

To: Board of Directors

Date: 1/9/2020

From: Ruby Horta, Director of Planning, Marketing & Innovation

Reviewed by: *W.C.*

SUBJECT: Ridership Update

Background:

County Connection staff prepared a Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA), which was completed in January 2018. The COA provided staff with the foundation for a data-driven planning effort to restructure County Connection's service focused on increased ridership. Since January 2018, the Board approved a major service change which was implemented in March 2019. The service change included cuts, adjustments and enhancements throughout the service area. Subsequently, a minor service change was implemented in Fall 2019, to routes serving Bishop Ranch.

Overall Trends

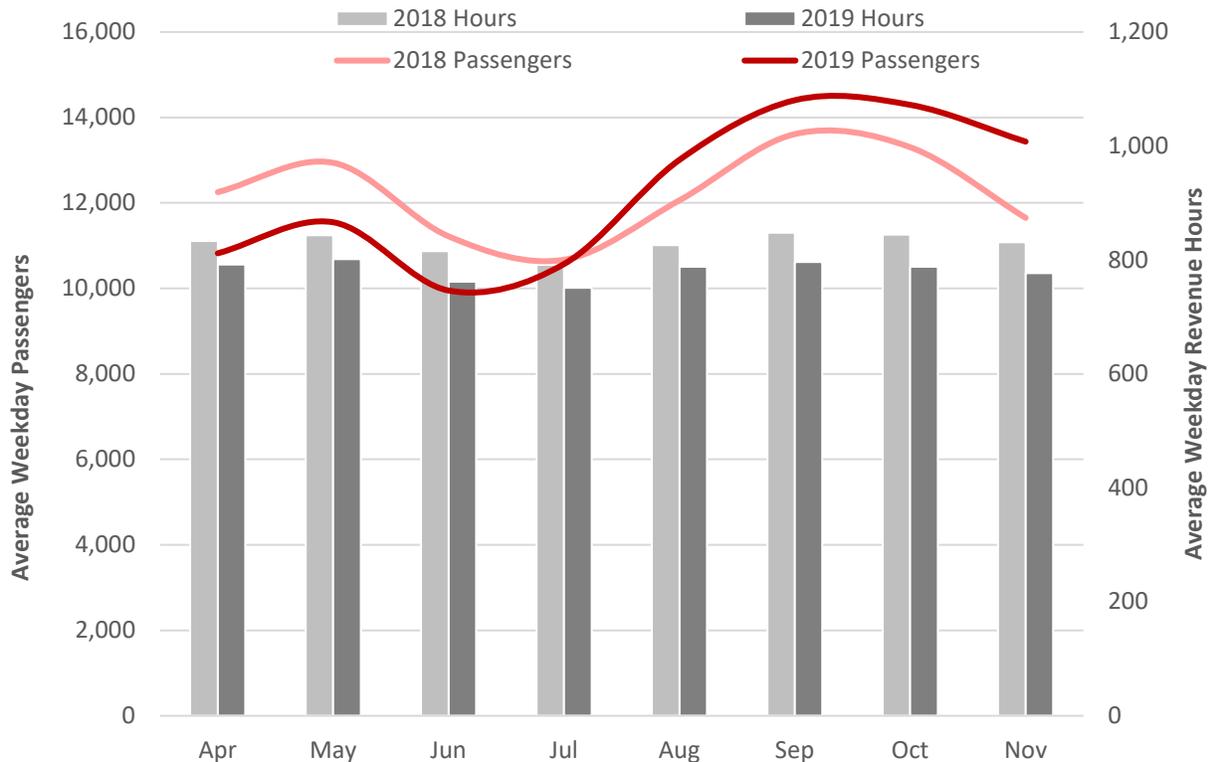
Service changes typically require a couple of years to realize the full effects, whether positive or negative. Staff anticipated a reduction in ridership given the reduction in overall service hours. Although service was increased along certain routes, potential new riders require various levels of persuasion try the new service. However, over the last several months, routes with increased service have gained additional ridership.

The following analysis compares 2018 to 2019 from April – November. It should be noted that in addition to the service changes that went into effect in March 2019, three (3) routes serving the Monument Corridor offer free fares since July 2019. The data demonstrates a significant shift in the ridership trend (starting July 2019), despite the reduction in revenue hours.

The chart on the next page compares average weekday passengers and revenue hours. Staff has excluded bus bridges and other special events to depict solely County Connection passengers. From April to June, ridership continued to decline, year over year. However, starting in July 2019, the trend has shifted and although revenue hours have not increased, ridership was about 11 percent higher in November 2019, when compared to the same month last year.

Average Weekday Passengers & Hours

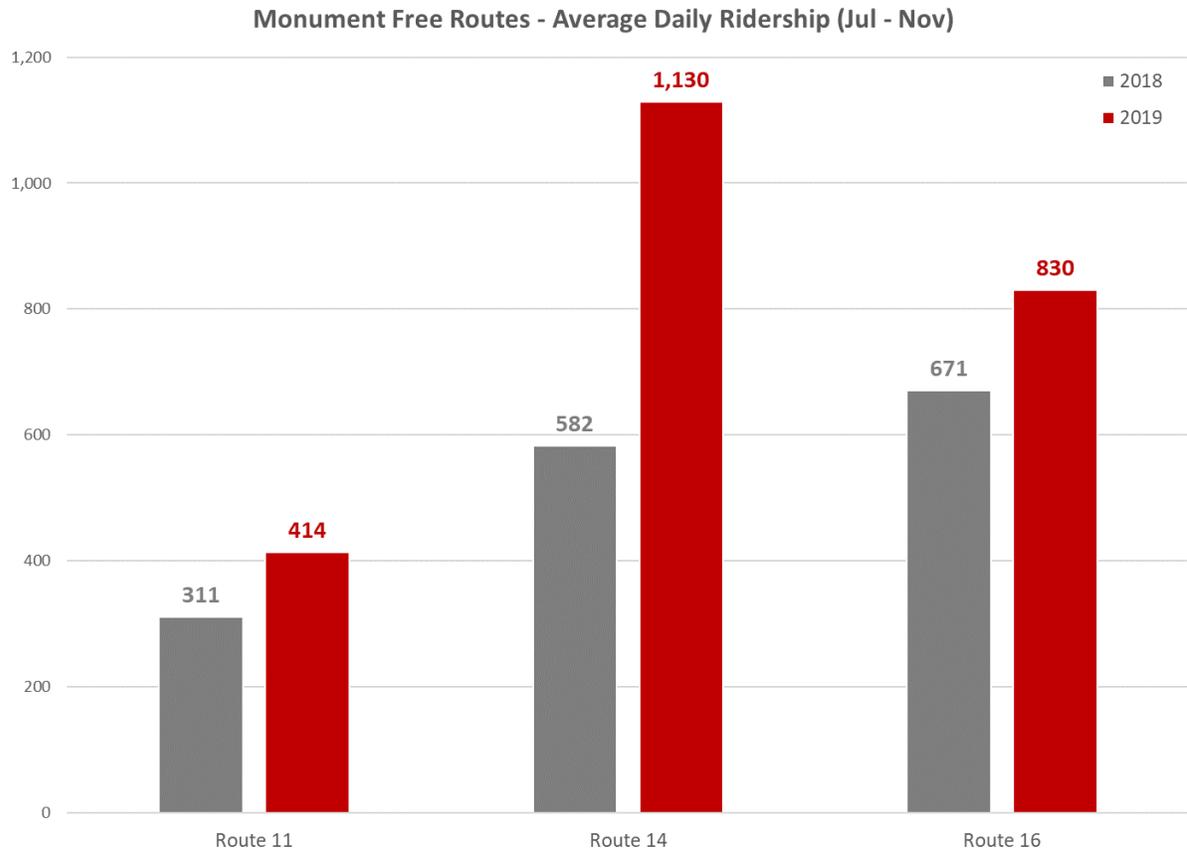
(excludes bus bridges & other special events)



There are several positive results from the service restructure, however, the most impactful variable (within a short time frame) has been the Monument Corridor Free Fares Pilot, funded by the State’s Cap and Trade grant under the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP). Some of those positive results, outside of the LCTOP sponsored routes include increased productivity on routes 1, 7, 9, 10, 20, 91X, 99X and 320 and increased ridership on routes 6 and 35. On the flip side, about half of the weekend routes experienced a decrease in ridership. Additionally, routes like 15 and 28 were altered to allow other routes to cover certain segments more effectively, and thus have declining ridership. Route 15 no longer serves a segment between Pleasant Hill BART and Walnut Creek BART and Route 28 no longer serves the Homeless Shelter on Arnold Industrial Way. Route 14 was extended to Walnut Creek BART to better connect passengers from the Monument Corridor and Route 27 connects the Homeless Shelter to North Concord BART. While some routes are still experiencing declines in ridership, the trend is slowing down, and in some cases has even become positive in the last few months.

Monument Corridor – Free Fares

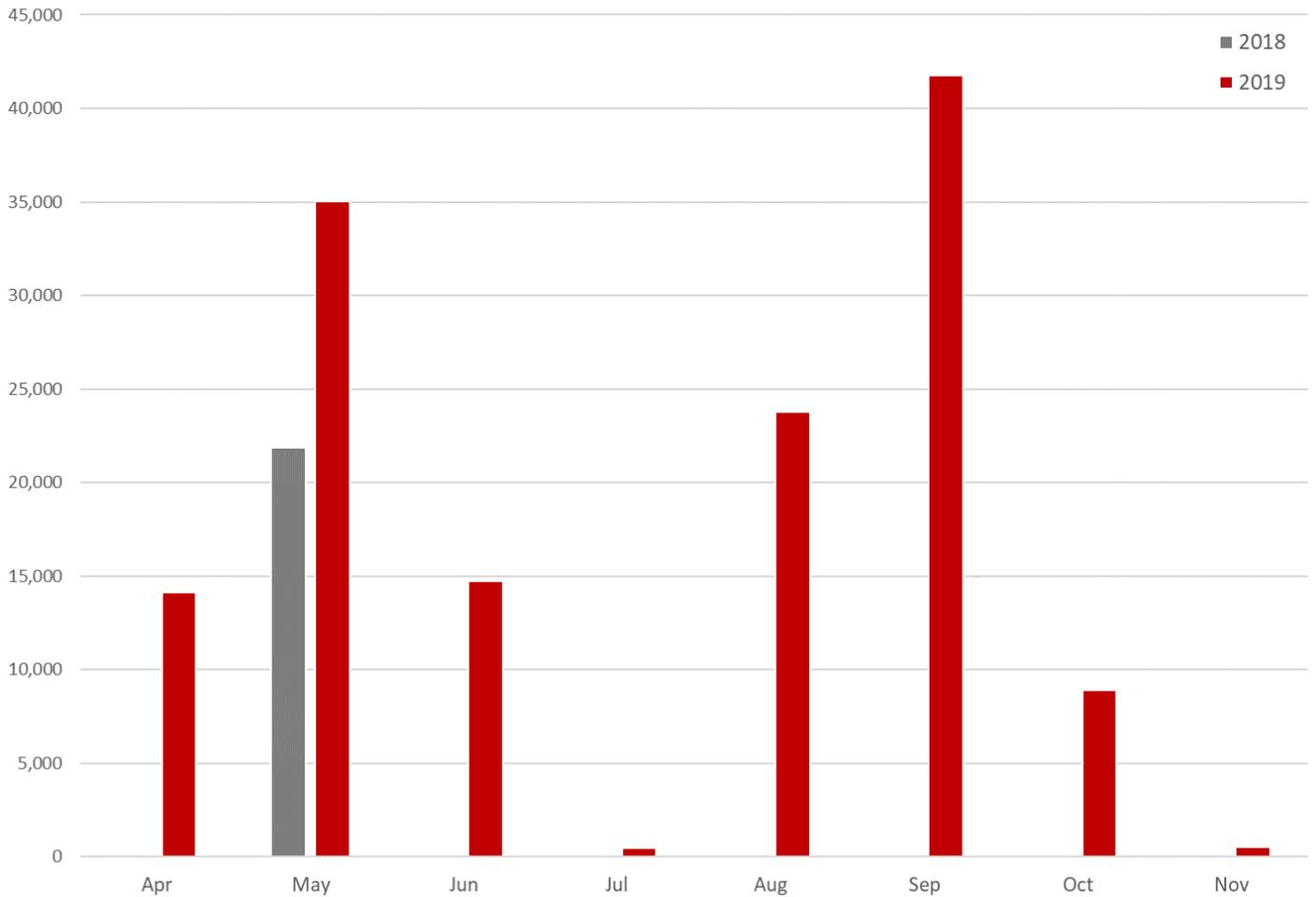
The three LCTOP-sponsored routes include routes 11, 14 and 16. They have been offering free trips since July 2019. Year-over-year, combined ridership (for the months of July through November) on these three routes has increased from approximately 1,500 in 2018 to 2,300 in 2019. That’s more than 50 percent increase, over a 5-month period.



BART Bus Bridges:

County Connection has operated bus bridges on behalf of BART for many years. Traditionally, bus bridges occurred in case of emergencies when BART service was interrupted for an extended period. Starting in 2019, BART began scheduling several maintenance projects on their tracks, which required working with transit agencies to operate bus bridges. For County Connection, the bus bridges in 2019 represent a significant boost to ridership. From April to November of 2018, BART bus bridges accounted for a little over 20,000 passengers. This was for a single bus bridge in May 2018. During the same period in 2019, County Connection carried close to 140,000 passengers, with bus bridges every month, from April to November.

BART Bus Bridge Monthly Ridership (Apr - Nov)



Next Steps:

The analysis above, though relatively preliminary, provides staff with initial guidance on potential areas for improvement. Weekend routes and routes that offer infrequent service should be further analyzed. Additionally, the one-year LCTOP pilot expires in June 2020, and although additional funding will be available, staff must ensure federal regulations (Title VI) will not be violated if we extend the program beyond the one-year pilot.

Financial Implications:

None, for information only.

Recommendation:

None, information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.