

To: Operations & Scheduling Committee

Date: 12/21/2023

From: Pranjal Dixit, Manager of Planning

Reviewed by: MR

SUBJECT: Fixed Route Performance Comparison

Background:

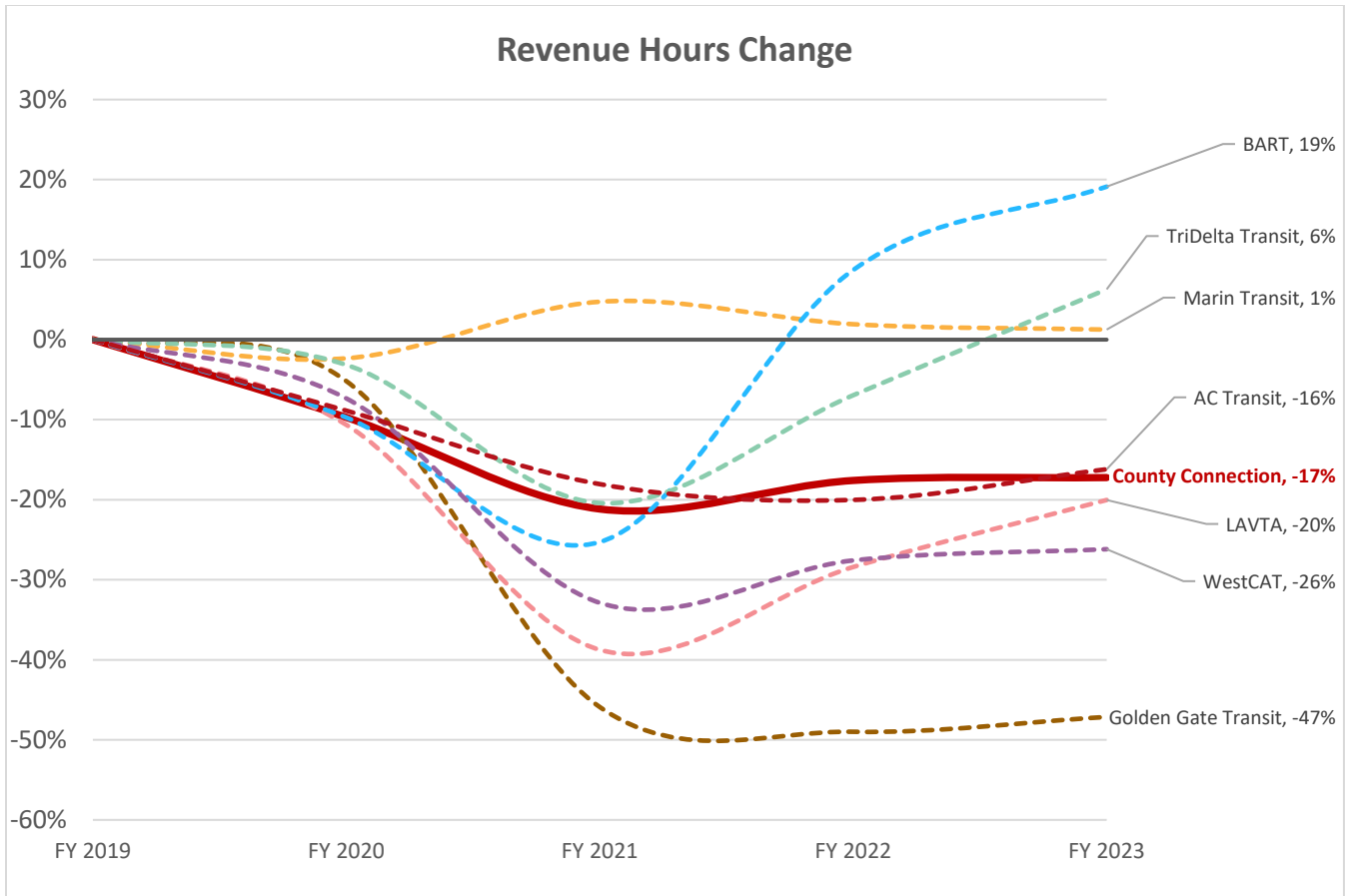
Bay Area ridership endured a drastic and uneven decline during the pandemic. While experiencing a slight downward trend pre-pandemic, the implementation of stay-at-home orders in March 2020 triggered a precipitous drop of over 74%, from 41.4 million passenger trips per month to under 10.4 million by the end of FY 2021. This decline was not uniform, with commuter-focused routes facing the most significant impact. As restrictions eased, ridership gradually recovered but still remains at only 55% of pre-pandemic levels, highlighting the ongoing challenge. Notably, the nature of this recovery has been vastly different for suburban transit agencies like County Connection, Tri Delta Transit, WestCAT, and LAVTA, compared to urban-centric agencies like Muni, AC Transit, SamTrans, and VTA.

Service Levels:

In response to the pandemic's impact on ridership, Bay Area bus operators implemented service adjustments throughout 2020-2023. County Connection, for example, initially reduced service in response to low ridership and operator availability, prioritizing access to essential jobs and services over peak-hour frequency. Notably, Marin Transit took a contrasting approach, increasing local service to address capacity constraints, highlighting the diverse strategies adopted by various agencies. BART's increase in service levels are primarily due to the Orange/Green Line extension towards Berryessa/North San Jose.

With the gradual return to normalcy, service restorations began in FY22. County Connection reinstated school services and reallocated resources to routes along the Monument Corridor and other high ridership areas, boosting local and weekend services in low-income and minority communities. Tri Delta Transit, on the other hand, initially expanded service with the Oakley Park and Ride opening but recently reduced it due to lower demand on specific routes. They plan on making further adjustments in January 2024. Similarly, LAVTA and WestCAT are actively reviewing their service models to improve local connectivity and weekend offerings.

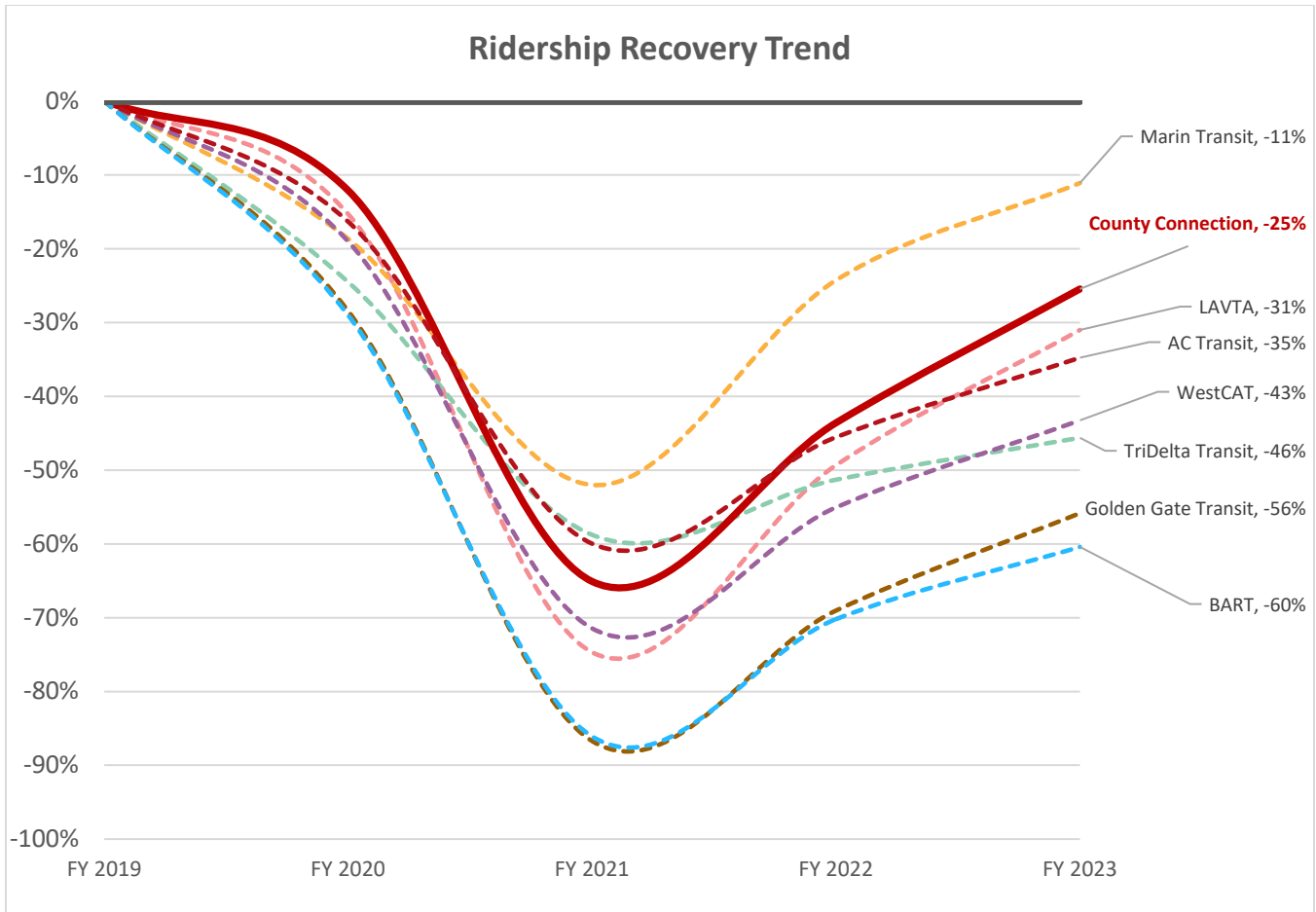
Facing continued remote work trends, Golden Gate Transit, with its historically commuter-heavy ridership, has opted to maintain service levels close to those implemented during the pandemic



Ridership Trends:

In March 2020, ridership dropped across all transit systems at the onset of the shelter-at-home order as business closed and commuters started working remotely. The pandemic quickly highlighted social inequities, as essential workers, who are disproportionately low-income and minority, continued to rely on transit throughout pandemic. As the demand for commuter service remains low, the demand for local service and weekend service continues to rise.

This dynamic landscape underscores the ongoing adaptation of Bay Area bus operators to evolving needs, with a growing focus on serving low-income and minority communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic and service reductions.



Operator Needs:

Transit agencies nationwide are facing a critical operator shortage, a ripple effect of pandemic-related burnout, health concerns, career shifts, and a competitive labor market. In the East Bay, five agencies vying for a limited pool of candidates intensifies the challenge. While some agencies like Tri Delta Transit saw success with aggressive recruitment and bonus programs, most agencies have struggled to fully restore their pre-pandemic workforce and service levels on their routes. Tri Delta Transit's operator count even exceeded pre-pandemic levels, but with their bonus program having ended in September 2023, the future remains uncertain. LAVTA and WestCAT currently have enough operators to operate current service levels, but operator retention woes pose a barrier to restoring additional service, despite having sufficient staff for their existing routes.

County Connection, with a 15-operator gap as of October 2023, is taking action. An employee referral program to boost recruitment launches January 1st, 2024, and a starting salary increase was implemented in FY22. As County Connection gears up for service restorations, efforts to address the operator shortage will be crucial in ensuring adequate transit options for the East Bay community.

Productivity:

With tight budgets and staffing shortages, measuring passenger productivity (riders per revenue hour) offers a fresh perspective on transit recovery beyond ridership numbers alone. This metric shows not just how many people are riding, but also how efficiently available resources are being used.

Faced with operator shortages, some agencies strategically shifted resources. Commuter routes saw reduced service, while weekend and local routes benefiting low-income and minority communities were bolstered.

County Connection actively restored service (reaching 83% of its original schedule) and still attained 90% of its pre-pandemic passenger productivity. Tri Delta Transit and BART also faced the challenge of integrating its new services like Oakley Park-n-Ride service and Berryessa/North San Jose extension into their existing networks. They're currently in the process of right-sizing their schedules to optimize efficiency and meet changing travel patterns.

Agency	Productivity Recovery	Service Levels (FY23 vs FY19)
County Connection	90%	83%
Marin Transit	88%	101%
LAVTA	86%	80%
Golden Gate Transit	84%	53%
AC Transit	78%	84%
WestCAT	77%	74%
Tri Delta Transit	52%	106%
BART	34%	119%

On-Time Performance:

With pandemic-induced service cuts across all agencies, service reliability has become vital. Passengers, now relying on less frequent transit, potentially face longer wait times if schedules are unpredictable. Additionally, increased congestion has further contributed to longer transit travel times. As highlighted earlier, the ongoing operator shortage has prevented service level increases, making reliability enhancements even more crucial from a user perspective.

On-Time Performance is the most common way for agencies to measure reliability of their service. According to this metric, a bus is “on-time” when it arrives at a bus stop within a certain range of its

scheduled arrival. If the bus arrives outside of that range, it's considered either early or late. Agencies within East Bay have different on-time "windows" as shown in the table below.

To address this critical issue, County Connection partnered with Swiftly in December 2022. This collaboration focuses on improving on-time performance and run time tracking, ultimately aiding in service changes for enhanced schedule reliability. Implemented in Fall 2023, on-time performance adjustments across over 15 routes yielded a positive impact, increasing overall punctuality by a notable 2.3%.

Agency	On-Time Window	On-Time Performance (FY23)
County Connection	1 min early to up to 5 mins late	85%
AC Transit	1 min early to up to 5 mins late	76%
Tri Delta Transit	up to 5 mins late	82%
WestCAT	5 min early to up to 5 mins late	96%
LAVTA	1 min early to up to 5 mins late	88%

Financial Implications:

None, for information only.

Recommendation:

None, for information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.

Attachments:

None