



Legislation Details (With Text)

**File #:** 14-318      **Version:** 1      **Name:** LINKS Update  
**Type:** Staff Report      **Status:** Filed  
**In control:** City Council  
**On agenda:** 7/21/2014      **Final action:** 7/21/2014  
**Enactment date:**      **Enactment #:**  
**Title:** Update on San Leandro LINKS Shuttle Program  
**Sponsors:** Cynthia Battenberg  
**Indexes:**  
**Code sections:**  
**Attachments:** 1. Final LINKS Shuttle Report June 2014, 2. PowerPoint 3A Presentation 2014 0721 LINKS Update.pdf

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
7/21/2014	1	City Council	Received and Filed	

Update on San Leandro LINKS Shuttle Program

**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This report and presentation is for information only and no action is required at this time.

**BACKGROUND**

Since its inception in 2001, the LINKS shuttle service has served businesses throughout the West San Leandro industrial area and has provided a free transportation link between places of employment and the San Leandro BART Station. The service has demonstrated its value to the community through the overwhelmingly positive feedback from riders (90% responded that shuttle service was good to excellent), high ridership productivity, and ridership growth over the past decade. In recent years, the LINKS shuttle has provided slightly less than 200,000 rides annually.

LINKS is funded through a variety of sources including local and regional grants. A significant portion of funding (45% over the past three years) comes from a business improvement district (BID) that is formed by businesses within 1/4 mile of the shuttle route.

The LINKS shuttle service is managed by the San Leandro Transportation Management Organization (SLTMO), a non-profit entity with representation from local businesses and the City of San Leandro. In 2014, several factors have led to the SLTMO exploring options for enhancing and updating the service:

- *BID Re-establishment:* The current BID expires this year. Thirteen years have passed since the original route was created and the timing is right to suggest service modification and potential expansion during this renewal period.
- *New growth and development in West San Leandro:* Business activity is very strong in San

Leandro's industrial areas. A recent influx of new businesses, the opening of the Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, and a general economic recovery warrant revisiting the LINKS alignment to ensure that the service best meets current and future needs.

- *Next Generation Workplace District Initiatives*: An Industrial Area Working Group, formed to help prioritize projects and programs related to the revitalization of San Leandro's industrial areas, ranked LINKS service enhancements as the #1 priority of 17 potential projects.
- *National trend in transit-ridership growth*: Numerous studies show a trend of younger workers driving less and preferring other modes such as transit and biking for commuting. To cater to this generation of workers, there is an expectation of effective transportation alternatives that reduce the need to drive.

With these drivers in mind, the SLTMO engaged Nelson Nygaard, a leading transportation consulting firm to study the LINKS service and suggest possible service alternatives.

### **Proposed Service Enhancements**

Although LINKS riders report high satisfaction, an opportunity exists to provide more frequent service, shorten the time required for a round-trip ride, and reach businesses that previously could not access LINKS. The primary recommendation of the Nelson Nygaard report is that the existing LINKS route be split into two separate loops. By splitting the route, it is possible to reduce the daily travel time for riders. Under current conditions, a full trip around the loop (i.e. to work in the morning and back to BART in the afternoon) can take over 40 minutes. The split loop alternative will reduce that time by roughly ten minutes.

An additional benefit of the split route proposal is that it will provide service to Marina Boulevard; a key employment center that presently lacks shuttle coverage. Adding service along Marina Boulevard will benefit a large number of businesses - including Marina Square Shopping Center and the Auto Mall - that currently suffer from a lack of parking and transit options.

Expanded LINKS service will necessarily increase the cost of service. To meet this challenge, City staff and the SLTMO are exploring numerous options to secure funding. A part of the Next Generation Workplace District Study, the City Council committed \$50,000 in the FY2014-15 budget to support LINKS operations. It is also likely that businesses will be asked to contribute more through an increase to the BID assessment rates. Discussions are also underway with AC Transit and local businesses and property owners to determine if new partnerships might yield additional funding for LINKS. Funding scenarios will be presented for Council input and discussion.

### **ATTACHMENT**

- San Leandro LINKS Service Alternatives report, Nelson Nygaard, June 2014.

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