

To: Board of Directors

Date: 1/7/25

From: Andrew M. Smith, Director of Planning & Marketing

Reviewed by:

SUBJECT: School calendars and regional transit schedule coordination

Background:

As part of its fixed route service, County Connection operates sixteen 600-series “school routes” serving 17 schools in six school districts (see Attachment 1), with a total combined ridership of approximately 1,300 passengers per school day. As these routes only operate on school days, we must adjust our schedules and operating assignments at the beginning and end of each school year. Specific to summertime operations, bus operators’ hours must be adjusted down to reflect the reduction in service, which usually coincides with increased bids for vacation time taken by the operators.

Starting this year, and in accordance with the policies of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), transit providers across the nine-county Bay Area region began synchronizing changes to their service schedules to two dates each year: the second Sunday each January and August. This way a passenger transferring between multiple providers (for example, County Connection to BART to SamTrans) will not miss a connection because one or more of the transit agencies modified their schedules on different dates. To accommodate the regional transit schedule synchronization program, County Connection adjusted its bid schedule to align the start of the Spring and Fall Bids with the regional synchronization dates in January and August.

Challenges with aligning school calendars:

The governing body of each school district sets their own school calendar, including the start and end dates for each school year. If the first day of school occurs prior to the regional transit schedule synchronization date in August (also the start of the Fall Bid), County Connection’s dispatch staff must search for extra operators who are available and willing to run the school routes on those first several days of the school year. This can be very challenging as there are usually not enough Extra Board operators to cover all the school routes, and if dispatch staff is unable to find enough volunteers, operators must be diverted from regular routes to cover the school routes, resulting in missed runs on the regular routes. Since they primarily serve 11 to 14-year-old middle school students, we prioritize coverage of the school routes when deciding which runs to cut when there is a shortage of available operators.

Were it not for the need to routinely adjust routes and schedules throughout the County Connection system, the start of the Fall Bid could be timed to the earliest start date of the six school districts served by school routes. However, due to the integration of both school routes and regular routes in the operators’ daily assignments, it is not feasible to schedule the start of the Fall Bid on a different date than the fall service/schedule changes.

Until this year, all six of the school districts served by County Connection started their school years during the week following the regional transit schedule synchronization date in August. However, for the 2024-2025 school year, Mt. Diablo Unified School District moved their first day of school to the week prior to the regional synchronization date. Unfortunately, the school district did not provide much advance notice of this change, and County Connection's dispatch staff had to move very quickly to ensure that the school routes would operate during the first week of school.

This situation remains unchanged for the 2025-2026 school year (see Attachment 2), with the Mt. Diablo School District Board of Education again adopting the early start dates for both the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 school years. Unfortunately, no notice of this change was provided to County Connection, and staff only became aware of the pending decision by the School Board on the evening prior to the School Board's hearing. Consequently, on December 18, 2024 (the day of the School Board's hearing on the item), County Connection staff sent a letter to the School Board expressing concerns with the early school start dates (Attachment 3). However, the School Board still adopted the early start dates as mentioned above.

While the early start date for schools in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District presents a challenge for the first week of operations on the six school routes serving the District, County Connection will continue to prioritize staffing on those routes, though this may come at the expense of missed runs on regular routes.

Financial Implications:

Additional operators will likely be required to provide service on the school routes in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District for the week prior to the regional transit schedule synchronization date (and start of the Fall Bid) in August. While this will result in additional costs for staff time and bus mileage, the costs are relatively minor and can be absorbed by the Operating & Capital Budget.

Recommendation:

None, for information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Summary of school routes

Attachment 2: List of school districts served by school routes with start dates

Attachment 3: December 18, 2024, comment letter to the Mt. Diablo Unified School District Board of Education

County Connection 600-Series School Routes

Route	School District(s)	School(s)
601	Walnut Creek School District	Walnut Creek Intermediate School
602	Walnut Creek School District	Walnut Creek Intermediate School
605	Walnut Creek School District	Walnut Creek Intermediate School
606	Orinda Union School District Acalanes Union High School District	Orinda Intermediate School Miramonte High School
611	Mt. Diablo Unified School District	Oak Grove Middle School
612	Mt. Diablo Unified School District	Pine Hollow Middle School
613	Mt. Diablo Unified School District	Oak Grove Middle School
615	Mt. Diablo Unified School District	El Dorado Middle School Concord High School Olympic High School
616	Mt. Diablo Unified School District	Oak Grove Middle School
619	Mt. Diablo Unified School District	Oak Grove Middle School
622	San Ramon Valley Unified School District	Pine Valley Middle School California High School
623	San Ramon Valley Unified School District	Monte Vista High School
625	Acalanes Union High School District	Acalanes High School
626	Lafayette School District	Stanley Middle School (also serves Saint Mary's College)
635	San Ramon Valley Unified School District	Gale Ranch Middle School Windemere Middle School Dougherty Valley High School
636	San Ramon Valley Unified School District	Iron Horse Middle School Pine Valley Middle School California High School

**First Day of Instruction (Start of School Year)
School Districts Served by School Routes
2025-2026 School Year**

Start Date	School District	Route(s)
August 6, 2025	Mt. Diablo Unified School District	611, 612, 613, 615, 616, 619
August 10, 2025	REGIONAL SCHEDULE SYNCHRONIZATION	
August 12, 2025	Acalanes Union High School District	606, 625
August 12, 2025	Lafayette School District	626
August 12, 2025	Orinda Union School District	606
August 12, 2025	Walnut Creek School District	601, 602, 605
August 13, 2025	San Ramon Valley Unified School District	622, 623, 635, 636

December 18, 2024

Mt. Diablo Unified School District Board of Education
1936 Carlotta Drive
Concord, CA 94519
(sent via e-mail to boardComments@mdusd.org)

Subject: Board Item 19.4 - Review and Potential Approval of the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 School Year Calendar

Dear Board of Education:

On behalf of the Central Contra Costa Transit Authority (County Connection), I apologize for the lateness of these comments, however we just learned of this item's placement on tonight's meeting agenda.

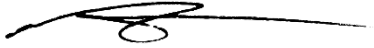
County Connection provides fixed route bus and paratransit service to Central Contra Costa County, San Ramon Valley, and Lamorinda, including several special routes serving area schools that are timed to their bell schedules and school year calendars. In the Mt. Diablo School District, we operate six such bus routes that serve El Dorado Middle School, Oak Grove Middle School, Pine Hollow Middle School, Concord High School, and Olympic High School. Combined, these routes carry an average of 225 students each school day. As these routes only operate on school days, we must adjust our schedules and operating assignments at the beginning and end of each school year.

Starting this year, transit providers across the nine-county Bay Area region began synchronizing when they make changes to their service schedules to two dates each year: the second Sunday in both January and August. This way a passenger transferring between multiple providers (for example, County Connection to BART to SamTrans) will not miss a connection because one or more of the transit agencies modified their schedules on different dates. Changes to transit schedules is a monthlong process that involves community outreach, equity analyses, route planning and synchronization, bidding on operating assignments by union-represented transit operators, and the printing, posting, and publication of new timetables.

Specific to summertime operations, operators' hours must be adjusted down to reflect the reduction in service, which usually coincides with increased bids for vacation time taken by the operators. Consequently, providing service on school routes prior to the Bay Area-wide schedule change synchronization date on the second Sunday in August is extremely difficult, and can result in missed runs on some routes due to a lack of transit operators reporting for work.

Therefore, I kindly ask you to amend the proposed 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 school year calendars such that the first day of school begin no earlier than **August 11, 2025**, and **August 10, 2026**. Your consideration in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Andrew M. Smith
Director of Planning & Marketing

cc: President Erin McFerrin (sent via e-mail to mcferrine@mdusd.org)
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