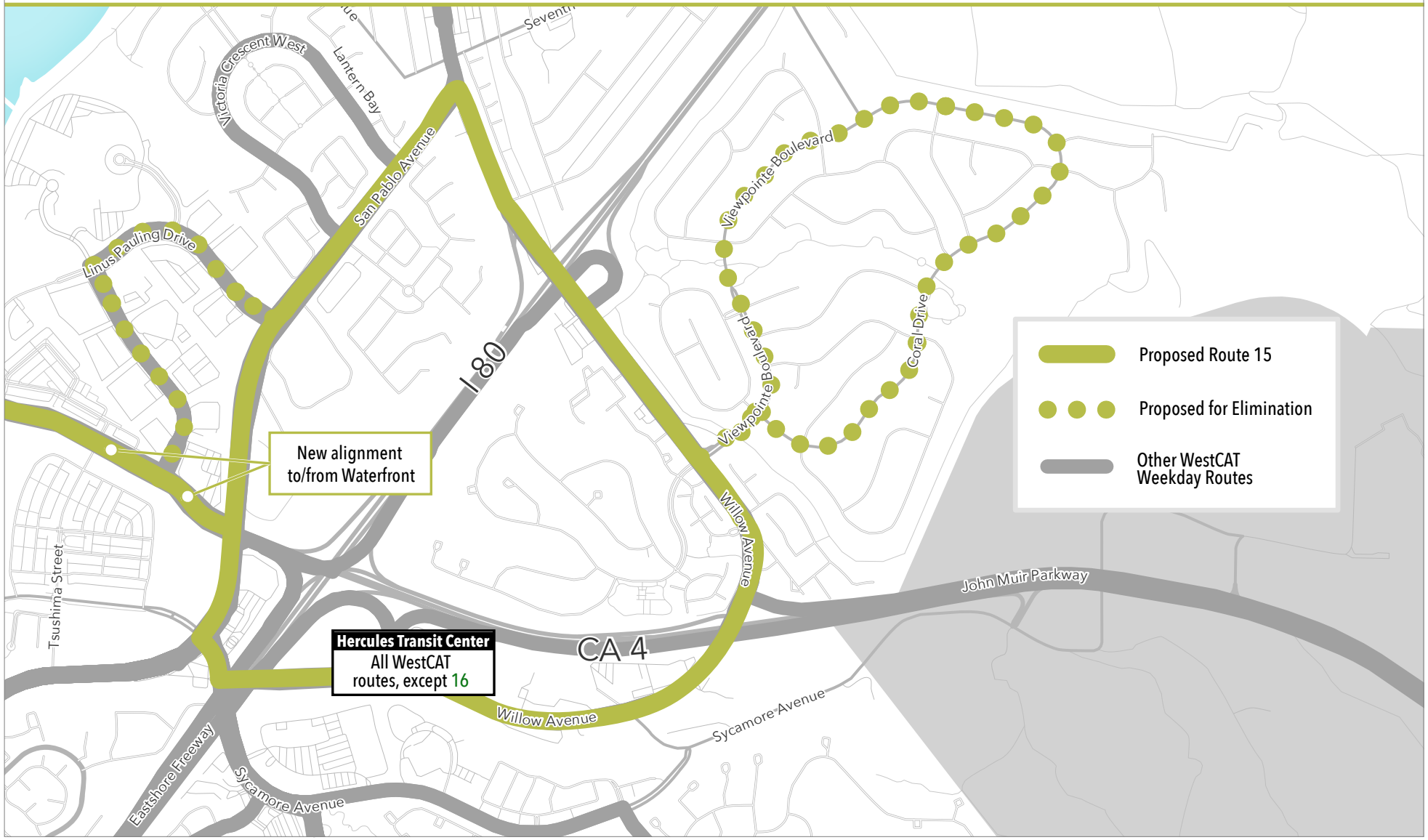
This opportunity also includes adding an extension of Route 15 to serve the Waterfront area stop, in place of the JX service recommended for elimination earlier in this document on page IV-6. The new deviation would occur at the beginning of the route after leaving HTC and would travel westbound along John Muir Pkwy to the Waterfront stop at Bayfront Blvd & Promenade St. The bus would then turn around at the Waterfront  return along John Muir Pkwy to San Pablo Ave where it will make a left. It should be noted again that the current area that allows for the bus to turn around at the Waterfront is going to see new construction that will inhibit this movement. Prior to that point WestCAT and City of Hercules staff will need to work together to explore alternative solutions.

## Why

Support for streamlining route 15 includes:

- Streamlining a route by removing deviations shortens travel time and improves reliability.
- The Viewpointe/Coral and business park loops add travel time without generating a minimum of meaningful ridership.
- Returning to HTC along Willow Ave would connect an affordable housing development (Willow Glen Apartments) to HTC along a much shorter path.

# Optimize Route 15, Add Service to the Waterfront




Map 8: **Recommended Service Change - Optimize Route 15 & Add Service to the Waterfront**

- Moving to an hourly schedule balances productivity with coverage. Route 15 would still meet its purpose as a coverage route while reducing the number of unproductive trips, freeing up service that can be reinvested where there is greater need.

Support for extending Route 15 to the Waterfront, in place of JX service, includes:

- Serving the Waterfront stop with Route 15 is much faster and less costly than providing this connection with the JX due to avoidance of the freeway. Therefore, the cost of the additional service is very low, relatively.
- The approximate cost per passenger of those who board at the Waterfront would be reduced by 72%.
- Passengers who board at the Waterfront wishing to transfer to other routes at HTC will not have to ride on Route 15 for long due to the streamlining measures described above.
- Service would be provided consistently throughout the day, rather than peak-only.
- The number of trips serving the Waterfront stop would stay the same.

## Streamline Route 16

### Context

Route 16 operates weekdays from 5:20 a.m. to 8 p.m. with most headways ranging from 28 to 40 minutes, with an average of 31 minutes. The route connects Pinole Valley Road in eastern Pinole with destinations west of I-80, Fitzgerald Drive, and connections at the Richmond Parkway Transit Center. Route 16 is the only WestCAT route that does not connect to the Hercules Transit Center.

On the far eastern end, once per roundtrip, the route goes up Wright Ave and turns around at Doidge Ave. Each of the stops along this stretch, with the exception of the westernmost, have less than an average of 1.5 total stop activities (ons or offs) per day. One stop of this leg had only one alighting and no boardings during the entire two month analysis period.

Between I-80 and San Pablo Ave, route 16 deviates from Appian way to so serve Ridgecrest Road, Marionola Way, and Marlesta Road, in both directions (twice per roundtrip). These stops also have very low activity on per day on average, especially given the number of trips that serve these stops.

### Description

Similar to the proposed changes for route 15, this opportunity involves removing sections of route 16 that see very little activity in order to improve travel time and produce cost savings that can be better used elsewhere. The changes include:

- Remove the Wright Ave/Doidge Ave leg of route 16, reducing each trip by 2.2 miles and six minutes
- Remove the deviation along Ridgecrest/ Marionola/Marlesta and instead travel straight along Appian Way, reducing each one way trip by three minutes and half a mile
- Establish a northbound stop along Appian Way that would serve the Pinole Middle School and a 154-unit development currently under construction

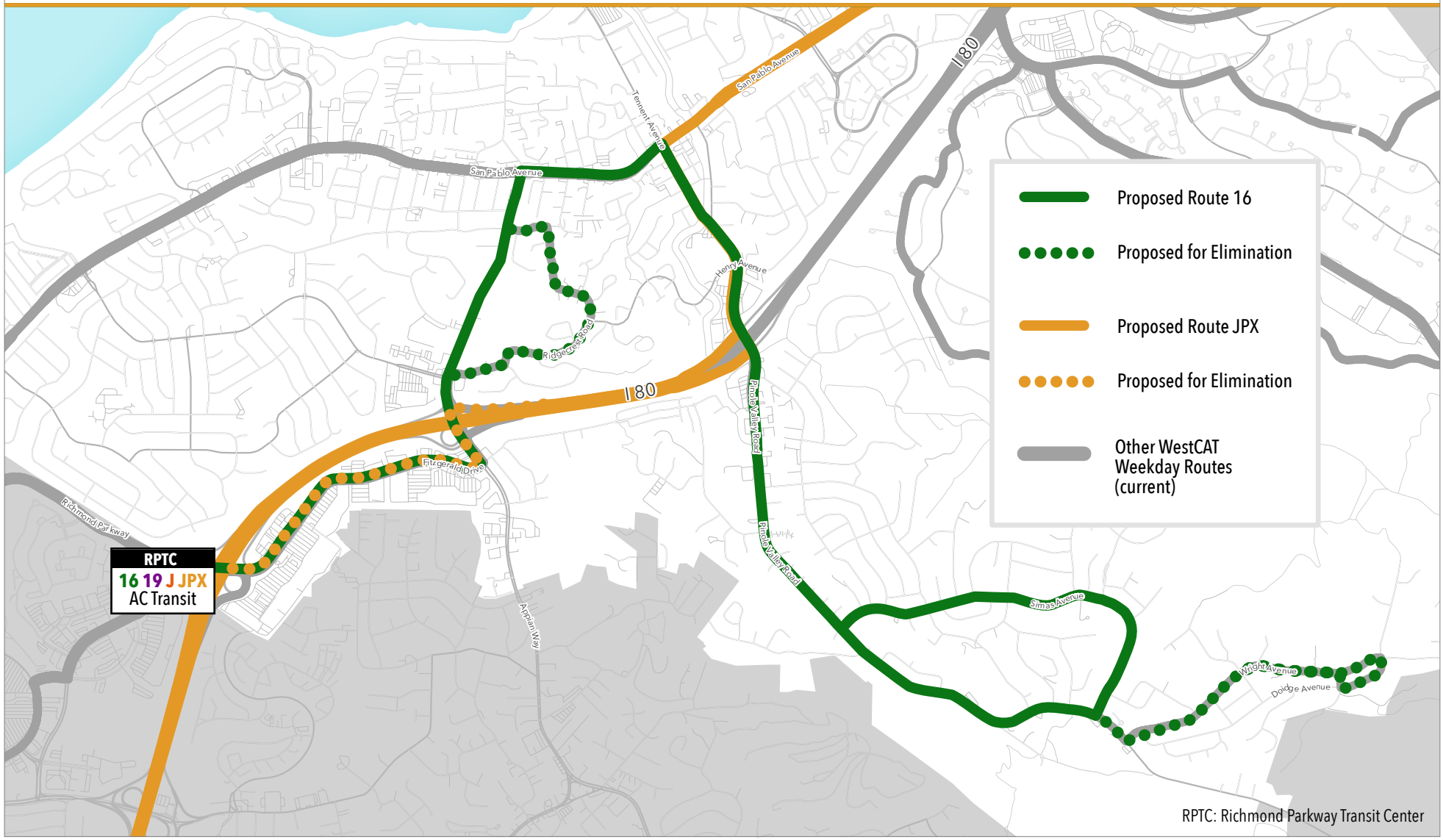
### Why

The justifications for streamlining route 16 include:

- Streamlining the alignment makes route 16 easier to understand and more direct, improving

## RECOMMENDED SERVICE CHANGE

# Streamline and Connect Routes 16 & JPX




Map 9: **Recommended Service Changes - Streamline and Connect Routes 16 & JPX**

overall reliability and reducing the likelihood of delays caused by circuitous deviations

- Removing the Wright Ave/Doidge Ave leg of route 16 would have very little impact on riderships, but would save 2.7 hours and 60 miles per day.
- Removing the Ridgecrest/Marionola/Marlesta deviation would also have very little impact on ridership, but would save 1.3 hours and 13.5 miles per day.
- The busiest stops along these two sections are very close to adjacent stops that would stay in service, therefore passengers could easily use these stops instead.
- By eliminating underused deviations and adding a new stop on Appian Way, the route would better align with current and future demand.

# Improve Connections at Key Transfer Points

This section builds on other proposed changes in this document and introduces two additional sets of measures aimed at improving connections between WestCAT routes, to regional services, and to key existing and future destinations. These, along with other recommended improvements, would strengthen the connection points at Richmond Parkway Transit Center (RPTC) and Hilltop Mall.

The following routes connect at the Richmond Parkway Transit Center:

- WestCAT - 16, J (as proposed), and JPX (as proposed)
- AC Transit - L, 70, 71, and 76

The following routes connect at the Hilltop Mall bus stop:

- WestCAT - J and 19
- AC Transit - 76 and 689

## Streamline JPX and Serve Richmond Parkway Transit Center All Day

### Context

The JPX currently provides express bus service between Hercules Transit Center (HTC) and Del Norte BART Station (BART) on weekdays. Midday from around 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. the JPX serves the shopping centers on Fitzgerald Drive and the Richmond Parkway Transit Center (RPTC).

The JPX stops along Fitzgerald Avenue each have about three ons and offs combined per day, which is quite low, especially for an express route. Route 16 also serves these same stops, but at more than double the rate.

The RPTC is a heavily used stop on all three routes that currently serve it, especially J and 16. Routes J and 16 provide local service covering much of the service area.

### Description

This opportunity proposes two changes for the JPX. The first is that the JPX serves the RPTC on all trips throughout the day, rather than only midday, in order to provide consistent connections with routes J and 16, as well as AC Transit.

The second proposed change is to eliminate the stops along Fitzgerald Avenue, allowing the JPX to stay on the freeway between Pinole Valley Road and

Richmond Parkway. Passengers on JPX wishing to get on or off at the Fitzgerald stops can transfer to/from route 16 at either the RPTC or Pinole Valley Road.

Eliminating the Fitzgerald stops and adding the RPTC stop all day would result in a net savings of 1.6 hours and a net addition of 23 miles per day, which results in a net cost savings.

### Why

- The Fitzgerald Drive stops generate very low ridership, and the same locations are already better served by Route 16. Consolidating service here reduces duplication and improves overall efficiency without leaving riders unserved.
- Providing all-day JPX service to RPTC ensures more consistent transfer opportunities to the J and 16 locals and to AC Transit routes.
- Public engagement feedback included the importance of reliable connections between WestCAT routes and to regional services. In open houses and surveys, riders frequently cited the RPTC as a key connection point and expressed frustration with inconsistent service patterns. Expanding JPX to serve RPTC all day directly addresses this need by simplifying connections and providing a consistent all-day network structure.
- Streamlining the JPX alignment improves speed and reliability for long-distance riders. Eliminating the Fitzgerald deviation keeps the route on the freeway for longer, reducing delay for through passengers while still maintaining coverage via route 16.

## Realign Route 19 to Improve Coverage and Connections

### Context

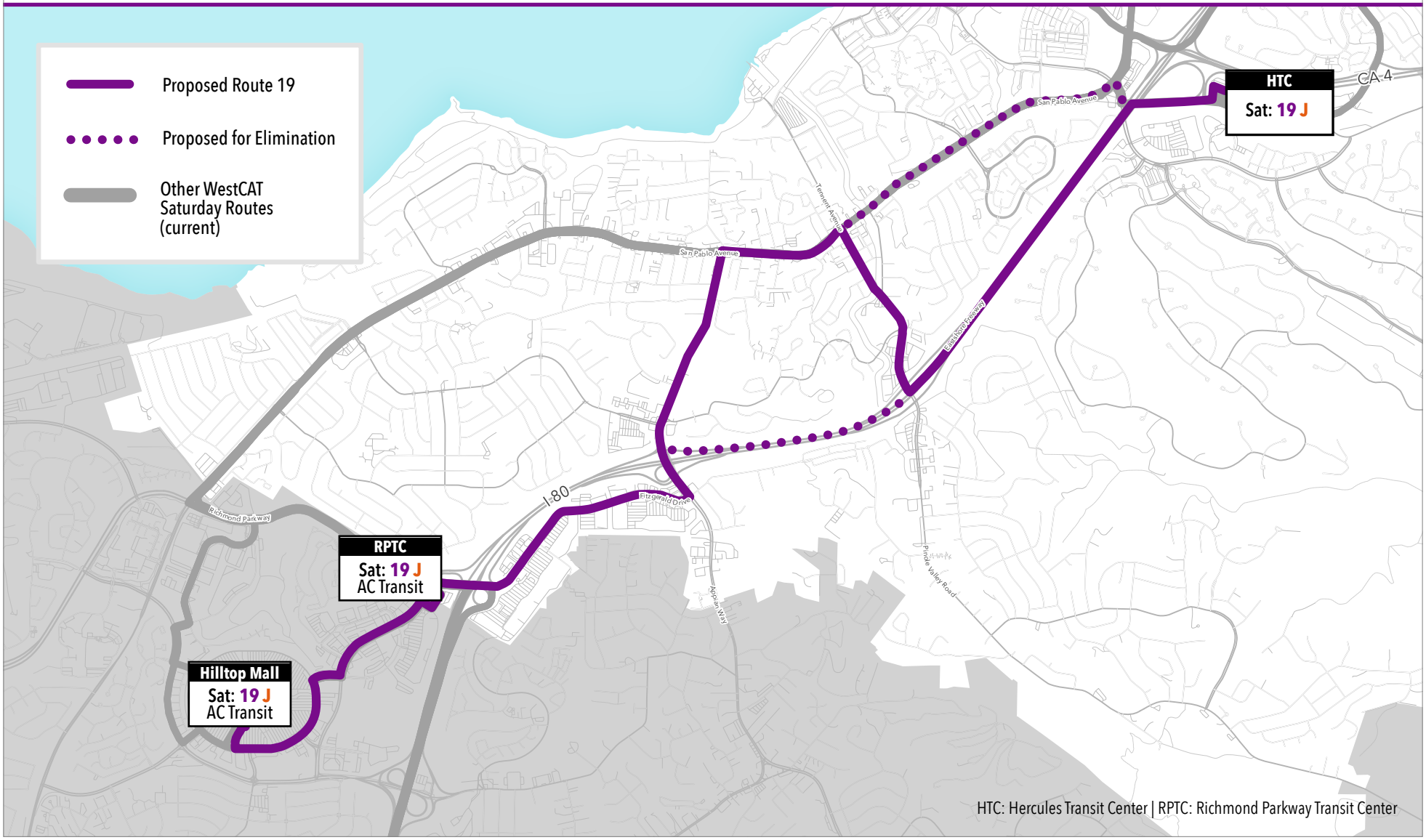
Route 19 currently operates on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 8:40 p.m. with mostly consistent headways of 48 minutes. At its northern end, the route starts at HTC, stops along San Pablo Avenue, cuts southeast along Tennent Avenue/Pinole Valley Rd, takes the freeway to Fitzgerald Drive, and ends at Hilltop Mall. Route 19's stops that see the most activity are all proximate to major shopping destinations, including Pinole Valley Road & Henry, stops along Fitzgerald, and Hilltop Mall. The stops along the San Pablo Avenue, which are shared with the J, have very low ridership

### Description

This opportunity involves changing the alignment of the northern half of route 19 and adding a stop at RPTC in both directions. In the southbound direction, instead of traveling south from HTC along San Pablo Avenue, the route would take I-80 to the Pinole Valley Road exit and head north, then west along San Pablo Avenue, then south along Appian Way to Fitzgerald Drive. This proposed section between I-80 and Fitzgerald mirrors the proposed weekday alignment of route 16 and adds coverage of central Pinole. This would remove three route 19 stops along San Pablo Avenue in each direction, however riders at these stops can ride the J and transfer to/from route 19 along San Pablo Ave at either Tennent Avenue or Appian Way. Three route 19 stops would be added along San Pablo Ave just south of the current segment. In addition, this opportunity adds a stop at RPTC in both directions between Fitzgerald and Hilltop Mall, thus increasing the transfer opportunities to other routes and AC Transit.

# RECOMMENDED SERVICE CHANGE

## Optimize Route 19




Map 10: **Recommended Service Change - Optimize Route 19**

The net cost of realigning route 19 and adding a stop at RPTC is 2.3 hours and 31.7 miles per day, which is relatively inexpensive.

### Why

The stop-level data analysis showed route 19 had very low stop activity at the shared stops with route J along San Pablo Avenue. Therefore, removing these stops for route 19 would have very little, if any, impact on ridership.

The public engagement results specific to route 19 riders contain supporting evidence for this opportunity:

- Nearly half of route 19 riders also use route 16 on weekdays. By aligning route 19 with a portion of route 16, it is likely that more passengers who normally ride route 16 will have access to Saturday service on route 19.
- 70% of route 19 passengers usually transfer to AC Transit. Adding a stop at RPTC would add more opportunities for connections to this neighboring transit system.
- Across open houses and survey comments, riders identified better coordination with other WestCAT routes and with AC Transit as a key need.
- Route 19 riders were the only group that chose enhanced coverage over adding frequency. They also had a strong preference for adding local service rather than regional service.

# FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The table to the right contains a summary of the estimated marginal costs of the proposed fixed route service addition and reductions. The improvements that cost and save the most are associated with increasing the frequency of J & JPX by eliminating JX service. Three of the opportunities would have very little impact on the annual budget, while still improving service and connections.

This summary shows only the service changes that are recommended in this set of fixed route recommendations. The total of the additional costs is slightly lower than the total cost of the reductions to allow for a margin of error.

The financial impacts of several other opportunities that were under consideration were also assessed at varying levels.

| | Annual Marginal Costs | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Opportunity** | **Hours** | **Miles** | **TOTAL** |
| **Additions** | | | |
| **19: Realign** | $ 8,899 | $ 2,178 | **$ 11,077** |
| | | | |
| **19: Add Sundays** | $ 44,292 | $ 13,403 | **$ 57,695** |
| **11: Add Sundays** | $ 47,347 | $ 16,314 | **$ 63,661** |
| | | | |
| **J 20-min Frequency - 10 hrs** | $ 199,431 | $ 54,311 | **$ 253,742** |
| **JPX 20-min Frequency - 10 hrs** | $ 174,726 | $ 66,399 | **$ 241,125** |
| | | | |
| **15: Serve Waterfront** | $ 26,532 | $ 5,303 | **$ 31,835** |
| | | **TOTAL ADDITIONS** | **$ 659,136** |
| | | | |
| **Reductions** | | | |
| **Eliminate JX** | $ (278,534) | $ (129,958) | **$ (408,492)** |
| **JPX -Fitz +RPTC** | $ (26,728) | $ 6,950 | **$ (19,778)** |
| **Streamline 16** | $ (95,350) | $ (27,241) | **$ (122,592)** |
| **Combine JL+JR** | $ (16,938) | $ 9,331 | **$ (7,607)** |
| **Reduce 15 Loops** | $ (69,975) | $ (18,167) | **$ (88,142)** |
| **Reduce 15 to 1 Hr HWs** | $ (15,161) | $ (5,152) | **$ (20,313)** |
| | | **TOTAL REDUCTIONS** | **$ (666,924)** |

# V. ADA PARATRANSIT & SENIOR DIAL-A-RIDE

Overall, WestCAT's Dial-a-Ride programs are functioning well, with no major operating issues. The agency provides a higher level of service than required under the ADA by offering the Senior Dial-a-Ride program to all residents aged 65 and older throughout the service area. The fares are also much lower than the ADA allows and compared to other Bay Area paratransit providers. Additionally, the LIFE program further improves access by providing free trips for income-eligible riders.

The upcoming phone system upgrade will address the two main issues identified through community feedback: difficulty getting through to schedule rides and confirming return trips. Once the new system is in place and functioning smoothly, WestCAT may want to test the feasibility of dividing dispatcher responsibilities between the Fixed Route and Dial-a-Ride programs on a trial basis to see if it helps balance workloads and improve customer support.

WestCAT could also explore reaching out to local senior and assisted living communities to offer regularly scheduled group trips to shopping or activity destinations. These could improve mobility and social connection for residents while making efficient use of vehicles and operators.

Finally, the agency should continue participating in regional accessible transit planning and mobility management efforts, such as those identified in the Contra Costa Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan, and carry forward any DAR-related recommendations from the forthcoming communications and marketing plan to increase community awareness and strengthen relationships among stakeholders.

# BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

WestCAT operates two shared-ride, demand-response services that use the same vehicles and drivers: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit and Senior Dial-a-Ride. Together, these programs are referred to as "Dial-a-Ride"(DAR) by WestCAT. Both services provide curb-to-curb service for passengers who are unable to use fixed-route buses due to age or disability. Rides are typically booked by phone one to three days in advance, and subscription trips are available for passengers who travel regularly to the same destination. The service area extends beyond the ADA-required three-quarter-mile boundary around fixed routes to cover the entire WestCAT service area.

ADA Paratransit is open to riders with qualifying disabilities who complete the eligibility process, while Senior Dial-a-Ride is available to any resident aged 65 or older. Fares for both programs are set below the regional average at $1.25 per one-way trip within the service area or, $10 for a 10-ride sheet. One-way trips to Richmond and San Pablo are $3 or $25 for a 10-ride sheet. The programs also participate in regional coordination efforts, including the "One-Seat Ride" pilot, which allows ADA passengers to travel across multiple service areas without transferring, and the Low-Income Fare Equity (LIFE) pilot, which provides a limited number of free trip vouchers to eligible riders.

Feedback on Dial-a-Ride services was gathered through multiple public engagement activities conducted between January and March 2025, including:

- Structured telephone interviews with active ADA Paratransit and Senior DAR users
- Discussions at the Hercules Spring into Wellness Fair
- Presentation and discussion at Pinole Senior Center
- Open-ended comments received from the onboard passenger surveys referencing Dial-a-Ride service
- Customer service request logs from WestCAT's rider comment portal

The most direct input was received through 27 structured interviews that conducted with current DAR riders. The interviews averaged ten minutes in length and covered topics such as trip booking, reliability, comfort, and customer service. Responses were analyzed thematically to identify common strengths and challenges.

Due to the compact size of the WestCAT service area, trips on DAR are relatively short. Looking at three months of DAR trip data, the average trip distance is 3.2 miles. The average length of time between arrival at passengers' pickup locations and departure from their dropoff locations is 21 minutes. Most trips occur midday with 64% between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.

The most common (non-single-family residential) destinations for DAR trips are to shopping, medical, education, senior center, and group residential locations.

In order, with the most common at the top, they are:

- Target, Pinole - this is also where transfers to East Bay Paratransit are made
- Davita Dialysis, Pinole

- Cole Vocational School, Pinole
- Hercules Senior Center, Hercules
- Pinole Senior Center, Pinole
- Rite Aid, Hercules
- St Joseph Church, Pinole
- Mobile Home Park, San Pablo
- John Swett High School, Crockett
- Walmart, Richmond
- NIAD, Richmond
- TJ Maxx, Pinole
- Samara Senior Apts, Hercules
- Kaiser Pinole, Pinole
- Pinole Assisted Living, Pinole
- Pinole Valley Park, Pinole
- Rodeo Senior Center, Rodeo

There was an average of 1.8 passenger trips per vehicle revenue hour in FY 2024/25. This metric held steady in July and August of this year, but then jumped to 2.2 passengers per revenue hour in September. WestCAT provided an average of 70 one-way trips per weekday and 37 on Saturdays. Total DAR passenger trips continues to fluctuate between positive and negative percent changes compared to the same period the prior year.

# RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

## Improve Telephone Booking & Customer Service Experience

Across all DAR feedback sources, trip booking emerged as the most frequently mentioned challenge for Dial-a-Ride passengers. Riders consistently described long hold times when calling to schedule trips, particularly during mid-morning hours. Many of the comments received from current DAR riders related to lack of clarity around telephone wait times and their place in line when on hold. Several participants noted the difficulty of getting through on the phone to confirm or book a return ride after medical appointments or shopping trips, sometimes leading to extended waiting periods.

Stakeholders and community organizations echoed these findings, emphasizing that improvements to the call and scheduling process would make the greatest immediate difference for riders.

The good news is that WestCAT is already in the process of tackling all the above issues by upgrading their telephone system. The new system will add functionality and improve a number of aspects related to receiving and handling all calls, including those related to DAR.

# Offer Regularly Scheduled Group Trips

A suggestion that came from community stakeholders was for WestCAT to offer regularly scheduled group trips to shopping destinations for residents of senior and assisted living facilities. This type of service would operate as a coordinated Dial-a-Ride trip for multiple residents from the same residential facility traveling to a shared destination such as a grocery store, pharmacy, or shopping center. WestCAT already offers subscription trips for individual riders who travel to the same place at the same time on a recurring basis, and a group trip program would expand on that concept by allowing staff at senior facilities to book recurring rides on behalf of several residents at once. Other Bay Area transit agencies have successfully implemented similar programs—for example, Marin Transit's Catch-A-Ride Group Trips program coordinates regular outings from senior housing communities to shopping and social destinations using shared paratransit vehicles. For WestCAT, a comparable model could involve scheduling a weekly mid-morning group trip from Pinole Assisted Living to nearby destinations such as Sprouts or Trader Joe's, timed to avoid peak Dial-a-Ride demand periods. Providing this service could improve mobility and social connection for residents while reducing individual trip demand, making more efficient use of vehicle hours and simplifying scheduling for both riders and staff.

Implementing scheduled group trips could have a modest but positive financial impact on WestCAT's Dial-a-Ride operations. By consolidating multiple individual trips into a single shared ride, the program would reduce total vehicle hours and mileage needed to serve the same number of passengers, improving productivity and lowering cost per passenger.

Regularly scheduled group trips would also allow more efficient vehicle deployment during off-peak periods, balancing daily demand. While additional coordination with senior facilities may require minor administrative time, the overall effect would likely be cost-neutral or slightly cost-saving when compared to multiple separately scheduled trips.

# Consider Dividing Dispatcher Responsibilities

A potential operational improvement that emerged during staff discussions is the idea of dividing dispatcher responsibilities between the Fixed Route and DAR programs. Each program involves a myriad of minute-to-minute tasks and moving parts that must be tracked. Separating them could help make the workload more manageable and reduce the complexity of juggling all at once.

This concept should only be explored after the new phone system is fully in place and operating smoothly. If pursued, it would make sense to test the new arrangement on a trial basis for a defined period of time to assess its effects on efficiency, coordination, and staff workload. Several factors would need to be evaluated, including the current dispatcher capacity and the ability to maintain coverage during absences or peak activity periods.

If the trial indicated that additional staffing would be required to sustain separate dispatch functions, the financial impact would likely be comparable to the

cost of adding one additional full-time dispatcher. Further consideration would be needed to determine whether the benefits of a more specialized dispatch structure would outweigh the added costs.

## Increase Community Awareness & Understanding

Community feedback indicated that many residents who could benefit from DAR, particularly older adults and caregivers, are unaware of the service or uncertain about eligibility and booking procedures. While WestCAT's team already conducts outreach through community events and providing information, this effort could be expanded to more directly reach potential users and partner organizations. Improved communication about how to register, schedule trips, and use fare products would be directly aligned with WestCAT's Key Service Goal to, "Increase the presence of WestCAT in the communities…" The Marketing plan includes specific recommended methods and actions for the DAR programs.

## Coordinate with Regional Mobility Management Planning

The Contra Costa Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan (2021) identifies several programs and initiatives that, once implemented, would positively impact WestCAT's DAR programs. The Plan outlines near- and long-term strategies involving local transit agencies, including efforts to improve connectivity between paratransit providers and reduce the need for transfer trips, expand same-day trip options, and enhance coordination. At the subregional level, the West Contra Costa Transportation Commission (WCCTC) offers a travel training program for older adults and disabled residents of West County. The program helps participants learn how to use a range of transportation options, including WestCAT buses, BART, ferries, city-operated senior shuttles, and paratransit through orientation sessions and guided travel outings. Together, these efforts demonstrate a growing regional framework that aligns with WestCAT's goals to provide equitable, effective transit service for all.

# VI. PUBLIC TRANSIT TO SCHOOLS

As part of WestCAT Evolution, transit service to middle and high schools emerged as an important topic from both the data analysis and public engagement. Feedback from school staff, parents, student passengers, and WestCAT operations staff highlighted a mix of challenges and opportunities related to how students travel to and from schools within the service area. This section summarizes what was learned about current travel patterns, existing school "tripper" services, and potential opportunities to strengthen coordination and improve transit options for students.

Feedback related to school transportation was gathered through multiple sources, including interviews with key school stakeholder staff, WestCAT operations staff, and the onboard passenger survey responses. Traffic congestion around schools was a consistent concern across the board. Some students attending middle and high schools within the WestCAT service area travel from outside of it, necessitating transfers between systems. School representatives noted that students and parents have said that the availability of transit routes is not sufficient for getting students to and from school. School representatives also emphasized the need for more promotion of information about existing transit services and collaboration with the district to better understand where students are coming from.

# SCHOOL TRIPPERS

Many transit agencies that provide local bus service operate supplemental services referred to as school "trippers," which are aimed at getting students to and from school. A school tripper is usually an added portion, extension, deviation, or variation of a regular, fixed bus route that is specifically timed to coincide with a particular school's bell times. In some cases, school trippers are a completely separate route with a very limited schedule. School trippers add bus capacity to accommodate a rush of students, but are also open to the general public.

WestCAT currently operates school trippers on routes 10, 12, and J, although, many other WestCAT routes, such as routes 11 and 16, serve schools within the service area.

## Overview

### 10 & 12 Trippers

- Two afternoon trippers on each route (in opposite directions), about an hour apart on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday
- One afternoon tripper on each route (in opposite directions) on Wednesdays
- No morning trippers
- Tripper routings are reconfigurations of each route that start at the Hercules Middle & High School to pick up students and then deliver them to the surrounding neighborhoods
- Ridership:
  - Trippers on both routes have moderate ridership.
  - Route 12 heads east after picking up students at the school, then winds through the neighborhood, and then about 40% get off at Hercules Transit Center, which is the last stop.
  - Route 10 heads west after picking students up at the school and 62-69% get off at the very next stop, which is at Turquoise Drive and Sycamore Ave. This stop is close to many shopping destinations, but it is also the closest to the Hercules Transit Center, which is about a half-mile walk.

### J Trippers

- Two morning trippers (one JL, one JR), arriving at nearly the same time, in the direction coming from BART
- Two afternoon trips (one JL, one JR), leaving at nearly the same time, in the direction towards BART
- Tripper routing is a one-mile deviation south along Tennent Ave from San Pablo Ave to Pinole Valley High School on Pinole Valley Road
- Ridership:
  - The afternoon trippers pickup an average of about 20 students at the school each day and distribute them at various stops along the route, with about 40% getting off at BART.
  - The morning trippers have low to very low ridership.

# Recommendations

## Consider Morning Trippers on Routes 10 & 12

Data from the onboard passenger survey showed that routes 10 and 12 have higher-than-average proportions of middle and high school student ridership. The moderate ridership on the afternoon trippers further supports the potential for successful morning tripper service. This would likely only require minor adjustments to the schedules to ensure that the regular routes are aligned with morning school bell times.

## Serve Hercules Transit Center Directly after School Pickup

This opportunity involves moving the Hercules Transit Center stop on the Route 10 tripper up from the end of the route to the beginning, right after picking students up at the school. This would better accommodate the current Route 10 tripper riders who get off at Sycamore Ave & Turquoise Drive and then walk to the HTC. It would also provide a much faster connection for the 40% of Route 12 tripper riders who ride the entire route before alighting at the HTC. In both cases, this would save students going to HTC in the afternoons about 15 minutes of travel time. Furthermore, the added convenience of this connection could potentially attract more student passengers.

## Establish Ongoing Coordination with School Representatives

WestCAT could benefit from establishing a more consistent process for coordination with local schools and the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD). A regular forum or school transit advisory committee would allow school staff and WestCAT to share information, identify transportation needs, and explore opportunities for improved communication with students and families. Representatives could include staff from middle and high schools within the service area as well as district transportation and communications staff.

Initial outreach could focus on Pinole Valley High School to better understand students' transportation needs, particularly morning travel patterns and factors affecting the low ridership on the J morning trippers. Alternatively, as discussed later in this section, Pinole Middle School could also serve as an initial focus due to the willingness of school staff to participate.

Discussions could also include how to share information about WestCAT routes and trip planning tools more effectively with students and parents. Collecting data on students' home locations and gathering feedback from school staff would help WestCAT better understand where service or outreach gaps may exist.

Several Bay Area transit agencies have successfully maintained ongoing partnerships with school districts through standing coordination groups. These forums provide a structured way to address emerging transportation needs, share performance data, and align communications efforts.

Further development of this opportunity, including engagement strategies and messaging approaches, are included in the Marketing Plan.

# PINOLE MIDDLE SCHOOL COORDINATION AND PLANNING PROCESS

## Background

The Assistant Principal of Pinole Middle School approached WestCAT staff to better understand the school's transportation challenges and potential opportunities for improvement. The Assistant Principal of Pinole Middle School noted that some families face transportation challenges that may affect attendance, particularly for students traveling from nearby neighborhoods such as Hilltop and Montalvin Manor. Current travel options can involve multiple transfers or long walks, and traffic congestion near the school contributes to delays during morning drop-off. The school also identified safety concerns related to heavy traffic along Appian Way and expressed interest in working with WestCAT and local partners to explore ways to make travel to and from school easier and safer for students.

Pinole Middle staff expressed strong interest in collaborating with WestCAT to identify feasible solutions. The Assistant Principal was amenable to surveying parents about transportation needs and shared willingness to help distribute the survey through school newsletters. He also expressed interest in Safe Routes to Schools resources and coordination with city staff to address pedestrian safety. School staff invited WestCAT to participate in family-oriented events, such as orientation and Back-to-School Night, to provide route information and assist families in identifying safe ways to travel to school.

This collaboration has laid the groundwork for a structured, repeatable process to assess and address school transportation needs. Pinole Middle School offers an opportunity to pilot this process and establish a model for future coordination with other schools in the WestCAT service area.

## Recommended Planning Framework

The Assistant Principal of Pinole Middle provided consultant staff with the anonymized home addresses and associated absentee records of each student. These were mapped to explore potential transportation barriers or gaps. The addresses were also mapped to assess whether any correlations existed between rates of absenteeism and the availability of transit or proximity to the school.

The preliminary mapping of student addresses from Pinole Middle showed a wide distribution across the city and surrounding neighborhoods, with no clear geographic clusters of low attendance. The analysis also showed that a large proportion of students live within walking distance of WestCAT's J route along San Pablo Avenue, which provides a direct connection to stops located about a half mile from the school, or Route 16, which stops right at the school. For these students for whom existing transit routes may be a feasible option, there are opportunities for expanded coordination with the school community to make using existing routes

more convenient and improved communication to promote student and family awareness of the options.

The following is a simple, recommended planning framework for improving transit access for schools. This process is derived from Marin Transit's successful School Transportation Program, but is scaled to WestCAT's size and resources. Dependent upon funding and staff resource availability, the scope of this process could include all of WestCAT's middle and high schools, or it could start small by focusing on a single pilot school, such as Pinole Middle.

### Step 1: Establish a Collaborative Partnership & Gather Feedback

Begin by building relationships with key partners such as school and district administrators, city staff, and parent or community representatives. Establishing open lines of communication early on helps create a foundation of trust and shared understanding that will support later steps in the planning process. Designate a primary point of contact at each school to coordinate with WestCAT and facilitate ongoing collaboration. Utilize these relationships to gather qualitative input on students' transportation needs through outreach methods such as parent surveys, attendance at school informational meetings, and conversations with key staff.

### Step 2: Collect and Analyze Data

Compile key data such as student addresses, bell schedules, and enrollment by grade level. Overlay this information with WestCAT's routes and known barriers to bike/pedestrian travel, such as freeways. Incorporate the qualitative feedback gathered from the previous step. Locate student clusters that are beyond walking distance but could be reasonably served by existing fixed routes or minor route adjustments. Identify other common barriers to travel that could be addressed through non-transit solutions, such as Safe Routes to Schools programs.

### Step 3: Evaluate Routing Options

Using the data analysis, develop one or two candidate service options. For example, extending an existing route or adding a short morning and afternoon deviation in the form of a school tripper. Evaluate each option for travel time, operating cost, and available fleet or driver resources. Ensure that any proposed change fits within the existing service structure.

### Step 4: Assess Demand and Community Support

If new school tripper service is deemed to be a viable solution, first survey students and families, through the school or online, to measure likely ridership and gather input on stop locations and timing. Confirm that potential demand meets a minimum viability threshold.

### Step 5: Communicate and Build Awareness

Once service options or travel resources have been identified, prioritize making information easily accessible to families. Work with school staff to share route details, maps, and trip-planning guidance through existing communication channels such as parent newsletters, email updates, school websites, and information portals. Attend school events like orientation and Back-to-School Night to answer questions and provide information. Clear, consistent communication will ensure that families are aware of available transit options and helps strengthen trust and collaboration between WestCAT and the school community.

### Step 6: Pilot and Evaluate

If data and feedback support a service change, implement a short-term pilot (e.g., one school semester). Track ridership, on-time performance, and student satisfaction. After the pilot period, determine whether the service should continue, be adjusted, or discontinued based on results.