





Draft Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study Report

November 13, 2026

San Joaquin
Joint Powers Authority

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Executive Summary

Conclusion

The Gold Runner Thruway Bus network is performing exceptionally well and is a valuable part of California's intercity transportation system. Right-sizing decisions made during and following the pandemic have resulted in a cost-recovery ratio of 119% for the overall network while retaining most of the network's ridership. This is a strong outcome given industry-wide operating cost increases experienced since the pandemic. This success provides the foundation for the recommendations in this study, which aims to build on an already effective system through targeted, tactical interventions. The greatest need for improvement lies with Route 15A (Merced – Yosemite) and Route 7 (Martinez – Arcata), where cost effectiveness remains below desired levels, while the broader network presents opportunities to further strengthen performance through targeted service adjustments, improved connections, enhanced data and reliability, and partnerships with local and regional transit and private intercity bus providers. Overall, the network should be viewed very positively, with this study providing a practical framework to build on existing successes, address key areas for improvement, and capitalize on opportunities to further enhance an already successful program. By continuing to make strategic, data-informed decisions and pursuing partnerships that can expand connectivity and leverage additional funding, SJJPA can build on the progress already achieved and ensure that the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network remains a reliable, convenient, and cost-effective extension of the rail system for communities throughout California.

Background

The San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA) is responsible for managing, improving, and planning for the future of the Gold Runner Intercity Passenger Rail Service (operated by Amtrak), which runs between Bakersfield in the south and Oakland and Sacramento in the north.

SJJPA is also responsible for management and service decisions for a large network of Thruway Bus routes connecting Gold Runner passengers to destinations throughout California and into Nevada. The Gold Runner Thruway Bus Network is the largest Thruway bus network in the Amtrak system, based on the scale of daily bus miles operated and passenger volume. This Thruway Bus Network functions as an extension of the Gold Runner rail network and is an integral component of the success of the Gold Runner service, with over 55% of Gold Runner rail passengers utilizing Gold Runner Thruway Bus connections to Los Angeles and other major population centers. Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes also provide connecting service to California's two other intercity passenger rail

services (Capitol Corridor, and Pacific Surfliner) and connect with numerous local/regional passenger rail and transit services throughout the state. Amtrak manages daily operations of most routes through private contracted operators, with funding flowing from Caltrans through SJJPA. The bus network is integrated with the rail service through coordinated connections, guaranteed seating, and integrated ticketing. In Fiscal Year 2025 (July '24-June '25), the Gold Runner Thruway Bus system carried approximately 627,000 passengers.

The network has evolved significantly in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic sharply reduced ridership, prompting SJJPA to modify several routes to preserve the network's overall viability by reducing operational costs on underperforming routes while maintaining services in strong ridership corridors and markets. These measures included elimination and shortening of certain routes, along with service reductions on others. Ridership rebounds in recent years are now pointing to opportunities to increase service levels on certain routes and look to expand the network strategically to meet the level of demand while ensuring continued cost effectiveness.

Additionally, SJJPA worked with Senator Allen and Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada (RailPAC) to pass Senate Bill 742 (SB 742) in 2019, which aimed to remove portions of the California Government Code that required state-supported Amtrak Thruway bus passengers to have a rail trip as part of their ticket. Enabling Thruway Bus ticketing for bus-only trips creates additional opportunities to increase the reach and utility of the network to passengers across the state while also potentially boosting cost-effectiveness and access to harder to reach rural parts of the state. Bus-only ticketing is implemented on a route-by-route basis and has now been implemented on all but three routes in the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network.

Looking to the future, SJJPA is pursuing strategic partnerships with regional agencies, private intercity bus operators, and stakeholders to enhance performance, expand connectivity, and pursue additional local, regional, and state funding sources. These efforts additionally include positioning the Gold Runner to integrate with the California High-Speed Rail Authority's Merced–Bakersfield Early Operating Segment, anticipated to begin service by 2033.

Goals

Given the size and importance of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network, there is a need for SJJPA to investigate the existing routes, performance, and governance of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network to ensure that the service provided achieves the following goals:

1. A preferred and convenient option for intercity travelers that connects to Gold Runner rail services and increases Gold Runner ridership while driving mode shift away from the highway network.
2. A cost-effective service that is responsive to structural shifts in demand, highly constrained Public Transportation Account (PTA) funding, and increasing costs of providing service (including maximized utilization of available funding from partner agencies for Thruway service benefits).
3. Effective business models/governance structure to oversee and administer the Thruway Bus service.
4. Providing safe, reliable, and competitive connectivity to key travel markets throughout California – particularly for transit-dependent residents (focusing on near-term improvements/changes)

In order to advance these goals, SJJPA initiated the Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study in May 2026 as a tactical effort focused on short-term, feasible recommendations for studying and improving the network in both the near-term and long-term. This study proposes network-wide and route-specific recommendations, with a focus on actionable items and next steps for further study during the current and next fiscal years.

Cost Effectiveness of the Existing Network

Cost effectiveness is a key metric used to evaluate the performance of the network as well as of each route. This metric can be determined based on each route's ability to achieve the *break-even point*, defined under California Government Code Section 14035.2a(3) as: the point at which combined revenue from bus and connecting train trips meets or exceeds the cost of operating the corresponding Thruway Bus route. This is measured through the cost recovery ratio, calculated by dividing combined ticket revenue by operating costs; a ratio of 100% or above indicates the route has reached the break-even point and is therefore considered cost effective. The metric is valuable because it reflects both a route's ability to meet market demand and its capacity to recover operating costs through revenue.

SJJPA has successfully addressed cost effectiveness concerns in recent years through strategic route-by-route interventions, responding to ridership decreases during COVID as well as increasing operating costs. **Table ES-1** below outlines the latest available data on cost effectiveness for all routes, revealing that through its tactical approach, SJJPA has successfully ensured the cost effectiveness of most of its Thruway Bus routes. Furthermore, the overall network is cost-effective with a cost recovery ratio of 119%.

Looking to the future, it is important that SJJPA ensure that cost effectiveness of the network remains stable despite rising costs and strains on State PTA funds, which currently constitute the primary operational funding source for the Gold Runner service. On the other hand, ridership rebounds in recent years combined with good performance on most of the routes point to opportunities to increase service levels on certain routes and expand the network strategically to meet the level of demand while ensuring continued cost effectiveness. Recommendations as part of this study outline a variety of interventions that SJJPA can pursue to this end – both focusing on interventions to boost the ability of poor performing routes to recover costs, as well as looking to ways to bolster the performance of already high-performing routes.

Table ES-1: *Annual ridership (FY 25) and cost effectiveness data (Oct 2024 - Sep 2025) by route*[1]

No.	Route	Annual Route Ridership *(Oct '24 – Sep '25)*	Annual CA System Revenue[2] *(Oct '24 – Sep '25)*	Annual Operating Cost for CA[3] *(Oct '24 – Sep '25)*	Cost Recovery Ratio *(Oct '24 – Sep '25)*
1	Fresno – Bakersfield – San Diego	221,770	$12,691,271	$6,803,509	187%
1C	Bakersfield – Santa Monica	33,248	$1,343,055	$1,217,738	110%
3	Stockton – Redding	159,008	$6,705,183	$3,445,185	195%
3R	Chico – Redding	6,533	$193,035	$426,480	45%
6	Stockton – Santa Cruz	27,358	$1,055,169	$683,677	154%
7	Martinez – Arcata	46,467	$1,971,053	$3,246,049	61%
10	Santa Barbara – Las Vegas	32,382	$745,348	$123,575	603%
15[1]	Yosemite – Mammoth Lakes				
15A[1]	Merced – Yosemite	4,066	$198,271	$406,457	49%
15B[1]	Fresno – Yosemite				
18A	Hanford – Santa Maria	10,390	$193,679	$85,399	227%
18B	Hanford – Visalia (KART)	Not Available	Not Available	~$75,000	Not Available
19	Bakersfield – San Bernardino	41,390	$2,107,336	$1,743,350	121%
40	Merced – San Jose	4,707 *(Jan-Apr '26)*	Not Available	$244,355 *(Jan-Mar '26)*	Not Available
99	Oakland – San Francisco	47,564	$2,242,054	$544,557	412%

[1] Ridership and cost data is for Route 15A. Routes 15 and 15B have very low ridership and YARTS receives the bus ticket portion of the revenue from train passengers rather than a set contract amount for these routes.
[2] Includes both Thruway Bus Route and associated California train revenue (Gold Runner, Capitol Corridor, and Pacific Surfliner) for connecting bus passengers
[3] Includes bus contract payments and Amtrak payments by CA. For Routes 10 and 18A the bus operator pays most of the costs to operate these services through their interline agreements with Amtrak, but receives most of the bus ticket revenue from Amtrak.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this report identify a range of opportunities to maintain and build upon the existing success of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network. Because these recommendations vary in their urgency, complexity, and readiness to advance, they have been organized into three tiers to help SJJPA prioritize its efforts and establish a clear path forward. Prioritization considers the anticipated benefit to the network, the level of coordination or additional analysis required, and the appropriate timeframe for advancing each recommendation.

The three tiers are intended to distinguish between actions that can be addressed immediately, opportunities that warrant focused study in the near term, and longer-term strategies that may depend on future conditions or additional planning. This approach allows SJJPA to focus resources on the most urgent priorities while continuing to evaluate opportunities that may strengthen the network over time.

- **Tier 1 – Immediate Priorities**: These recommendations represent the immediate actions that should be advanced by the end of 2026. They generally include actions that are sufficiently defined to move forward now and where very near-term coordination, decision-making, or implementation is required.
- **Tier 2A + 2B – 2027 Priorities:** Tier 2A recommendations should be studied and assessed during the first half of 2027 and Tier 2B recommendations should be studied and assessed during the second half of 2027. They may require additional analysis, coordination with operating or transit partners, monitoring service performance, or further development before a decision on implementation can be made. Advancing these considerations will help SJJPA determine which opportunities are most appropriate to pursue.
- **Tier 3 – Longer-Term Priorities:** These recommendations represent longer-term opportunities that should remain under consideration as the Gold Runner network evolves. These recommendations provide a longer-term planning framework without requiring immediate action.

Table ES-2 below provides the full list of recommendations organized by tier.

Table ES-2: *Tiered List of Recommendations*

	Route	Recommendation
Tier 1	General	Update the Gold Runner webpage to improve the accuracy, clarity, and consistency of passenger information and provide additional information regarding routes and connectivity to other passenger rail and transit services, universities and colleges, and other key destinations on its website and marketing materials.
	General	Work with partner public transportation agencies and private operators whose services connect with Gold Runner Thruway Bus stops to try to get them to better support, promote, and market these connections.
	General	Update all stop signage and provide additional information alongside QR codes at all stops for passengers to access route schedules and ticketing.
	General	Improve online information regarding guaranteed transfer policies and passenger protections.
	General	Increase marketing and advertising of key destinations, including universities and colleges and destinations like Yosemite National Park.
	General	Utilize electronic announcements on Gold Runner trains to send advertising messages to passengers, such as reminders of connecting locations to destinations such as Yosemite.
	1	Increase marketing and advertising for the Thruway Bus connection to LAX FlyAway at Union Station and see if LAX Flyaway could get into Amtrak ticketing.
	1	Partner with the LOSSAN Joint Powers Authority to have them assist in marketing the Route 1 connections to the Pacific Surfliner.
	1C	Work with UCLA to better promote the Gold Runner service to UCLA.
	3	Coordinate with BCAG, Amtrak, and Caltrans on implementing a potential partnership to have BCAG operate the Thruway Bus service between Sacramento and Chico in advance of BCAG's proposed start of service in early 2027. Coordinate service realignment to best serve the Stockton-Sacramento-Davis corridor.
	5	Monitor ridership and revenue performance and timed train connections. Continuous active marketing measures throughout FY 26/27 and track performance.
	18	Strongly encourage KART to secure a ticketing agreement with Amtrak and to operate the Hanford to Visalia service on Sundays and holidays.
	18	Update the Gold Runner website to include KART service between Hanford and Visalia.
	19	Develop partnerships with Metrolink and other transit providers to help promote service and evaluate Route 19 arrival and departure times at Metrolink stops to achieve easy transfers.
	19	Investigate the possibility of moving the Pasadena stop to be located at the Del Mar Pasadena Gold Line Station or to the Pasadena Memorial Park Station, and the feasibility of relocating the Claremont station approximately one mile east to Montclair.
	40	Conduct targeted marketing for Route 40, particularly for the Los Banos and Gilroy markets, which were previously not served by Gold Runner, as well as Merced and San Jose, where reduced trip times make these more viable markets for Gold Runner.
	40	Market the connection to Santa Cruz to/from Route 40.

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Deleted: Study feasibility of alternative service patterns and service reductions based on day of week and seasonality.

	40	Work with Amtrak to get ticketing issues fixed for markets from Route 40 and Santa Cruz Metro's Route 17 to enable ticketing to Yosemite via YARTS (15, 15A, & 15B) and then provide marketing between these routes to Yosemite.

Tier 2A	General	Ensure updated cost-effectiveness data is received from Amtrak on a semi-annual basis for all Gold Runner Thruway Bus Routes.
	General	Explore partnerships with other transit providers as both future contract partners and for better timed service connections.
	General	Work with Caltrans to have an integrated statewide passenger information system coordinating information related to rail, Thruway bus, and connecting transit services developed.
	General	Increase coordination with JPAs (SJJPA, Capitol Corridor, and LOSSAN) regarding schedule changes.
	General	Ensure the provision to collect performance and tracking data in future operating contracts.
	General	Work with Caltrans to secure Thruway Bus-specific minor capital program funding and explore alternative funding sources for bus shelters, other passenger amenities, and passenger safety/security measures.
	General	Coordinate with Flix North America (FNA), and Amtrak Real Estate on potential interline service agreements, shared facilities and interlined ticketing, and cooperative funding agreements to add service.
	General	Investigate strategies to address Gold Runner on-time performance issues.
	General	Audit and validate the GTFS feed to identify, prioritize, and correct data inconsistencies, missing or invalid records, schedule discrepancies, geographic inaccuracies, and accessibility or passenger information issues, ensuring compliance with GTFS standards and reliable trip planning information. Audit the GTFS feed to identify and correct existing issues.
	1C	Study the implications of removing Burbank Airport from Route 1C to streamline service.
	1C	Evaluate adding San Fernando to the route with the removal of Burbank Airport. Furthermore, study alternative terminus options such as LAX, Hollywood, Westwood-UCLA, and Long Beach.
	1C	Evaluate the Santa Monica stop for passenger experience and convenience and whether it remains the optimal terminus. Work with the City of Santa Monica and the local and regional transit to assist with increasing marketing to see if Santa Monica should remain a stop.
	3	Investigate opportunities to fully open Route 3 for bus-only ticketing including complementary partnerships with FNA.
	3	Request Cal State Chico to help promote the Gold Runner service and future BCAG service between Chico and Sacramento.
	6	Implement bus-only ticketing on Route 6 as indicated in the 2026 Business Plan.
	6	Study long-term implications of Route 40 ridership to San Jose in relationship to the cost-effectiveness of Route 6 (which also connects to San Jose).
	6, 40	Work with San Jose State University (RTs 6 & 40) and UC Merced (RT 40) to promote Gold Runner service.

	7	Work with Cal Poly Humboldt, Sonoma State, and Santa Rosa Junior College to better promote the Gold Runner service to these educational institutions.
	7	Initiate discussions with Caltrans and HTA regarding the possibility for long-term service coordination between Ukiah and Cal Poly Humboldt.
	10	Evaluate providing an additional round-trip between Santa Barbara and Bakersfield, additional seasonal service to UCSB, and additional weekend service along the western half of the route.
	10	Evaluate the current operating agreement for Route 10 and get Amtrak to provide more information regarding the route's performance or consider pursuing a future agreement that ensures data transparency.
	10	Work with UCSB to better promote the Gold Runner service to UCSB.
	15	Encourage and assist MCAG and YARTS in pursuing additional state and federal funding sources in coordination with Caltrans, in order to support service operations and reduce reliance on SJJPA funding.
	15	Pursue an alternative partnership/compensation structure for Route 15A in coordination with Caltrans.
	15	Include provisions in the partnership structure for holding buses for Gold Runner trains. Specifically, get YARTS to agree to have one of their later buses hold for the last Gold Runner train for at least one hour (rather than 15 minutes) should it be delayed.
	15	Work with YARTS to determine if significant number of Gold Runner passengers purchase YARTS tickets separately when taking a trip to Yosemite (and therefore the number of Gold Runner passengers and benefits for Route 15A could be significantly higher than reported).
	18	Continue partnership efforts with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to market the service and see if this partnership can be a model for working with other universities/colleges that are served by Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes.
	19	Study the implications of removing or replacing the La Crescenta stop with another stop which connects with the Gold Line.
	99	Connect service directly to the Salesforce Transit Center.

Tier 2B	General	Conduct a market assessment that looks at potential new markets and temporal demand.
	General	Audit bus stop locations across the network to see if there are opportunities to improve transit network connectivity, passenger experience, and ridership.
	General	Implement real-time tracking.
	1	Study opportunities to deploy bus-only ticketing along Route 1, including potential partnerships with public and private operators along the corridor.
	1	Study opportunities to increase Route 1 service including additional San Diego service, enhancing Burbank Airport service (including consideration of express airport connections and relocating the stop), and more service between Bakersfield and Los Angeles Union Station.
	1C	Study connectivity to LA Metro in the near term and the long-term, including implications of the D-Line extension.

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	3	Pursue a potential partnership with SJRTD for service between Stockton and Sacramento/Davis if a partnership is established with BCAG for service between Chico and Sacramento.
	6	Investigate a potential partnership with RTD if Route 6's cost-effectiveness declines.
	7	Study locations of stops along the route for safety and customer experience including Santa Rosa, Arcata, Sonoma, and connections to Sonoma County Airport.
	7	Study connectivity to SMART stations, including Rohnert Park and the future Healdsburg Station.
	7	Partner with transportation agencies along the Highway 101 corridor to study whether targeted service modifications could streamline Route 7 operations in the North Bay Area while continuing to serve the corridor's strong ridership demand.
	7	Study feasibility of alternative service patterns based on day of week and seasonality with the goal of improving service.
	10	Evaluate seasonal or event-based service increases to Las Vegas.
	15	Analyze how passengers use Routes 15, 15A, and 15B to identify barriers, travel patterns, and market opportunities that can inform service planning, schedule coordination, and targeted marketing efforts.
	18	Study the impact of changes to the route as more data becomes available, specifically whether seasonal university service is a successful model.
	19	Evaluate additional seasonal service or daily service patterns for Route 19.
	40	Monitor the performance of this new route and its impact on Route 6.
	40	Coordinate with MCAG on a potential partnership to run a commuter round-trip between Merced and Silicon Valley (San Jose, Great America, Gilroy).
	99	Study the possibility of expanding service to connect to Caltrain at 4th and King until Caltrain is extended to the Salesforce Transit Center.

Tier 3	General	Monitor the performance of the new Route 5 to see if this is a model that can be deployed in other parts of the state.
	1	Study the feasibility of improving Metrolink connectivity at Newhall. This would include investigating a pilot program/partnership with Metrolink to have a Gold Runner Thruway bus round-trip terminate at Newhall and connect with Metrolink to provide service to Los Angeles Union Station.
	3	If a partnership can be reached with BCAG, investigate having some Route 3 service connect to the new Valley Rail Midtown Sacramento Station once it is constructed.
	6	Coordinate with VTA to strengthen connections to Mineta San Jose International Airport.
	7	In coordination with HTA, Mendocino Transit Authority, Caltrans, and Amtrak, evaluate the potential for a partnership with HTA for service between Ukiah and Arcata.
	7	Study the possibility for connecting service to Richmond, potentially through coordination with CJJPA.
	19	Evaluate opportunities to connect to future Brightline West service in Rancho Cucamonga, and to provide seasonal service to Coachella Valley or supplemental service on Route 39.

Deleted: to truncate route in Ukiah in the future

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA) is responsible for managing, improving, and planning for the future of the Gold Runner Intercity Passenger Rail Service (operated by Amtrak), which runs between Bakersfield in the south and Oakland and Sacramento in the north. SJJPA is also responsible for the management of a large network of Thruway Bus routes connecting Gold Runner passengers to destinations throughout California and into Nevada (see *Figure 1*). The purpose of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus Network is to extend the reach of the Gold Runner to communities with limited or no intercity rail service. This Thruway Bus Network is integral to the success of the Gold Runner service, with a significant portion of the Gold Runner service's ridership utilizing Gold Runner Thruway Bus connections to Los Angeles and other major population centers as an extension of the rail network. Typically, over 55 percent of Gold Runner train passengers use a Gold Runner Thruway Bus on at least one end of their trip. Gold Runner Thruway Bus services connect to Gold Runner trains at Bakersfield, Hanford, Fresno, Merced, Stockton, Sacramento, Martinez, and Emeryville. Thruway Buses also connect with (and provide additional ridership to) the state funded Capitol Corridor and Pacific Surfliner intercity passenger rail services and connect with numerous local/regional passenger rail and transit services throughout the state. The total Gold Runner Thruway Bus ridership in Fiscal Year 2025 (July 24-June 25) was about 627,000 passengers.



Figure 1: *Thruway Bus Services across California*

Measurement of Cost-Effectiveness

The Gold Runner service (train and Thruway Bus Network) operational subsidy is provided by the State of California (through Caltrans) using Public Transportation Account (PTA) funds. In recent years, the cost of subsidizing the state-supported intercity passenger services (Gold Runner, Pacific Surfliner, and Capitol Corridor) has increased significantly, requiring increased PTA support. This has placed increased pressure on the PTA, which derives its revenues primarily from taxes on diesel fuel at a time when taxable diesel fuel consumption is at historically low levels. It is therefore important to the SJJPA and the State that Gold Runner Thruway Bus services are cost-effective – both as a network and as individual routes. The measurement of cost-effectiveness for the state-supported Thruway Bus services that connect to the intercity passenger rail services is dictated by specific language in the California Government Code, Section 14035.2a(3) states that Thruway Bus routes ("feeder routes") that fail to reach the "break-even" point within a reasonable time period would be restructured or discontinued. The break-even point is defined as the revenue generated from both the bus and train portions of the trips made by Thruway Bus riders meeting or exceeding the cost of providing the Thruway Bus service/route. Section 14931.8f(3) states that a Thruway Bus route shall not be terminated unless it fails to meet the cost-effectiveness standard.

Management of Gold Runner Thruway Bus Routes

Amtrak currently manages the daily operations of most of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus services. Most of the routes are operated by private bus operators under contract with Amtrak. Funding for the routes comes from Caltrans through the SJJPA (see **Figure 2**). The SJJPA contracts with Amtrak for dedicated feeder bus services (i.e., Thruway Buses), and Amtrak then contracts with bus operators. The bus routes function as part of the Gold Runner intercity rail service, with coordinated connections, guaranteed seating, integrated fares and ticketing procedures, and inclusion in Amtrak's central information and reservation system in a similar manner as the trains.

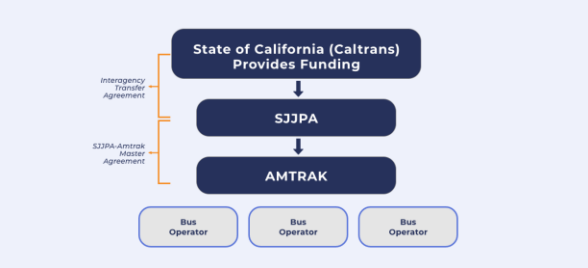


Figure 2: *Current Contract Structure for Thruway Bus Funding and Procurement*

Characteristics of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus services are typically:

- guaranteed connections to Amtrak trains,
- coordinated connections to other carrier schedules, and
- modern intercity buses with amenities such as restrooms, reclining seating, leg rests, space for luggage, individual lighting and accessibility accommodations.

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In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted ridership on Gold Runner trains and Thruway Bus routes. As a result, in 2020 and 2021, the SJJPA took action to make reductions to the Gold Runner Thruway Bus Network. The purpose of the changes was to maintain the viability of the overall Thruway Bus Network by reducing operational costs on underperforming routes while maintaining services in strong ridership corridors and markets for the foreseeable future. SJJPA, with support and assistance from Amtrak, made the following management decisions to make route reductions to the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network:

- Route 1b between Bakersfield and San Pedro was truncated at Los Angeles Union Station (becoming part of Route1) – eliminating stops at Long Beach and San Pedro
- Route 1c between Bakersfield and Torrance was truncated at Santa Monica – eliminating stops at Westchester, El Segundo, and Torrance
- Route 6 was reduced from four round-trips down to two round-trips
- Route 7 between Martinez and McKinleyville was truncated at Cal Poly Humboldt (Arcata)
- Route 9 (now part of Route 10)
- Route 10 was reduced from three round-trips down to one round-trip
- Route 12 between Bakersfield and Victorville was eliminated
- Route 18 was reduced from two round-trips down to one round-trip
- Route 19 between Bakersfield and Hemet/Indio was truncated at San Bernardino
- Route 34 between Stockton and San Francisco was eliminated

Due to COVID-19 service impacts, the significant reductions implemented by the SJJPA constituted a discontinuation total of 34+ scheduled trips, removal of 21 stops, and a reduction of 16 buses and 6,061 daily miles. To maintain a very efficient and cost-effective Gold Runner Thruway Bus network, SJJPA took action to continue with the reduced level of Thruway Bus services after the pandemic came to an end. Over the last several years, substantially increasing Thruway Bus operations costs that were largely brought on by the impacts of the pandemic, led the SJJPA (in coordination with Amtrak) to make a number of additional key strategic management decisions, including the following actions:

- Route 1 was reduced from thirteen round-trips down to eleven round-trips between Bakersfield and Los Angeles Union Station, and the two round-trips that had continued beyond Los Angeles Union Station to Santa Ana were truncated at Los Angeles Union Station
- Route 1C was reduced from four round-trips down to two round-trips
- Route 7 had the one round-trip between Napa and Marinez eliminated
- Route 19 was reduced from four round-trips down to two round-trips

Senate Bill 742 (SB 742)

To increase ridership on Thruway Buses and reduce operating costs, the SJJPA worked with Senator Allen and RailPAC on Senate Bill 742 (SB 742) in 2019. SB 742 was passed by the Legislature in September 2019 and signed by the Governor on October 8, 2019. The primary purpose of SB 742 was to remove portions of Section 14035.55 of the California Government Code that require state-supported Thruway Bus passengers to have a rail trip as part of their ticket. The passage and implementation of SB 742 supports increasing ridership by enabling Thruway Buses to pick up any passengers (rather than only those transferring from state-supported intercity passenger trains), offering an additional opportunity to increase ridership and increase transportation options for current and future customers. The new ticketing structure that allows non-Amtrak passengers onto the Thruway Bus service is being implemented on a route-by-route basis. This new ticketing structure is referred to as “bus-only” ticketing since passengers can travel on the Thruway buses without a train trip as part of their ticket.

Since the enactment of SB 742, SJJPA has implemented bus-only ticketing on seven routes—Routes 1C, 3R (Redding and Red Bluff to Chico, Oroville, Marysville, and Sacramento), 7, 10, 18, 19, and the new Route 40 (Merced– Los Banos–Gilroy–San José). These corridors were prioritized for shared-use operations due to their rural/interregional mix and limited alternatives. SB 742 requires coordination with local, regional transit, and private intercity bus providers before opening a Thruway Bus route for bus-only ticketing. Bus-only ticketing is also allowed on the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) regional transit routes (Gold Runner Routes 15, 15A, and 15B) that serve Yosemite. Routes that allow bus-only ticketing improve load factors, increase fare revenue, advance environmental and equity goals, and complement local/regional transit. The SJJPA plans to continue to expand the number of Thruway Bus routes with bus-only ticketing consistent with the provisions of SB 742. More details on the status of the implementation of SB 742 and the reductions to the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network during the COVID-19 Pandemic are provided in Appendix A.

Strategic Partnerships with Other Agencies

SJJPA pursues strategic partnerships with regional agencies and stakeholders to enhance Thruway Bus performance, expand intercity connectivity, integrate services with local/ regional networks and reduce PTA costs borne by SJJPA through new local, regional, and state funding contributions. Efforts emphasize leveraging partner investments, pursuing new grant programs, aligning travel patterns, improving travel times, reducing duplication, and preserving seamless access/integrated ticketing for Gold Runner passengers. Interline agreements enable Gold Runner passengers to use partner intercity bus services with integrated ticketing, extending reach beyond the core network. The SJJPA evaluates these agreements for cost-effectiveness, customer benefit, and alignment with program goals through performance and financial analysis. In addition, SJJPA is positioning Gold Runner to integrate with the California High-Speed Rail Authority's (CHSRA) Early Operating Segment between Merced and Bakersfield, anticipated to begin service by 2033. This effort is focused on advancing coordinated service planning, infrastructure readiness, and operational alignment to ensure Gold Runner trains and buses are prepared to connect seamlessly with high-speed rail as a critical part of an integrated statewide intercity transportation network.

Performance Goals for Gold Runner Thruway Bus Network

Given the size and importance of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network, there is a need for the SJJPA to investigate the existing routes, performance, and governance of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes to ensure that the service provided achieves the following goals:

1. A preferred and convenient option for intercity travelers that connects to Gold Runner rail services and increases Gold Runner ridership while driving mode shift away from the highway network.
2. A cost-effective service that is responsive to structural shifts in demand, highly constrained PTA funding, and increasing costs of providing service (including maximized utilization of available funding from partner agencies for Thruway service benefits).
3. Effective business model/governance structure to oversee and administer the Thruway Bus service.
4. Providing safe, reliable, and competitive connectivity to key travel markets throughout California – particularly for transit-dependent residents (focusing on near-term improvements/changes)

Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study

SJJPA is undertaking a Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study (initiated May 2026) that is intended to be tactical in nature and focused on delivering specific, feasible, and short-term recommendations for improving the Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes/network. The primary deliverable of this study will be a Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study Report. In addition to this introductory chapter, the report will have two additional chapters. “Route Characteristics” (Chapter 2) will provide an overview of each of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes that includes recent detailed ridership information, and “Short-term Service Optimization” (Chapter 3) that will provide recommendations and the rationale behind these recommendations for any proposed changes to the Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes.

As part of the study, public/agency outreach will be conducted by SJJPA staff and consultants to gain valuable insights. In support of the public/agency outreach efforts, a Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study webpage has been added to SJJPA’s website to enable agencies and the public to get easy access to Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study information and documents and to provide input to the SJJPA. The Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study effort is being developed by a Technical Working Group that includes SJJPA staff from Operations, Passenger Experience and Marketing, Planning, Grants, and Programming, and Fiscal departments, as well as a representative from Caltrans. Initial agency and public outreach to support the Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study was carried out in early June 2026. The Public Outreach Plan for this Thruway Bus Study is provided as Appendix B to this report. SJJPA staff presented to the SJJPA Board at their July 16, 2026, Board Meeting regarding existing service characteristics and proposed goals for the service as well as input from initial outreach. Additional agency and public outreach to get input on the Thruway Bus Study Draft Report will be carried out in September. Staff expect to request approval of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study Report at SJJPA’s November 20, 2026, Board Meeting and to also discuss implementation strategies.

Chapter 2: Existing Service Characteristics, Service Parameters, and Route Profiles

Evaluating the Existing Network

As outlined in Chapter 1, SJJPA currently oversees 14 Thruway Bus routes connecting the Gold Runner rail network to destinations across California and Nevada. The bus network serves a diverse array of markets with various partnership structures, financial considerations, and operational constraints. Each route thus requires an in-depth analysis of its context and performance to understand opportunities for strategic improvements and to work towards optimizing the entire network.

In order to evaluate each route, and the network as a whole, key metrics and characteristics were analyzed including ridership, bus-only ticketing implementation, cost effectiveness, partnership and contracting structures, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and passenger miles traveled (PMT). These characteristics provide an understanding for how well the Thruway Bus network operates and where potential opportunities for change may exist.

Table 1. More detailed information regarding each route, bus stop location, and route schedule is available on the Gold Runner website.[1]

As ridership trends and cost considerations evolve, SJJPA has continued to evaluate and optimize the Thruway Bus network. This has included interventions ranging from tactical schedule adjustments to the development of new routes. As outlined in Chapter 1, SJJPA made substantial reductions to the Thruway Bus network during the COVID-19 pandemic. SJJPA worked with Amtrak to strategically reduce the least cost-effective portions of the network. Chapter 1 also highlights the additional Thruway Bus service reductions SJJPA has made over the last several years to counter the effects of the severe cost escalation for bus operations that has occurred post pandemic. Most recently, SJJPA has made a couple of important service additions to the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network and one significant reduction. SJJPA launched Route 40 in January 2026, which provides direct service between Merced and San Jose. On August 10, 2026, SJJPA launched Route 5, replacing Route 3R and providing an improved connection to Redding. In June 2026, SJJPA significantly modified service on Route 18 with the following changes: discontinued service

[1] Gold Runner, https://goldrunner.com/

to Santa Maria, seasonal service to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and continued year-round service between Hanford and Visalia through a partnership with local transit operators.

Table 1: *Existing and upcoming Thruway Bus route destinations and frequencies*

No.	Route	Daily Round-Trips
1[1,2]	Bakersfield – San Diego	1
	Fresno-Los Angeles	1
	Bakersfield-Los Angeles	9[2]
1C	Bakersfield – Santa Monica	2
3[1]	Stockton – Chico	3
	Sacramento – Chico	1
	Stockton – Sacramento	1
	Stockton – Davis	4
3R[3]	Chico – Redding (RABA)	2
5[3]	Sacramento – Redding	2
6[1]	Stockton – San Jose	2
	San Jose – Santa Cruz	2[4]
7[1]	Martinez – Arcata	2
	Martinez- Santa Rosa	2
10	Santa Barbara – Las Vegas	1
15	Yosemite – Mammoth Lakes (seasonal)	2
15A	Merced – Yosemite	4
15B	Fresno – Yosemite (seasonal)	2
18[5]	Visalia – Hanford	1
	Hanford – San Luis Obispo	Seasonal
19[1]	Bakersfield – San Bernardino	2
40	Merced – San Jose	2
99[1]	Emeryville – San Francisco	5[6]

[1] Additional service is operated around Thanksgiving, Christmas, Spring Break, and Labor Day.
[2] Route 1 operates 9 daily round-trips between Bakersfield and Los Angeles – 4 of these round-trips serve duplicate connections to the same Gold Runner train with varying stopping patterns. See Appendix 2.1 for further information.
[3] Route 5 replaced Route 3R service on August 10, 2026.
[4] SC Metro operates all day service between San Jose – Santa Cruz; 2 round-trips connect with Route 6
[5] Route 18 service pattern was modified in June 2026 from daily service between Visalia, Hanford, and Santa Maria to a segmented service pattern with daily service between Visalia and Hanford, and seasonal service between Hanford and San Luis Obispo
[6] Route 99 runs 19 daily round-trips, with funding split between SJJPA, CCJPA, and Amtrak in proportion with the number of connecting services. SJJPA accordingly funds 5 of these round-trips.

Ridership

Ridership is a key component of understanding the performance of a route. Ridership data is derived from monthly route-level performance reports as well as daily ridership data. This data highlights demand patterns by day of week, trip time, and stop location for each route, enabling SJJPA to evaluate demand at each of these levels. Understanding travel patterns allows SJJPA to tailor service to demonstrated levels of demand and ensures favorable train connections. Ridership of each route varies by market demand. The highest ridership routes in the network are Route 1 and Route 3, as they provide connections to some of the largest markets in the state including Los Angeles, San Diego, and Sacramento.

Bus-only ticketing

Chapter 1 describes SB 742 and the ensuing provision for bus-only ticketing on Thruway Bus routes. Bus-only ticketing represents an opportunity to capture additional ridership beyond Gold Runner train riders, especially on bus routes that are not served or are underserved by other operators. Currently, four Gold Runner Thruway Bus Routes do not have bus-only ticketing activated (Route 1, 3, 6, and 99). For Route 1 and Route 3, this is primarily due to challenges in meeting SB 742 requirements related to coordination around overlapping services provided by other agencies or operators, but there is also concern about maintaining capacity on these high ridership routes for train passengers. Strategies to implement bus-only ticketing are a key consideration in developing recommendations for the future, as this represents a potential avenue to boost route revenue and cost effectiveness.

Partnership and contracting structures

Existing routes operate through contracts with both private and public operators. The type of partnership and contracting structure used on a route impacts SJJPA's financial responsibilities in compensating the operator and consequently has the ability to significantly impact the cost effectiveness of a route. Partnerships therefore represent a key consideration in planning for the future of the network.

A majority of the Gold Runner Thruway bus routes are operated by private operators under contract with Amtrak, either through a direct contract or an interline agreement. These contracts are often straightforward in compensation structure and involve fewer stakeholders. The remaining routes on the other hand involve contracts with public operators, namely Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS), Santa Cruz Metro (SC Metro), Kings Area Regional Transit (KART), and Redding Area Bus Authority (RABA). Each of these public partnership contracts is structured differently and has unique considerations. Public operators often serve various stakeholders with different needs and

priorities, necessitating more complex agreements. With these competing priorities, it may sometimes be difficult to ensure that bus service is coordinated with Gold Runner schedules, which can greatly reduce the effectiveness of the connecting services for Gold Runner train passengers. However, agreements with public operators have the potential to leverage existing services and resources as well as expand funding sources in order to boost cost effectiveness while reaching broader passenger markets.

SJJPA is exploring new opportunities to contract with public operators to optimize the Thruway bus network. Specifically, SJJPA is looking to the contract for Route 3R with RABA as a potential model to apply to other existing or future routes. This model includes a public operator that guarantees connections with Gold Runner service, a diversified set of funding mechanisms from local, regional, and state sources, bus-only ticketing for all bus stop pairs, and integrated Amtrak ticketing. SJJPA has adapted this contracting structure to launch the new Route 5, as a replacement for Route 3R.

Contracting structures are outlined in further detail below in the Governance section.

Cost Effectiveness

Cost effectiveness is a valuable concept to understand the overall performance of a route. As discussed in Chapter 1, cost effectiveness is defined in California Government Code, Section 14035.2a(3), which notes that routes are deemed cost effective if they reach the *break-even point*, defined as the point where revenue generated from both the bus and train portions of the trips made by Thruway Bus riders meets or exceeds the cost of providing the corresponding Thruway Bus route.

Cost effectiveness can be represented by the cost recovery ratio metric, which compares the operating costs of a route with the abovementioned combined total ticket revenue generated from both bus trips and connected train trips. This ratio is calculated by dividing the revenue by the costs, whereby a cost recovery ratio at or above 100% signifies that a route has met the break-even point and can be considered “cost effective” as per the definition laid out in the California Government Code. Particularly for routes where bus-only tickets are not sold, the number of train riders associated with each bus route is typically significantly higher than the number of bus riders for the route. This is because Gold Runner bus riders often have multiple train rides associated with their bus trip (for example, a trip between Fresno and Anaheim would include a Route 1 bus trip, a Gold Runner train trip, and a Pacific Surfliner train trip).

The cost recovery ratio metric is valuable because it not only reveals the ability of the route to meet market demand but also factors in the costs required to operate the route and the route’s ability to recover these costs through revenue. Cost effectiveness data has been

provided by Amtrak for the federal fiscal year from October 2024 through September 2025.[1] **Table 2** includes the latest available data on annual ridership, operating cost, and cost recovery ratio for all routes (see Appendix 2.2 for detailed cost effectiveness summary tables for available years by route as well as the full tables provided by Amtrak for 2018 and 2025). Overall, the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network is very cost-effective with a total cost recovery ratio of 119% for federal FY 24/25 (October 2024 – September 2025).

Route 10 is the most cost-effective Gold Runner route, primarily since there is only one round-trip and the operational cost to the state is very low, as a result of the interline agreement Amtrak has with the operator. Route 99 is the second most cost-effective route of the network, in part due to its short length and high ridership. Route 1 and Route 3 also exhibit high cost recovery ratios, reflecting the success in serving high demand markets and offsetting the higher costs caused by the distance of these routes. In addition, Route 19 also shows a positive net income trend and has recently become cost-effective.

Low cost-effectiveness on Routes 15/15A/15B, and Route 7, result in the highest net cost for SJJPA, and reflect factors including low ridership, high operating costs, and limited integration with Gold Runner service. These routes need to be prioritized for identifying optimization strategies to improve their performance. Route 3R also had a low cost-recovery ratio, but this route was always envisioned as a temporary solution until Route 5 could be deployed. Route 3R has now been replaced by Route 5.

[1] The state fiscal year is between July 1 through June 30.

Table 2: *Annual ridership (FY 25) and cost effectiveness data (Oct 2024 - Sep 2025) by route*

No.	Route	Annual Route Ridership *(Oct '24 – Sep '25)*	Annual CA Total System Revenue[1] *(Oct '24 – Sep '25)*	Annual Operating Cost for CA[2] *(Oct '24 – Sep '25)*	Cost Recovery Ratio *(Oct '24 – Sep '25)*
1	Fresno – Bakersfield – San Diego	221,770	$12,691,271	$6,803,509	187%
1C	Bakersfield – Santa Monica	33,248	$1,343,055	$1,217,738	110%
3	Stockton – Redding	159,008	$6,705,183	$3,445,185	195%
3R	Chico – Redding (RABA)	6,533	$193,035	$426,480	45%
6	Stockton – Santa Cruz	27,358	$1,055,169	$683,677	154%
7	Martinez – Arcata	46,467	$1,971,053	$3,246,049	61%
10	Santa Barbara – Las Vegas	32,382	$745,348	$123,575	603%
15[3]	Yosemite – Mammoth Lakes	4,066	$198,271	$406,457	49%
15A	Merced – Yosemite				
15B	Fresno – Yosemite				
18A	Hanford – Santa Maria	10,390	$193,679	$85,399	227%
18B	Hanford – Visalia (KART)	Not Available	Not Available	~$75,000	Not Available
19	Bakersfield – San Bernardino	41,390	$2,107,336	$1,743,350	121%
40	Merced – San Jose	4,707 *(Jan-Apr '26)*	Not Available	$244,355 *(Jan-Mar '26)*	Not Available[4]
99	Oakland – San Francisco	47,564	$2,242,054	$544,557	412%

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and Passenger Miles Traveled (PMT)

Table 3 shows total VMT and PMT by route derived from bus portions of passenger trips. This metric reveals part of the impact Thruway Bus service has on removing cars from the road network and lowering greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, representing a key quantifiable benefit of the Thruway Bus service that may not be immediately apparent from an analysis of purely financial data. This metric is thus important to consider in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the benefits of each route. While the available

[1] Includes both Thruway Bus Route and associated CA train revenue (Gold Runner, Capitol Corridor, and Pacific Surfliner) for connecting bus passengers.
[2] Includes bus contract payments and Amtrak payments by CA. For Routes 10 and 18A the bus operator pays most of the costs to operate these services through their interline agreements with Amtrak, but receives most of the bus ticket revenue from Amtrak.
[3] Ridership and cost data is for Route 15A. Routes 15 and 15B have very low ridership and YARTS receives the bus ticket portion of the revenue from train passengers rather than a set contract amount for these routes.
[4] Cost recovery ratio information is not yet available for Route 40 as this route was implemented in January 2026 and has limited data available.

data only includes VMT and PMT attributed to the bus portion of passenger trips, additional data including VMT and PMT attributed to train connections to and from the respective bus routes would facilitate a comprehensive assessment of the Thruway Bus service's impact in reducing GHG emissions.

In 2026, the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation released guidance for the Statewide VMT Mitigation Program. The program recognizes access to transit as a key strategy for reducing automobile travel and allows developers to satisfy California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) VMT mitigation requirements by contributing to a state fund that supports affordable housing in transit-accessible locations. While the program does not directly fund transit operations, it reinforces the importance of demonstrating how transit services reduce both VMT and associated GHG emissions.[1]

For SJJPA, this highlights the value of tracking the transportation and environmental benefits generated by the Thruway Bus network. All routes serve more PMT than the VMT they generate, with some routes performing more efficiently than others in this regard. For example, Route 1 and 1C together exhibit the highest PMT, generating an estimated 1.4 million VMT while serving a total of 32.8 million annual PMT. Route 19, while only traveling 0.27 million annual VMT, serves 6.5 million annual PMT, representing the highest ratio of PMT to VMT – while this route just reaches the break-even point in terms of cost effectiveness, considering VMT and PMT reveals additional benefits of the route that go beyond revenue produced. These 3 routes together serve approximately 24 passenger miles per vehicle mile traveled, illustrating how these services contribute to shifting intercity trips from personal vehicles to bus services and in turn transport these passengers in a more efficient and sustainable manner, reducing overall roadway congestion, fuel consumption, and GHG emissions.

Quantifying these benefits enables SJJPA to demonstrate how the Thruway network contributes to the State's climate, housing, and VMT reduction goals, while strengthening the case for transit-oriented investment in communities served by high-performing corridors such as Route 1.

[1] Statewide Vehicle Miles Traveled Mitigation Program Guidance, https://lci.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/AB-130-Statewide-VMT-Mitigation-Program-Guidance_063026_Final.pdf

Table 3: *Annual Vehicle Miles Traveled and Passenger Miles Traveled by Route*

Route	***Annual Vehicle Miles Traveled*** *(FY 25)*	***Annual Passenger Miles*** *(April 2025 – March 2026)*
Route 1	1,171,802	32,830,611
Route 1C	191,917	
Route 3	694,413	9,366,492
Route 3R	106,580	423,812
Route 6	125,268	1,954,351
Route 7	532,170	5,777,566
Route 10	336,530	5,447,640
Route 15	Not available	259,813
Route 18	157,607	1,114,067
Route 19	267,910	6,501,620
Route 40	171,368	263,494
Route 99	30,843	390,825

Governance

Chapter 1 discusses a high-level overview of the current contract structure for Thruway Bus and Procurement. This chapter will go into further detail outlining the existing governance structure and types of contracts that are involved.

Structure of Existing Governance Framework

The State of California funds the management and operation of Thruway Bus service through SJJPA, and SJJPA procures the management and operation of the Thruway Bus network via an operating agreement with Amtrak.

Although SJJPA does not directly manage the day-to-day operation of the Gold Runner Thruway Network, it oversees the program through strategic planning, contract management, and coordination with Amtrak contracted bus operators, Caltrans, local transit agencies, and other stakeholders. SJJPA works with Amtrak to establish service expectations, monitor contractor performance, ensure contractual compliance, and support funding, budgeting, and reporting requirements that help maintain reliable and efficient service.

SJJPA also leads long-term planning and continuous improvement efforts by analyzing ridership, cost, on-time performance, customer feedback, and travel demand to identify opportunities for service enhancements. The agency coordinates route and schedule changes, improves connections between buses and trains, supports passenger information and marketing initiatives, and works with regional partners to strengthen first and last mile connectivity. During service disruptions, special events, and infrastructure

projects, SJJPA collaborates with Amtrak and operating partners to minimize impacts on passengers and maintain seamless regional mobility.

In addition, SJJPA is in charge of fare policy for both Gold Runner train and Thruway Bus routes, including bus-only ticketing. The Gold Runner service fare policy requires reserved ticketing. This is needed to prevent overcrowding and manage capacity for both Gold Runner trains and Thruway buses. Efforts to realign Gold Runner fares began in 2018, following an SJJPA board action to establish a distance-based fare setting methodology for both train and Thruway buses. Due to the Pandemic, SJJPA had refrained from adjusting fares as the focus was on rebuilding ridership. In October 2025, SJJPA implemented a 7.5% increase of fares across the service. To ensure that fares keep pace with market and operational demands, a bi-annual evaluation of a fare increase for both train and thruway bus services was implemented following a May 2025 board action.

Governance Agreements

The **Interagency Transfer Agreement (ITA) between Caltrans and the SJJPA** provides that Caltrans funds SJJPA, who then funds both the Gold Runner rail service and the associated Thruway Bus routes. More specifically, the agreement transfers responsibility from Caltrans to SJJPA to administer Gold Runner service, including the Thruway Bus network. The agreement outlines the State's responsibility to provide funding for Gold Runner service and Thruway Bus operations.

The **Master Agreement between the SJJPA and Amtrak** provides that SJJPA reimburses Amtrak based on the cost of operating Gold Runner and Thruway Bus services. Amtrak holds and manages all contracts with bus operators.[1] The Master Agreement also outlines performance measures Amtrak needs to meet. More specifically, the agreement defines the service routes and schedules that Amtrak will provide via passenger rail and Thruway Bus feeder service. Amtrak oversees the bus operators and manages a team of operations and contract management staff to implement what is set out in the agreement. The Amtrak management cost for the Gold Runner Thruway bus network is 6.62% of the Carrier Payments for each of the Thruway Bus routes. This fee is included in the Annual Route Operating Costs shown on **Table 2**. The Amtrak cost for managing the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network was $1.17 million for FY 24/25.

Thruway Bus Operating Contract Types

In **dedicated contracts between Amtrak and private bus operators**, Amtrak pays operators for route operation. Funding comes fully from SJJPA funds via ticket revenue and PTA funds. While SJJPA helps facilitate stakeholder outreach, it does not have a

[1] The ITA does stipulate that SJJPA has the authority, under ITA to procure bus services directly

contractual relationship with the operator running the service. Operators under this type of contract include *Alvand*, *American Star*, *Avalon*, and *Whitecastle* running on most of the routes in the network.

Interline service agreements with private bus operators were set up so private operators could cover the cost of running the service by receiving revenue from bus tickets and a portion of the train tickets with bus connections. Because of the reliance of this type of agreement on ticket sales, interline agreements were intended to reduce a route's annual operating cost for SJJPA. In order to ensure adequate payment to the operator, Amtrak (via SJJPA) can provide minimum revenue guarantees to the operator which are applicable in the event of a revenue shortfall. In these cases, SJJPA (through Caltrans) will provide the remainder of funds required to meet the guarantee, usually drawing from PTA funds. Routes 3R and 10 are examples of interlined routes with minimum revenue guarantees.

Public bus operator agreements provide that public transit operators will transport Gold Runner customers in addition to non-Gold Runner passengers. These routes can have different considerations depending on context, with various compensation structures possible like with private operators. Amtrak currently contracts with three public bus operators – RABA for Route 5, SC Metro for a portion of Route 6 (San Jose to Santa Cruz) and YARTS for Routes 15, 15A, and 15B. Each of the agreements were individually negotiated with distinct specifications and compensation details. While SJJPA does not hold operating contracts with bus operators, it still ultimately decides upon what service is run, where it operates, and how much service it runs.

While public operator agreements can provide benefits from leveraging existing services and resources, these agreements need to be evaluated for compatibility with the goals of the Thruway Bus service, as public operators often have other services and priorities beyond the Thruway Bus network's goal of complementing Gold Runner service.

Table 4 below shows the operator(s) by route, the operator type, and the contract agreement type.

Table 4: *Operator and Contract Type by Route*

Route	Route	Operator	Operator Type	Agreement Type
1	Fresno – Bakersfield – San Diego	Alvand	Private	Direct
1C	Bakersfield – Santa Monica	Alvand	Private	Direct
3	Stockton – Redding	Avalon	Private	Direct
5	Sacramento – Redding	RABA	Public	Interline
6	Stockton – San Jose	Whitecastle	Private	Direct
	San Jose – Santa Cruz	SC Metro	Public	Direct
7	Martinez – Arcata	American Star	Private	Direct
10	Santa Barbara – Las Vegas	Alvand	Private	Interline
15	Yosemite – Mammoth Lakes	YARTS	Public	Direct
15A	Merced – Yosemite	YARTS	Public	NA
15B	Fresno – Yosemite	YARTS	Public	NA
18	Hanford – San Luis Obispo	American Star	Private	Direct
	Hanford – Visalia	KART	Public	Non-Binding MOU
19	Bakersfield – San Bernardino	Alvand	Private	Direct
40	Merced – San Jose	American Star	Private	Direct
99	Oakland – San Francisco	American Star	Private	Direct

Route Profiles

Route 1: Fresno - Bakersfield - Los Angeles - San Diego



Figure 3: *Map of Route 1 – the route operates primarily between Bakersfield and Los Angeles, with 1 round-trip from Bakersfield to San Diego and 1 round-trip from Fresno to Los Angeles.*

Service Overview

Route 1 operates along the corridor connecting Fresno, Bakersfield, Los Angeles, and San Diego. This route connects most of the major population centers in Southern California to the Gold Runner service at Bakersfield and Fresno and is by far the highest ridership route, has the most frequent service, and is therefore the most important route in the SJJPA Thruway Bus network.

Schedule

The trunk of the route operates between Bakersfield and Los Angeles with nine daily round-trips. One round-trip operates from Fresno to Los Angeles and one round-trip from Bakersfield to San Diego. The Route 1 round-trip between Fresno and Los Angeles provides a connection between the San Joaquin Valley and the Pacific Surfliner during hours when there are no Gold Runner trains to make the connection between Bakersfield and Fresno. The Route 1 round-trip between Bakersfield and San Diego provides connections to Pacific Surfliner stations between Los Angeles and San Diego during times that the Pacific

Surfliner is not operating. Four of the Bakersfield to Los Angeles trips constitute a second bus connecting to the same Gold Runner train while operating under a different service pattern (See Appendix 2.1). This route offers transfer opportunities to and from all Gold Runner trains, with transfer times ranging from 4 to 18 minutes. **Table 5** below shows Route 1's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled travel time.

Table 5: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Bakersfield – Los Angeles	9	2h 10m – 2h 30m
Bakersfield – San Diego	1	6h 30m – 8h 40m
Fresno – Los Angeles	1	4h 45m

Ridership

Route 1 had over 221,300 total riders in FY25. **Figure 4** below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year, starting from FY 23.

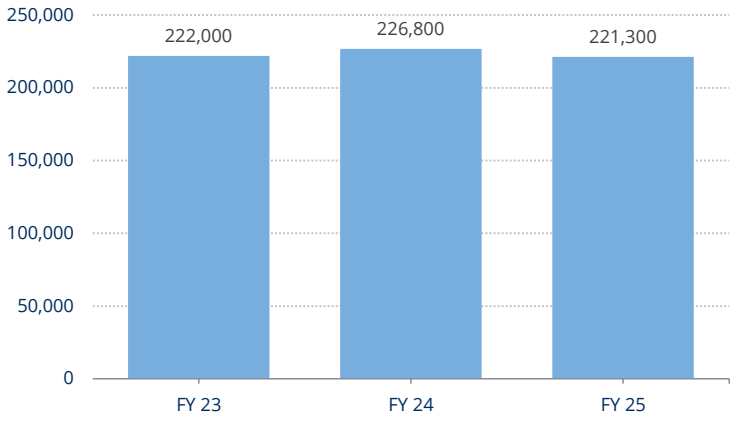


Figure 4: *Annual ridership on Route 1 by fiscal year*

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 6** below. Bakersfield and Fresno are the two Gold Runner transfer stations on this route, with 239,300 and 8,400 ons and offs respectively. Other than Gold Runner transfer stations, Los Angeles Union Station has the highest ridership at just under 200,000 ons and offs for Route 1. Union Station provides many

transfer opportunities to a robust Southern California transit network. Transfer options include metro connections to the A, B, and D lines and Metrolink connections to Orange County, Perris Valley, Riverside, Antelope Valley, and Ventura County. Union Station provides riders with more choices and access than any other Gold Runner Thruway stop. The second highest ridership non-transfer station is San Diego, which exhibits high ridership even with just one round-trip per day. While this route exhibits the highest ridership in the network, total Route 1 ridership declined by 2.4% between FY 24 and FY 25, largely driven by ridership declines in Los Angeles and San Diego. This is in contrast with the network's overall COVID-19 recovery trend.

Table 6: *Ons and offs by stop for Route 1 comparing FY 24 and FY 25.*

Stop	Ons/Offs *(FY 24)*	Ons/Offs *(FY 25)*
Bakersfield (Transfer)[1,2]	*243,852*	*238,354*
Los Angeles	201,075	196,220
San Diego	10,852	9,808
Fresno (Transfer)[1]	*7,229*	*7,844*
Santa Clarita[1]	8,076	8,024
Burbank Airport[1]	7,376	7,306
Glendale	5,831	5,547
Hanford	3,699	3,947
Oceanside	2,303	2,362
Anaheim	1,784	1,919
Santa Ana	1,488	1,595
Fullerton	1,384	1,477
Irvine	1,181	1,347
Solana Beach	457	490

Partnerships and Finances

Route 1 is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and Alvand, a private operator.

Bus-only ticketing is not active on this route. Although the route has high ridership and is cost-effective, the implementation of bus-only ticketing remains a way to increase cost-effectiveness and public benefits as the network continues to develop in the future. SJJPA

[1] Ons/offs at Bakersfield and Fresno include transfers to/from Gold Runner trains.
[2] Ons/offs at Bakersfield, Santa Clarita, and Burbank Airport represent combined ons/offs on Route 1 and Route 1C.

faces challenges with the implementation of bus-only ticketing on this route due to the well-established nature of travel along this corridor – under the existing private operator contract for Route 1, SJJPA would need to coordinate with existing intercity (like Greyhound and Flix Bus) and local/regional bus operators, that offer overlapping service before being able to implement bus-only ticketing as per the stipulations of SB 742. In addition, Route 1 is the highest ridership Gold Runner route so SJJPA would need to make sure that there was adequate capacity for intercity train passengers connecting to Route 1 before implementing bus-only ticketing.

Deleted: , like Greyhound and Flix Bus

Operating costs on Route 1 totaled $6,803,509 between October 2024 and September 2025. Total California system revenue between October 2024 and September 2025 related to Route 1 totaled $12,691,271[1]. This translates to a cost recovery ratio of 187%, signifying that Route 1 met the threshold for cost effectiveness in FY 24/25 as it has for all years with available data, even during COVID-19.

Route 1 had the highest increase in operating cost between FY 22 and FY 25 of any Gold Runner Thruway route. Expenses increased by 134% from $2.9 million to $6.8 million in three years as shown in **Figure 5**. While Route 1 is currently and has historically been a very cost-effective route, rising costs to operate this route combined with slowing ridership growth triggered SJJPA to reduce the number of Route 1 round-trips in 2023 (two fewer total round-trips and also truncated two of the round-trips at Los Angeles Union Station that had extended to Santa Ana). This management decision was important to keep Route 1's cost recovery ratio well above 100%, however Route 1's cost recovery ratio still has dropped as compared to its pre-pandemic numbers.

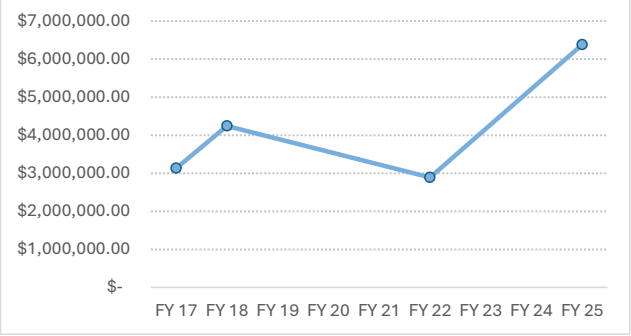


Figure 5: *Annual Route 1 expenses by fiscal year*

[1] Total California system revenue for each route includes the bus ticket revenue and the train ticket revenue associated with the bus riders that connect to the Gold Runner, Capitol Corridor, and Pacific Surfliner trains.

Route 1C: Bakersfield – Santa Monica



Figure 6: *Map of Route 1C*

Service Overview

Route 1C connects Bakersfield, Santa Clarita, Burbank Airport, Van Nuys, Westwood-UCLA, and Santa Monica along the I-5 corridor. This route connects cities in the Los Angeles metropolitan area to Gold Runner service at Bakersfield but faces relatively low ridership south of Van Nuys. The route formerly extended to Torrance, but that segment was discontinued due to low ridership.

Schedule

This route is served by two daily round-trips, with transfer opportunities to and from Gold Runner trains scheduled between 2:00 and 5:00 PM. Transfer times range from 6 to 17 minutes.

Table 7 below shows Route 1C's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled travel time.

Table 7: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Bakersfield – Santa Monica	2	3h 30m

Ridership

Route 1C had just under 32,900 total riders in FY 25. **Figure 7** below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year, starting from FY 23. Ridership grew with a 1,800-rider increase from FY 23 to FY 24, followed by a smaller 600 rider increase from FY 24 and FY 25. In 2023 SJJPA reduced the number of Route 1C round-trips by 50% (from four round-trips down to two round-trips) focusing on maintaining the highest ridership round-trips. This decision was based on the rapidly increasing operational costs. Reducing operational costs (by reducing the number of round-trips) was essential to enable Route 1C to be a cost-effective route.

Deleted: As Route 1C is close to reaching the cost-effectiveness threshold, its modest ridership gains are positive indicators that with strategic interventions, this route may achieve cost effectiveness.

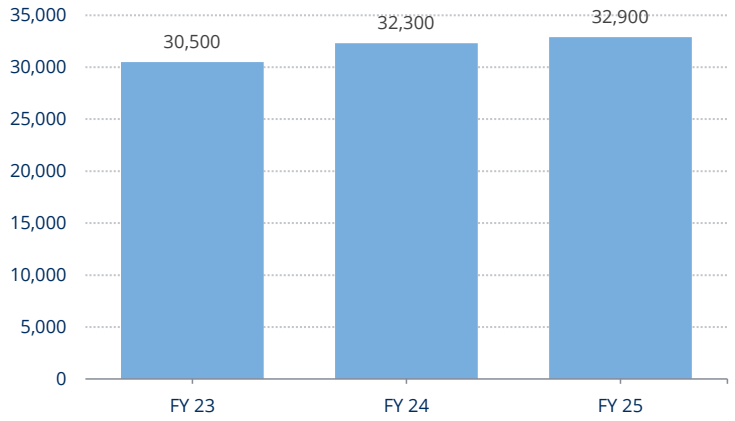


Figure 7: Annual ridership on Route 1C by fiscal year

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 8** below. Route 1C shares stops with Route 1 at Bakersfield, Santa Clarita, and Burbank Airport, with indicated ons/offs at these stops representing combined values across both routes. Like Route 1, Route1C connects with Gold Runner trains at Bakersfield. Route 1C bus stops south of Van Nuys, especially Santa Monica, demonstrate low ridership. The circuitous route between Bakersfield and Van Nuys via Burbank Airport increases travel time compared to the fastest route via I-405.

Other than Bakersfield, Van Nuys has the highest ridership on this route while Santa Monica Pier has the lowest.

Table 8: *Ons and offs by stop for Route 1C, for the latest year of available data (Mar 2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar '25 – Feb '26)
Bakersfield (Transfer)[1]	*239,318*
Van Nuys	12,543
Santa Clarita[2]	7,955
Burbank Airport[2]	7,312
Westwood-UCLA	6,918
Santa Monica Pier	1,462

Partnerships and Finances

Route 1C is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and Alvand, a private operator. Operating costs on Route 1C totaled $1,217,738 between October 2024 and September 2025. Total California system revenue related to Route 1C totaled $1,343,055. This translates to a cost recovery ratio of 110%, signifying that Route 1C met the threshold for cost effectiveness in 2024/2025. While Route 1C was marginally cost effective in FY 17, and increasing operating costs outpaced ridership increases, cost effectiveness for the route remains positive since the amount of service for this route was reduced in 2023.

[1] Bakersfield ridership (ons and offs) includes transfers.
[2] Ons/offs at Bakersfield, Santa Clarita, and Burbank Airport represent combined ons/offs on Route 1 and Route 1C.

Route 3, 3R, & 5: Stockton – Sacramento – Chico – Redding

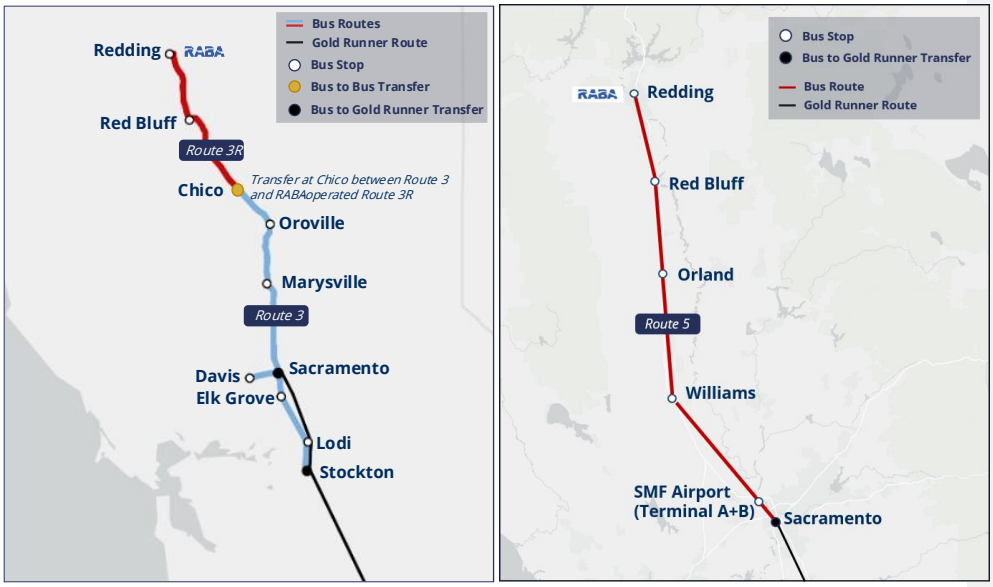


Figure 8: *Map of Route 3 and the discontinued Route 3R (left) and the new Route 5 (right)*

Service Overview

Route 3 connects Stockton to Chico via Sacramento. This route connects cities in the Central Valley to Gold Runner service at both Sacramento and Stockton. Route 3 represents the second highest performing route in the network after Route 1, with especially high ridership occurring between Stockton and Sacramento. Route 3 supplements the direct Gold Runner train trips to Sacramento by connecting to Gold Runner trains traveling to between Bakersfield and Oakland at the Stockton San Joaquin Street Station.

Prior to the implementation of Route 5, passengers could take advantage of timed transfers to Route 3R at Chico, which continued to Redding. Route 3R was implemented as a first step towards developing the new Thruway Bus Route 5 service between Redding and Sacramento. Route 3R was replaced by Route 5 on August 10, 2026, with Route 5 offering more direct service between Redding and Sacramento along the I-5 corridor. Route 5 reduces travel times, improves transfer opportunities, and connects Sacramento International Airport (SMF) to the Thruway Bus network. SJJPA has partnered with Caltrans and Shasta Regional Transportation Agency (SRTA) since 2018 to develop Route 5 (formerly known as the “Salmon Runner”).

RABA has access to diverse funding sources that alleviate pressure on PTA funds disbursed through SJJPA to initiate the new route. These funding sources include annual 5311(f) operations funding through Caltrans, one-time State Highway Account funds, and annual Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds transferred from Tehama County. This partnership and funding model operated by RABA on Route 5 will be used to evaluate whether such arrangements can be used for other routes across the Thruway Bus network.

Schedule

Currently, Route 3 follows multiple service patterns, with its primary trunk serving the Stockton-Sacramento corridor with 8 round-trips. 4 of these round-trips continue to Davis, while 3 continue to Chico. The route has 1 additional round-trip between Sacramento and Chico.

Route 3 offers transfer opportunities to and from every Gold Runner train, with transfers primarily planned at Stockton with transfer times 10 to 65 minutes. The single round-trip between Sacramento and Chico offers transfers to Gold Runner trains at Sacramento, with transfer times between 4 and 14 minutes.

Route 3R served Chico to Redding daily with two round-trips and timed transfers to and from Route 3 at Chico. Route 5 now serves Sacramento to Redding daily with two round-trips and timed transfers to and from the Gold Runner at Sacramento Valley Station. **Table 9** below shows Route 3, 3R and 5's routing, daily round-trips, and travel time.

Table 9: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Stockton – Chico (Route 3)	3	3h 10m – 3h 40m
Sacramento – Chico (Route 3)	1	1h 55m
Stockton – Sacramento (Route 3)	1	1h 0m – 1h 20m
Stockton – Davis (Route 3)	4	1h 35m – 1h 55m
Chico – Redding *(Route 3R – discontinued Aug '26)*	*2*	*1h 35 min*
Sacramento – Redding (Route 5 – began Aug '26)	2	3h 0m

Ridership

Route 3 and 3R had 153,500 total riders in FY 25. **Figure *9*** below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year, starting from FY 19.

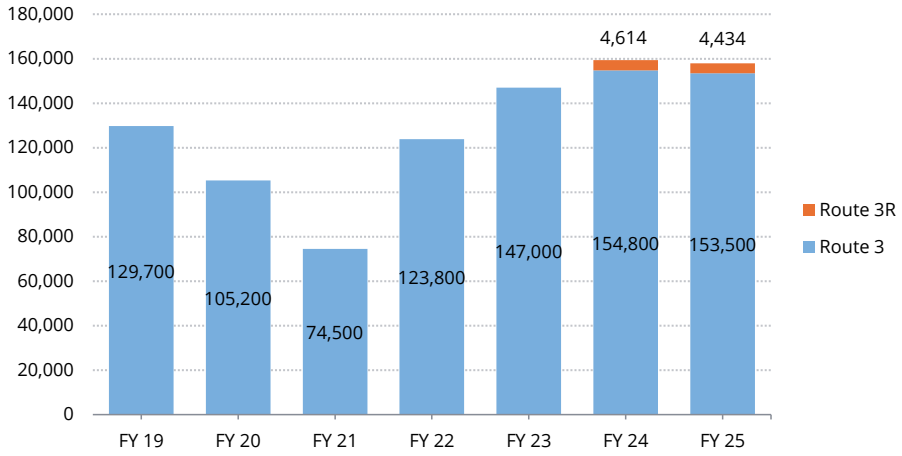


Figure 9: *Annual ridership on Route 3/3R by fiscal year*

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table *10*** below. Stockton San Joaquin Street is the primary train-to-bus transfer station on this route, with over 125,000 annual ons/offs. Stockton has two stops – Stockton San Joaquin Street Station with transfer opportunities to Gold Runner service, and Stockton Cabral Station which is served by ACE rail. Sacramento has by far the highest ridership of the bus stops, followed by Chico. Although Sacramento is a transfer station for one daily round-trip, only a very small portion of the 113,145 riders comes from rail transfers.

Route 3's ridership did not decline when it was truncated to Chico, signifying that Route 3R was successful in serving the affected riders while ridership has additionally increased elsewhere along Route 3.

Table 10: *Ons and offs by stop for Route 3, for the latest year of available data (Mar 2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar '25 – Feb '26)
Stockton (Amtrak) (Transfer)[1]	*125,035*
Sacramento [2]	*113,145*
Chico	29,833
Davis	16,218
Redding	4,522
Marysville	4,537
Elk Grove	4,018
Oroville	3,292
Lodi	2,873
Red Bluff	1,903
Stockton (ACE)	1,722

Partnerships and Finances

Route 3 is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and Avalon, a private operator. Bus-only ticketing is not active on Route 3. While Route 3 is high performing, the implementation of bus-only ticketing could be a way to increase cost-effectiveness and benefits as the network continues to develop in the future. Like with Route 1, Route 3 faces challenges with the implementation of bus-only ticketing on this route due to the well-established nature of travel along this corridor. Using the current private operator contracted by Amtrak, SJJPA would need to coordinate with existing bus operators, including Greyhound and Flix Bus, that offer overlapping service before being able to implement bus-only ticketing as per the stipulations of SB 742. SJJPA is exploring potential partnerships with public transit operators that would allow bus-only ticketing along this route.

Route 3R was contracted separately between Amtrak/SJJPA and RABA. This contract constituted an interlining agreement, with RABA receiving the ticket revenue between Chico and Redding, as well as a minimum revenue guarantee funded by SJJPA to cover operating costs not covered by ticket revenue. This model is now being used for the new Route 5.

Operating costs on Route 3 totaled $3,445,185 between October 2024 and September 2025. Total California system revenue related to Route 3 totaled $6,705,183. This

[1] Ons/offs at Stockton include Gold Runner transfers
[2] Sacramento is both a stop destination and a transfer point with only a small portion of ridership coming from Gold Runner transfers (1RT from Sacramento to Chico)

translates to a very high cost recovery ratio of 195%, signifying that Route 3 met the threshold for cost effectiveness in FY 24/25. Between October 2024 and September 2025, Route 3R cost $426,480 to operate and had total revenue of $193,035 with a cost recovery ratio of 45%. Route 3R has now been replaced by Route 5. Removing the connection from Redding to Chico from Route 3 and its associated costs, has helped Route 3 continue to have a strong cost recovery ratio. Nevertheless, with the re-introduction of the Gold Runner train service's seventh daily round-trip (the second round-trip between Bakersfield and Sacramento) on December 8, 2025, it is likely that there will be a reduction in Route 3 ridership for FY 25/26.

Route 6: Stockton – San Jose – Santa Cruz

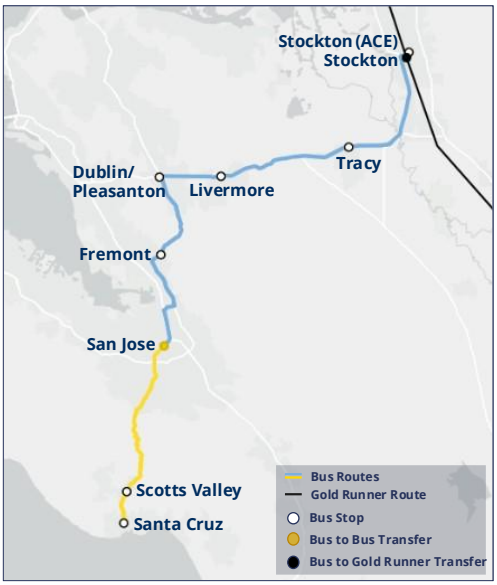


Figure 10: *Map of Route 6 and SC Metro service to Santa Cruz*

Service Overview

Route 6, which connects Stockton to San Jose, is operated by private bus operator Whitecastle. Route 6 offers transfers in San Jose to SC Metro's Route 17, connecting passengers to and from Santa Cruz.

Schedule

Route 6 runs from San Jose to Stockton with two daily round-trips, offering one morning and one evening transfer to Gold Runner service in each direction. Transfers to northbound

Gold Runner service are scheduled at 11 minutes, while transfers to southbound Gold Runner service are scheduled at 65 minutes. Route 6 connections between San Jose and Santa Cruz operate on an all-day schedule with headways between 15 minutes and 1 hour.[1] **Table 11** below shows Route 6's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled traveled time.

Table 11: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Stockton – San Jose	2	2h 5m - 2h 15m
San Jose – Santa Cruz (via SC Metro)	*All Day Service*	45-60m

Ridership

Route 6 had over 29,800 total riders in FY 25. **Figure *11*** below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year for Route 6, starting from FY 19. Since FY 21, Route 6 ridership slowly increased year over year with the biggest jump from FY 22 to FY 23 of 6,500 riders. Ridership is now at approximately 75% of the ridership in FY 19 but recovery is slowing. Route 6 ridership recovery is strong when considering that the route had four round-trips (twice the frequency) prior to the pandemic.

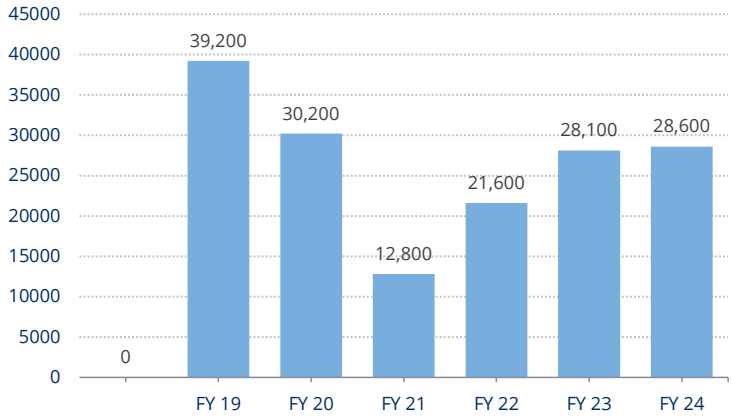


Figure 11: Annual ridership on Route 6 by fiscal year

[1] https://scmetro.org/routes/route-17/

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 12** below. The Gold Runner transfer station at Stockton has 26,100 ons and offs. Other than Stockton, Route 6 experiences its highest ridership at its terminus in San Jose, signifying the high proportion of riders using this route to travel between the Central Valley and the Bay Area. Most other stops demonstrate relatively low ridership.

The recent implementation of Route 40 connecting Merced and San Jose may draw San Jose riders away from Route 6 as Route 40 offers more direct travel between some Central Valley destinations and San Jose. Route 40 reduces the trip time between San Jose and Merced, and to destinations south of Merced, by over one hour. Since San Jose is the anchor stop for Route 6, revenue may decline as Route 40 ridership continues to develop. An analysis of early ridership data between January and May 2026 indicates that Route 6 ridership has declined by roughly 30% compared to the same months in 2025. This coincides with the implementation of Route 40 in January 2026 (see section *Route 40: Merced – San Jose* for more information on Route 40).

Table 12: *Ons and offs by stop for Route 6, for the latest year of available data (Mar2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar 25 – Feb 26)
Stockton (Amtrak) (Transfer)[1]	*26,110*
San Jose[2]	22,584
Stockton (ACE)	1,790
Dublin-Pleasanton	1,945
Fremont Park and Ride	1,883
Livermore	1,203
Tracy	1,091
Scotts Valley	No Data
Santa Cruz	No Data

Partnerships and Finances

Route 6 is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and Whitecastle, a private operator. San Jose-Santa Cruz service is operated through a partnership between Amtrak and SC Metro.

Bus-only ticketing is not active on Route 6. In the 2026 SJJPA Business Plan, SJJPA identified it as a priority for FY 26-27 to open this route to bus-only ticketing. This may

[1] Stockton ridership includes transfers.
[2] Ridership only includes passengers on Route 6 between San Jose and Stockton.

represent a strategy to recover potential ridership losses after the implementation of Route 40, by opening the route to additional passenger markets that do not overlap with Route 40.

Operating costs on Route 6 totaled $683,677 between October 2024 and September 2025. Total California system revenue related to Route 6 totaled $1,055,169. This translates to a cost recovery ratio of 154%, signifying that Route 6 met the threshold for cost effectiveness in FY 24/25. This route was also cost effective in FY 19 prior to COVID-19.

Route 7: Martinez – Santa Rosa – Arcata/Cal Poly



Figure 12: *Map of Route 7*

Service Overview

Route 7 is one of the longest routes in the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network, connecting Martinez to Napa, Santa Rosa, and destinations farther north including Ukiah, Eureka, and Arcata. Route 7 currently connects with Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) at Petaluma.

This route runs two daily round-trips from Martinez to Santa Rosa and another two round-trips from Martinez to Arcata/Cal Poly-Humboldt via Santa Rosa. It offers connections to most Gold Runner trains at Martinez with transfer times between 7 and 50 minutes.

Schedule

Route 7 schedules were recently updated to skip low ridership stops at Laytonville, Leggett, and Garberville on one of two daily round-trips in order to decrease travel times to meet federal requirements for bus operations. The schedule change also included eliminating the one daily round-trip between Napa and Martinez. Additionally, the updated schedules improve bus transfer opportunities in Ukiah while aligning northbound and southbound services to improve the attractiveness of bus-only trips. Even with the updated schedules, the length of the route poses operational complexities related to driver shifts, with the full route scheduled to take up to 6 hours and 50 minutes. As a result, the current schedule includes a 40-minute rest stop at Ukiah. **Table 13** below shows Route 7's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled travel time.

Table 13: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Martinez – Santa Rosa	2	1h 15m – 2h 15m
Martinez – Arcata	2	6h 35m – 6h 50m

Ridership

Route 7 had 45,000 total riders in FY 25. **Figure 13** below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year for Route 7, starting from FY 19. Route 7 ridership has nearly recovered to pre-COVID levels, with FY 25 ridership amounting to 95% of the route's ridership in FY 19. Ridership for the route has increased every year since FY 21. Route 7 has relatively high ridership (third highest in the Gold Runner Thruway system after Route 1 and Route 3) but induces disproportionately high operating costs due to its length. Despite this limitation, shortening Route 7 is challenging since the northern end of the route contributes a substantial amount to ridership and has limited alternative connections to major metropolitan areas in California.

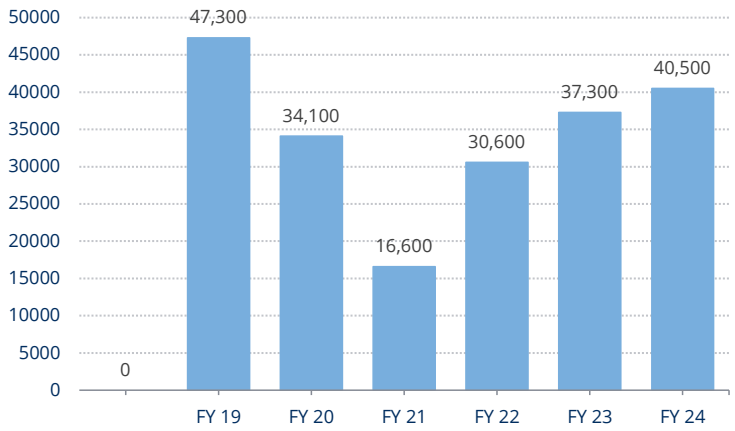


Figure 13: Annual ridership on Route 7 by fiscal year

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 14** below. The Gold Runner transfer station at Martinez has 35,000 ons and offs. Other than Martinez, Route 7 experiences its highest ridership at Santa Rosa with 10,800 ons and offs, while the Arcata and Cal Poly stops combined yield nearly 9,000 ons and offs. Eureka, Napa, and Ukiah also contribute substantial ridership to the route.

Table 14*: Ons and offs by stop for Route 7, for the latest year of available data (Mar 2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar 25 – Feb 26)
Martinez (Transfer)[1]	*35,062*
Santa Rosa	10,794
Eureka	5,750
Napa	5,313
Arcata (TC)	5,284
Ukiah	5,103
Vallejo	3,678
Arcata (Cal Poly)	3,620
Petaluma	3,053
Rohnert Park	2,613
Fortuna	1,802
Laytonville	1,691
Willits	1,643
Garberville	1,090

[1] Martinez ridership (ons and offs) includes transfers

Cloverdale	575
Healdsburg	447
Leggett	92

Partnerships and Finances

Route 7 is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and American Star, a private operator. Bus-only ticketing is active on Route 7.

Route 7 schedules have been updated to allow ample time for transfers with HTA service between Ukiah and Eureka. However, transfers between services are not guaranteed as HTA operates its service independently and is not required to modify its operations to accommodate Thruway bus transfers.

Operating costs on Route 7 totaled $3,246,049 between October 2024 and September 2025. Total California system revenue related to Route 7 totaled $1,971,053. This translates to a cost recovery ratio of 61% signifying that Route 7 did not meet the threshold for cost effectiveness in 2024/2025. In FY 17, Route 7 demonstrated substantial cost effectiveness with a 136% cost recovery ratio. In FY 18 the route showed a slight revenue loss. However, Route 7's cost recovery ratio has dipped sharply in recent years, primarily due to increasing operational costs outpacing ridership increases. Operational costs have increased by 176% since FY 22, while ridership has only increased by 47% in the same timeframe.

Route 10: Santa Barbara to Las Vegas



Figure 14: *Map of Route 10*

Service Overview

Route 10 connects Las Vegas and Santa Barbara via Bakersfield. The route was established through an interline agreement that combined the former Routes 9 and 10. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Route 9 operated between Bakersfield and Las Vegas but was suspended during the pandemic and has not been resumed as a standalone service. Route 10, which previously operated only between Bakersfield and Santa Barbara, was extended to assume Route 9's routing, creating a continuous service between Las Vegas and Santa Barbara.

The route is now over 430 miles long and is the longest route in the Gold Runner Thruway system. Due to its substantial distance paired with moderate ridership, Route 10 only operates one daily round-trip. During the pandemic, SJJPA reduced the frequency of service between Santa Barbara and Bakersfield from three round-trips down to one round-trip (the amount of service between Bakersfield and Las Vegas remained the same with one round-trip). When compared to services provided by the rest of the Thruway system, a similar percentage of Route 10 passengers board or alight at the Gold Runner transfer station in Bakersfield. The concentration of ons and offs at the Gold Runner connection indicates that despite Route 10's length, its usage patterns are consistent with the other Gold Runner Thruway routes.

Schedule

Route 10 runs one round-trip per day, providing afternoon connectivity to the Gold Runner at Bakersfield. Transfer times range from 17 to 48 minutes. A one-way trip takes 11 hours and 35 minutes, much of that travel time occurring between Las Vegas and Mojave. **Table 15** below shows Route 10's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled travel time.

Table 15*: Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Las Vegas – Santa Barbara	1	11h 35m

Ridership

Route 10 had 32,300 total riders in FY 25. **Figure 15** below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year for Route 10, starting from FY 19. While ridership peaked in FY 23, it has since declined in the subsequent years despite the implementation of bus-only ticketing. Strategies to stabilize this trend may be needed in order to ensure the route is financially sustainable in the future.

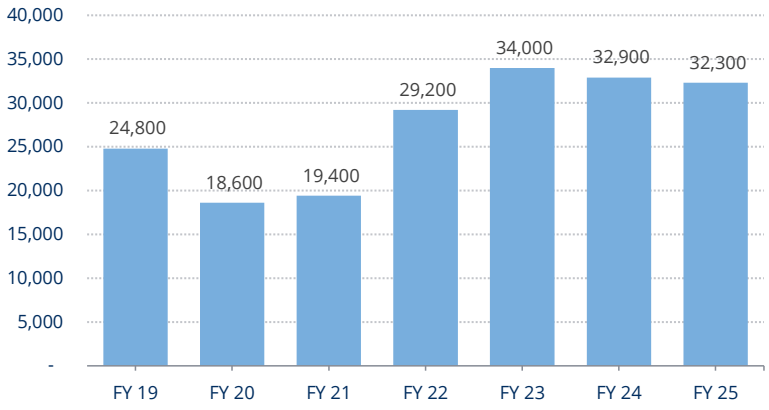


Figure 15: Annual ridership on Route 10 by fiscal year

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 16** below. Other than the Gold Runner transfer stop at Bakersfield, the highest ridership on this route occurs at Oxnard with nearly 9,800 ons and offs, followed by Santa Barbara and Las Vegas with 5,100 and 5,000 respectively. Both ends of the route contribute significantly to the route's overall ridership. Barstow has two stations, both with lower ridership, with the Barstow Bus station exhibiting especially low ridership.

Table 16: *Ons and offs by stop for Route 10, for the latest year of available data (Mar 2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar '25 – Feb '26)
Bakersfield (Transfer)[1]	*29,859*
Oxnard	9,787
Santa Barbara	5,068
Las Vegas Strip	5,015
UCSB	4,431
Las Vegas Downtown	4,426
Ventura	2,802
Mojave	2,317
Barstow Amtrak	1,713
Santa Paula	1,292
Carpinteria	1,003
Barstow Bus	782
Tehachapi	570
Fillmore	405

Partnerships and Finances

Route 10 is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and Alvand, a private operator. Route 10 includes an interline agreement with FNA where Greyhound and FlixBus are allotted a portion of the tickets that increased travel options for passengers and helped remove potential obstacles for selling bus-only ticketing on the route. The total operating cost for Route 10 is not available due to the nature of the interlining agreement; however, as part of the interlining agreement, the operator receives a minimum revenue guarantee of up to $292,000 to offset any operating revenue not covered by ticket sales. Between October 2024 and September 2025, the full amount of the revenue guarantee was not needed as the total operating cost for SJJPA was $123,575. California system revenue related to Route 10 totals $2,006,452. Based on the interline agreement, the Route 10 operator received nearly all of the bus trip portion of the revenue associated with the route, which totaled $1,261,104 between October 2024 and September 2025. Therefore, the amount of revenue used to determine the cost recovery ratio for Route 10 did not include the revenue that was paid to the operator and was almost entirely from the train portion of the revenue associated with the route. The amount of "train" revenue for Route 10 in **Table 2** totaled $745,348. From October 2024 to September 2025, Route 10 was the most cost-effective Gold Runner route with a cost recovery ratio of 603%.

[1] Bakersfield ridership (ons and offs) includes transfers.

Route 15, 15A, & 15B: Yosemite Routes

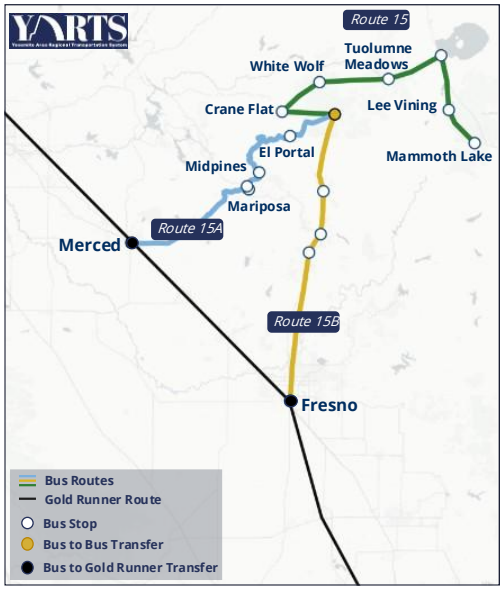


Figure 16: *Map of Route 15/15A/15B*

Service Overview

Routes 15, 15A, and 15B services are provided by the public operator YARTS. These routes link the Yosemite Valley to the Gold Runner via Merced (Route 15A) and Fresno (Route 15B). Because SJJPA only contributes a relatively small portion of the funding for these routes, accommodating Gold Runner schedules is not the top priority for YARTS service. As a result, bus schedules are not well aligned with Gold Runner train schedules. Furthermore, buses are only required to wait 15 minutes if Gold Runner trains are late, which may not guarantee transfers for passengers, hindering the benefit of these routes to Gold Runner passengers.

Schedule

Route 15 and Route 15B are seasonal routes, with two daily round-trips on each during their respective seasons. Route 15A runs year-round, operating between three round-trips in the winter and six round-trips in July and August. Up to four of these daily round-trips serve the Gold Runner station at Merced. However, due to the provisions of the agreement with YARTS derived from YARTS' own service goals focusing on transporting workers and tourists within Yosemite, connections to the Gold Runner are inconsistent, scheduled between 8 minutes and 1 hour and 45 minutes. As previously noted, where connections

exist, YARTS buses are not required to wait more than 15 minutes for Amtrak trains. The lack of timed connections between the Gold Runner and YARTS routes generates unreliability that can manifest in substantial travel time costs. **Table 17** below shows Route 15/15A/15B's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled traveled time.

Table 17: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
15 Yosemite – Mammoth Lakes	2	3h 35m
15A Merced – Yosemite	3-6	2h 21m – 3h 29m
15B Fresno – Yosemite	2	2h 5m – 2h 40m

Ridership

Route 15/15A/15B[1] had just over 4,500 Gold Runner transfer passengers in FY25. **Figure *17*** below represents a chart of combined annual ridership by fiscal year for the three routes, noting total YARTS ridership compared to Gold Runner transfer passengers. The number of Gold Runner transfer passengers in FY 25 was only 8% of the total YARTS FY 25 ridership.

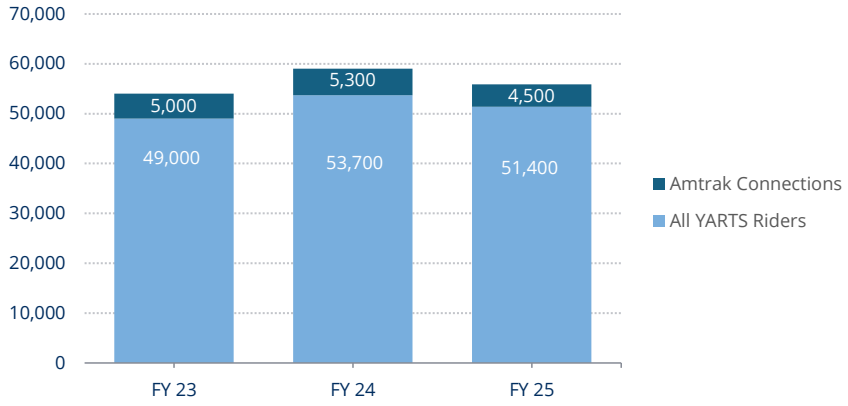


Figure 17: *Annual ridership on Route 15/15A/15B by fiscal year*

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 18** below. Route 15, 15A, and 15B all experience the highest ridership at Yosemite Curry Village at 1,300 ons and offs, followed by Yosemite

[1] FY25 ridership data does not include Route 15

Valley Lodge and Yosemite Visitor Center with 900 and 600 ons and offs respectively. The Gold Runner transfer station at Merced experiences 4,400 ons and offs. Many stops exhibit low ridership below 100 annual passengers, including Fresno despite providing seasonal transfers to Gold Runner service. Gold Runner related ridership does not contribute significantly to YARTS' overall ridership, reflecting the conflicting priorities between YARTS and SJJPA in offering this service.

Table 18: *Ons and offs by stop for Routs 15/15A/15B, for the latest year of available data (Mar 2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar 25 – Feb 26)
Merced (Transfer)[1]	*3,442*
Yosemite Curry Village	1,296
Yosemite Valley Lodge	884
Yosemite Visitor Center	628
Mariposa (Midtown)	209
Mariposa (Park & Ride)	180
El Portal	157
Midpines	95
Lee Vining	78
Oakhurst	18
Mammoth Lakes	4
Coarsegold	4
Fresno (Transfer)[26]	1

Partnerships and Finances

Routes 15/15A/15B are operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and YARTS, a public operator. The nature of the agreement allows YARTS to determine its schedules based on its own service priorities, inhibiting robust integration with Gold Runner service. SJJPA, through Amtrak, pays YARTS a daily rate per bus by route. The YARTS contract does not include fuel cost adjustment or liquidated damages provisions.

Because this route is run by a public operator, bus-only ticketing is automatically active. The majority of YARTS riders are not Gold Runner transfer passengers.

The Gold Runner Thruway contributed $406,457 toward Route 15A between October 2024 and September 2025. Total California system revenue related to Routes 15A totaled $198,271. This translates to a cost recovery ratio of 49%, signifying that the YART 15A route

[1] Ons/offs at Merced and Fresno include Gold Runner transfers

to Yosemite failed to meet the cost effectiveness threshold for SJJPA in FY 24/25 by a significant margin.

Route 18: Santa Maria – Hanford – Visalia (Route modified in June 2026)



Figure 18: *Maps of Route 18: service pattern through May 2026 (left), service pattern starting June 2026 (right)*

Service Overview

Until May 2026, Route 18 operated from Hanford to Santa Maria, San Luis Obispo, and Visalia, with one daily round-trip. **Figure 18** shows the original route through May 2026 compared with the modified route offering seasonal service from San Luis Obispo to Hanford and year-round service via KART between Hanford and Visalia. The new service pattern started in June 2026.

Route 18 was reconfigured due to declining ridership and bus revenues, making it difficult for the private operator, Classic Charters, to profit from the route. While post-COVID ridership has recovered systemwide, Route 18 has failed to experience a sustained recovery, with ridership maintaining a 57% decline since FY 18. Due to the operator of Route 18 terminating their interline agreement with Amtrak, the route has been reconfigured to focus resources on seasonal service around proven periods of high demand. This is anticipated to lower the cost of running the route and maximize the route's cost recovery.

Schedule

Starting March 31, 2026, Route 18 operated on a reduced schedule only running one round-trip per day on Friday through Monday. After May 31, 2026, Route 18 was discontinued and operations between Hanford and Visalia were taken over by KART. Since July 1, 2024, SJJPA contributes to the route, where KART operates two round-trips between Hanford and Visalia with Gold Runner transfers at Hanford. Service from Hanford to Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo will run seasonally based on peak university-based travel periods. Service to Santa Maria has been discontinued. **Table 19** below shows Route 18's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled travel time.

Table 19: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Visalia – Hanford	2	30m – 40m
Hanford – San Luis Obispo	Seasonal	1h 05m – 1h 15m

Ridership

Route 18 had over 10,600 total riders in FY 25.

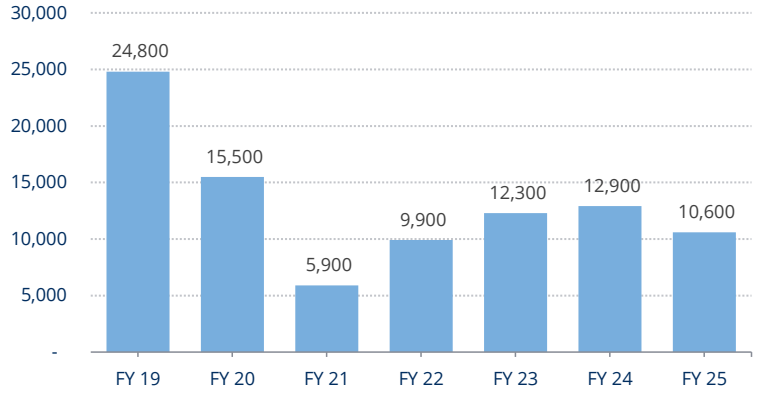


Figure 19 below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year for Route 18, starting from FY 19. Route 18 ridership declined by approximately 18% between FY 24 and FY 25.

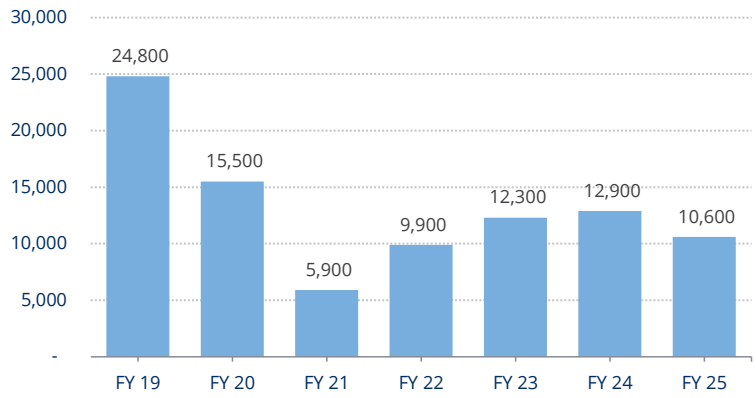


Figure 19: Annual ridership on Route 18 by fiscal year

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 20** below. Other than the Gold Runner transfer station at Hanford, the two San Luis Obispo stops together contributed the highest ridership with roughly 4,900 ons and offs. While this represents a modest level of ridership, annual data reveals a strong seasonality to ridership patterns, suggesting that the majority of ridership to San Luis Obispo occurs during peak university-related travel periods, supporting the decision to reduce service on a seasonal basis. Visalia also exhibited relatively low ridership with 2,170 annual passengers, but this service has been chosen to continue year-round due to lower operating costs and the feasibility of a partnership with the local public transit operator. Santa Maria has a similarly low level of ridership, with 2,000 annual ons and offs, and has been discontinued due to ridership not sufficiently justifying costs along this segment of the route. This ridership data does not yet reflect the recent changes to the Route 18 service pattern.

Table 20*: Ons and offs by stop for Route 18, for the latest year of available data (Mar 2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar 25 – Feb 26)
Hanford (Transfer)[1]	*8,957*
San Luis Obispo	3,199
Visalia	2,170
Santa Maria	2,003
San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly)	1,735
Grover Beach	1,454
Paso Robles	1,097

[1] Hanford ridership (ons and offs) includes transfers

Atascadero	419
Lemoore	414

Partnerships and Finances

Route 18 was originally operated by Orange Belt Stages which went out of business in 2020. Following Orange Belt Stage's closure, American Star operated the route through an interline agreement with Amtrak. After American Star recently opted to pull out of this agreement due to poor performance, SJJPA and Amtrak sought a new partnership structure to reconfigure the route.

Route 18 is now operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and American Star for seasonal service between Hanford and San Luis Obispo. An SJJPA contract with public operator Kings County Area Public Transit Agency (KCAPTA) permits KART to operate the year-round segment between Hanford and Visalia. In the future, Visalia Transit is expected to operate additional service on this route as part of the Cross Valley Corridor Phase 1[1]. KART service does not operate on Sundays and on New Years Day, Presidents Day, Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. In addition, KART currently does not have a ticketing agreement with Amtrak so it is not possible to purchase a connection to/from Visalia on Amtrak's website. KART is currently allowing Gold Runner passengers to ride for free by showing their train ticket.

Bus-only ticketing was always active on Route 18 but did not sufficiently counteract the route's decline in ridership in recent years.

Comprehensive operating cost data for the previous Route 18 service between Visalia and Santa Maria is not available due to the nature of the Amtrak interlining agreement. **Table 2** shows a high cost recovery ratio of 227% because of the relatively low cost for the revenue guarantee ($85,399) as compared to the train revenue generated from the connecting bus passengers ($193,679). In addition to the revenue guarantee funding, the operator received $343,579 in bus ticket revenue, but they claimed this funding was not enough to continue operations and terminated their interline agreement with Amtrak. Even at pre-pandemic ridership levels, Route 18 was not a cost-effective route with a cost recovery ratio of 75% in FY 17/18 (see Appendix 2.2). SJJPA determined it would not be cost effective to continue operating Route 18 between Visalia and Santa Maria due to declining ridership and increasing costs.

[1] The Cross Valley Corridor Plan proposes a transit corridor between Lindsay and Lemoore, including connectivity between Hanford and Visalia. Phase 1 focuses on improved express bus service along the corridor.

Route 19: Bakersfield – Riverside – San Bernardino



Figure 20: *Map of Route 19*

Service Overview

Route 19 connects Bakersfield to Riverside and San Bernardino via Pasadena. Route 19 formerly extended to Indio and Hemet, but these portions of the route were discontinued in 2020 due to low ridership.

Schedule

Route 19 runs two daily round-trips from Bakersfield to San Bernardino, offering connections to the Gold Runner in both directions between 10:30 AM and 12:45 PM and between 4:00 and 5:00 PM. Transfers are scheduled between 6 and 22 minutes. **Table 21** below shows Route 19's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled travel time.

Table 21: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Bakersfield – San Bernardino	2	4h 5m

Ridership

Route 19 had just over 41,700 total riders in FY25. **Figure *21*** below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year for Route 19, starting from FY 19. Ridership has remained largely stable in recent years; however, there was a slight decline from FY 24 to FY 25. In 2023 the number of round-trips on Route 19 was reduced from 4 down to 2. Despite this, ridership did not have a signifciant decrease, while at the same time, cost effectiveness increased.

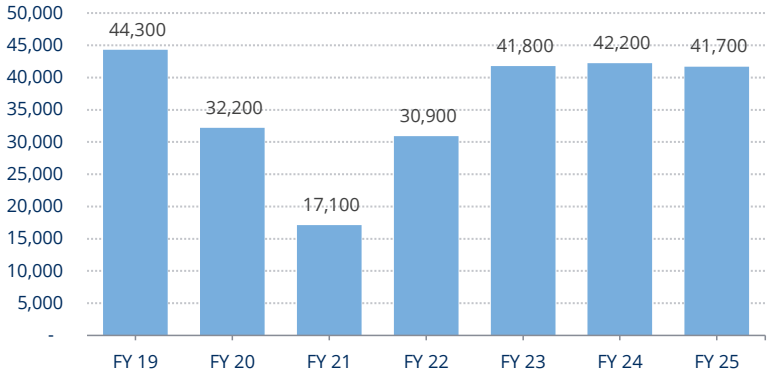


Figure 21: Annual ridership on Route 19 by fiscal year

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 22** below. Besides Bakersfield, which is a Gold Runner transfer station with nearly 40,000 ons and offs, Riverside exhibits the highest ridership with 15,365 ons and offs, followed by Ontario and San Bernardino. However, given the population in the Inland Empire region, ridership in this area is lower than expected.

Table 22: *Ons and offs by stop for Route 19, for the latest year of available data (Mar 2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar 25 – Feb 26)
Bakersfield (Transfer)[1]	*39,935*
Riverside	15,365
Ontario	8,732
San Bernardino	8,370
Pasadena	5,502
Claremont	4,650
La Crescenta	388

[1] Bakersfield ridership (ons and offs) includes transfers.

Partnerships and Finances

Route 19 is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and Alvand, a private operator. Bus-only ticketing is active on this route.

Operating costs on Route 19 totaled $1,743,350 between October 2024 and September 2025. Total California system revenue related to Route 19 totaled $2,107,336. This translates to a cost recovery ratio of 121%, signifying that Route 19 met the threshold for cost effectiveness in FY 24/25. This is an improvement over years past where cost recovery was between 69% and 94%. In 2023, SJJPA reduced service from four round-trips down to two round-trips. The change to 2 round-trips focused on the highest performing trips, and had a positive impact on cost effectiveness, even as costs continued to rise. However, with costs expecting to rise in the future, SJJPA may need to examine additional measures to increase ridership and revenue for the service.

Route 40: Merced – San Jose



Figure 22: *Map of Route 40*

Service Overview

Route 40 was implemented in January 2026, connecting San Jose and Merced. This route offers a direct alternative for many passengers traveling between the Central Valley and

Bay Area compared to Route 6, which connects Stockton to San Jose. For passengers travelling between San Jose and Merced, Route 40 saves between 45 minutes and 2 hours of travel compared to Route 6, which offers a less direct journey with a transfer in Stockton. As a result, Route 40 is expected to divert some ridership from Route 6. Route 40 is also positioned to provide an important connection from early phases of California High-Speed Rail service to the Bay Area.

Schedule

Route 40 runs two daily round-trips from San Jose to Merced, with Gold Runner connections available in the morning and evening. Transfer times are scheduled between 10 and 44 minutes. **Table 23** below shows Route 40's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled travel time.

Table 23: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
San Jose – Merced	2	2h 35m

Ridership

Route 40 was implemented in January 2026 and thus has limited historical ridership data. Available Route 40 ridership data from January 2026 to April 2026 is illustrated below in **Figure *23***. The ridership data available since Route 40 was opened indicates strong ridership growth. As the route matures, it will be critical to determine where ridership stabilizes and the corresponding impact to Route 6 ridership.

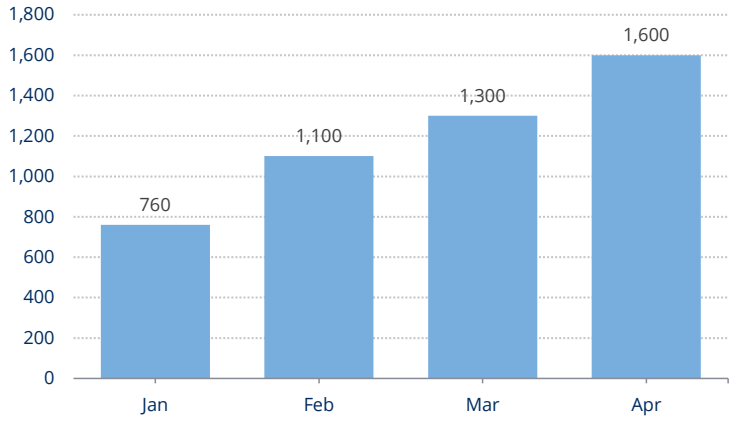


Figure 23: *Available Route 40 monthly ridership for 2026*

Ons and offs by stop between January 2026 and April 2026 are listed in **Table 24** below. The Gold Runner transfer station at Merced has 4,400 ons and offs. San Jose has 4,300 ons and offs, signifying that the vast majority of passengers on this route are traveling between Merced and San Jose. San Jose's high ridership is largely attributable to its position as a major population center and its extensive connectivity to the broader Bay Area transportation network.

Table 24: *Ons and offs by stop for Route 40, for the latest available data (January 2026 – April 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Jan'26 – Apr '26)[1]
Merced (Transfer)[2]	*4,446*
San Jose	4,252
Gilroy	459
Los Banos	257

Partnerships and Finances

Route 40 is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and American Star, a private operator. Bus-only ticketing is active on this route.

Reported operating costs between January and March 2026 were just over $244,300. Cost effectiveness data is not yet available for this route.

[1] As Route 40 is a recent implementation, data is only available between January 2026 and April 2026.
[2] Merced ridership (ons and offs) includes transfers.

Route 99: Emeryville – San Francisco



Figure 24: *Map of Route 99*

Service Overview

Route 99 connects San Francisco and Emeryville with just these two stops. This is the shortest and second most cost-effective route in the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network. While this connection is also served by BART (via the connection at the Richmond Station) and local bus operators, Route 99 represents a valuable and popular option for Gold Runner train passengers who may carry luggage or who may prefer a seamless connection to facilitate their journey to and from San Francisco.

Schedule

Route 99 has 19 daily round-trips, 5 of which connect to the Gold Runner at Emeryville between 8:00 AM and 10:00 PM. SJJPA partially funds this route, providing funding for the 5 round-trips that connect to the Gold Runner. Route 99 is a jointly managed route that is funded by SJJPA, CCJPA, and Amtrak. Gold Runner transfer times are scheduled between 6 and 18 minutes. **Table 25** below shows Route 99's routing, daily round-trips, and scheduled travel time.

Table 25: *Schedule, Scheduled Travel Time, and Daily Round-Trips*

Routing	Daily RT	Scheduled Travel Time
Emeryville – San Francisco	5	0h 25m – 0h 30m

Ridership

Route 99 had 42,800 total riders in FY 25. **Figure *25*** below represents a chart of annual ridership by fiscal year for Route 99, starting from 2021. Route 99 ridership has been relatively constant since FY 22 and exhibits a 94% ridership recovery since FY 19.

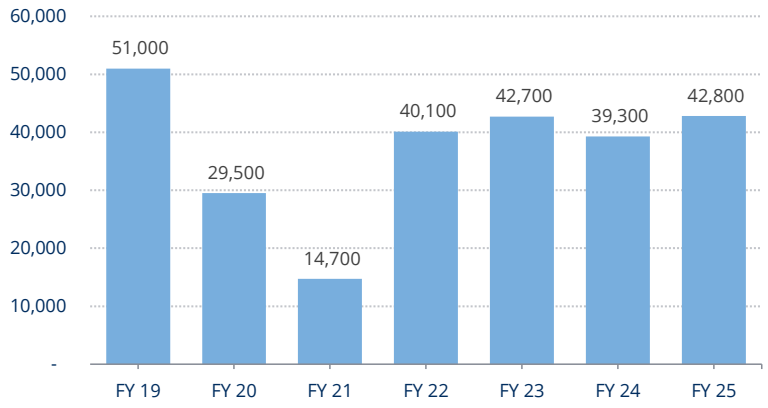


Figure 25: Annual ridership on Route 99 by fiscal year

Ons and offs by stop are listed in **Table 26** below. Because Route 99 only has two stops, total ons and offs are identical for both.

Table 26: *Ons and offs by stop for Route 99, for the latest year of available data (Mar 2025 – Feb 2026)*

Stop	Ons/Offs (Mar 25 – Feb 26)
Emeryville	43,246
San Francisco	43,246

Partnerships and Finances

Route 99 is operated under a direct contracting agreement between Amtrak and American Star, a private operator, with financial contributions shared between SJJPA, Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA) and long-distance Amtrak services. SJJPA is responsible for financing 22% of the route's operating costs, proportionate with the number of trips that are intended to connect with Gold Runner service at Emeryville.

Bus-only ticketing is not active on Route 99 because similar service is offered by AC Transit, the local transit agency.

SJJPA contributions toward Route 99 operating costs totaled $544,557 between October 2024 and September 2025. In the same period, Route 99 contributed to $2,242,054 of revenue for SJJPA related systems across the state. This translates to a cost recovery ratio of 412%, signifying that Route 99 exceeded the threshold for cost effectiveness in FY 24/25. This route is the second most cost-effective route in the Gold Runner Thruway Bus system. The route's short length results in low operating costs, which are easily offset by the route's substantial ridership.

A stop for Route 99 at the Transbay Transit Center is currently being negotiated and would improve the intermodal connectivity provided by the route. The bus stop at San Francisco is located outside of the Salesforce Transit Center, with the terminal itself underutilized since the pandemic. Negotiations between Transbay JPA, AC Transit, Greyhound, CCJPA and SJJPA have been ongoing (with Amtrak taking the lead). The point of contention has been the high cost to use the terminal, knowing that using the station will save the route ~5-10 minutes and will give passengers an improved experience due to improved shelter options.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 establishes a baseline assessment of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network by evaluating each route's ridership, financial performance, operating characteristics, partnership structure, and role within the broader passenger rail network. While the routes serve different markets and operating environments, several common themes emerge that help identify priorities for future improvements.

Overall, network performance is very strong. The cumulative cost recovery ratio for the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network was at 119% between October 2024 – September 2025 (FY 24/25). The cost recovery ratios for the individual routes varies considerably. Routes 1, 1C, 3, 6, 19, and 99 currently meet or exceed the State's cost effectiveness threshold, while Route 7, and Route 15A fall below the threshold and may benefit from service or

operational adjustments. It appears that Route 10 is the most cost-effective route for the state, but more information is needed regarding Amtrak's interline agreement with the operator. The analysis also shows that ridership alone does not determine performance. Operating costs, route design, transfer opportunities, partnerships, and management decisions regarding the level of service provided, all contribute to a route's financial success.

The network continues to evolve through recent service changes, including the implementation of Route 40, the replacement of Route 3R with Route 5, and the restructuring of Route 18. As additional performance data becomes available, these changes should continue to be monitored and incorporated into future planning efforts.

The findings presented in this chapter provide the foundation for Chapter 3, which evaluates networkwide strategies and route specific recommendations on how SJJPA can continue to work to improve ridership, strengthen rail connectivity, enhance the customer experience, and increase the overall cost effectiveness of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network.

Chapter 3: Service Optimization and Recommendations

Introduction

SJJPA enters this Gold Runner Thruway Bus planning effort, with a network that has strong ridership and exceptional cost effectiveness demonstrating the success of the strategic management decisions made in recent years. The network is well used, valued by Gold Runner, Capitol Corridor, and Pacific Surfliner riders, and delivers substantial environmental, social equity, and economic benefits as well as mobility throughout California. This chapter focuses on how SJJPA in coordination with Amtrak and Caltrans can build on the already successful Gold Runner Thruway Bus network through targeted opportunities to further strengthen and optimize the network through both systemwide recommendations and route-specific optimization strategies. The evaluation considers opportunities to enhance the overall network, including governance, partnerships, service patterns, connectivity, data, reliability, and the passenger experience, while also examining individual routes to identify targeted opportunities to improve service, cost effectiveness, and connectivity. Together, these evaluations provide the basis for the recommendations and optimization opportunities prioritized in the final tiered recommendations table.

As outlined in Chapter 1, SJJPA has laid out four goals to guide recommendations put forth by the Thruway Bus study:

A preferred and convenient option for intercity travelers that connects to Gold Runner rail services and increases Gold Runner ridership while driving mode shift away from the highway network

The Gold Runner Thruway Bus network extends the reach of Gold Runner rail service by connecting communities that are not directly served by rail. Every passenger who chooses the integrated rail and bus network instead of driving supports California's mobility and sustainability goals by reducing highway congestion and GHG emissions. By ensuring that the Thruway Bus network complements and strengthens Gold Runner rail service, SJJPA can increase rail ridership while maximizing the environmental and transportation benefits of the statewide network.

Accordingly, SJJPA's recommendations focus on strengthening the role of the Thruway Bus network as an extension of the rail system. Maintaining reliable, timed connections with Gold Runner trains will remain the highest priority, ensuring passengers have convenient access to communities beyond the rail corridor. Where demand warrants, SJJPA should evaluate opportunities to increase or expand bus service to improve travel options and accommodate future ridership growth. Service planning should continue to prioritize

interregional travel markets, while local transit agencies provide shorter-distance connections within their respective service areas. At the same time, SJJPA will continue to pursue opportunities to expand bus-only ticketing, allowing the network to serve additional passenger markets, improve asset utilization, and strengthen the financial performance of the Thruway Bus system.

A cost-effective service for the public sector, responsive to structural shifts in demand, highly constrained Public Transportation Account (PTA) funding, and increasing costs of providing service (including maximized utilization of available funding from partner agencies for Thruway service benefits)

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, cost-effectiveness is a primary consideration in planning the future of the Thruway Bus network. Each route is expected to meet established cost-effectiveness thresholds, with priority given to improving the performance of routes that fall below those standards. While maintaining a robust and convenient network for passengers remains a core objective, SJJPA must also ensure that available funding is used efficiently to support the long-term sustainability of the network. This is particularly important as operating costs continue to increase, and PTA funding remains constrained.

To continue to improve cost-effectiveness, SJJPA's recommendations address multiple aspects of service delivery, including schedules, route design, and operating partnerships. Timetables can continue to be refined using observed travel patterns and passenger demand to improve operational efficiency and strengthen rail-bus connections. Route alignments should also be evaluated to identify opportunities to reduce operating costs, improve ridership, or better balance both objectives. In addition, partnerships with public operators and other agencies can reduce operating costs, expand funding opportunities, and support the implementation of bus-only ticketing where appropriate.

Effective business models/governance structure to oversee and administer the Thruway Bus service

The current governance structure distributes responsibilities among SJJPA, Amtrak, public and private operators, and Caltrans. This model has worked well to effectively manage the Gold Runner routes and maintain predominately cost-effective routes despite the substantial operational cost escalation that has occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important that SJJPA receives cost-recovery data on all Gold Runner routes at least twice a year from Amtrak enabling SJJPA to further strengthen oversight and better position SJJPA to align the Thruway Bus network with its service goals while maintaining a cost-effective and financially sustainable system. In addition, the new operating structure being deployed on Route 5 (Redding to Sacramento) utilizing a public operator that brings in new state, regional, and local funding while also guaranteeing connections to Gold

Runner trains and uses Amtrak ticketing, needs to be closely monitored by SJJPA. The new Route 5 partnership with RABA could be an important new model for increasing service, benefits, and cost-effectiveness for new or existing Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes.

Providing safe, reliable, and competitive connectivity to key travel markets throughout California – particularly for transit-dependent residents (focusing on near-term improvements/changes)

As travel patterns continue to evolve, the Thruway Bus network will remain a critical component of Gold Runner service and California's broader intercity transportation system. The recommendations in this study focus on ensuring that the network continues to serve key travel markets through safe, reliable, and convenient connections while responding to changing passenger demand. They prioritize near-term strategies that can be implemented over the next several years to strengthen network performance and improve passenger experience.

The remainder of this chapter outlines recommendations and optimization opportunities at both the network and route levels. General recommendations address systemwide priorities, including governance, service planning, passenger information, and reliability, while route-specific recommendations identify opportunities to improve performance, expand connectivity, and enhance cost-effectiveness across the Thruway Bus network. The chapter concludes by bringing these recommendations together into a prioritized framework that identifies the actions and analysis that should be advanced immediately, those that warrant additional study within the Fiscal Year and longer-term opportunities for consideration.

General Recommendations

Governance, partnerships, and funding

The governance structure of the Thruway Bus network affects the operation and management of all routes in the system. As a result, this can have far-reaching effects on the success of the network. As detailed in Chapter 2, the governance structure of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network positions Amtrak as the main body coordinating with operators and SJJPA as the managing body, receiving funding from Caltrans to manage Thruway Bus service and monitor productivity. This partnership between SJJPA and Amtrak has resulted in successful management of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network. Difficult decisions made during and after the COVID-19 pandemic have kept the network cost-effective. Underperforming routes were reduced (eliminating the worse performing buses and or truncating segments with very small ridership), and in some cases eliminated. The unforeseen cost escalation after COVID-19 (which has greatly increased operating costs),

led to a number of strategic management decisions to make reductions in Thruway Bus service levels. The result of these decisions is a Gold Runner Thruway Bus network which remains extremely cost-effective despite increasing costs, while at the same time has maintained most of its ridership. The magnitude of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus Program should also be recognized when evaluating the network's overall performance. The system extends approximately 681 miles from Arcata to San Diego, providing statewide connectivity throughout California and to southern Nevada. In addition to connecting to Gold Runner trains, the network also provides critical connectivity to the Capitol Corridor and Pacific Surfliner state supported intercity passenger rail services as part of an integrated statewide intercity transportation network. Gold Runner buses travel approximately 11,609 miles each day, with more than 40 motorcoaches operating across the state at any given time. Maintaining a Thruway Bus network this size and geographic reach while preserving most ridership and controlling costs demonstrates the program's continued value, efficiency, and importance to California intercity transportation network.

SJJPA should continue to seek partnerships with public operators to operate portions of existing routes in order to leverage shared service goals, capitalize on additional funding sources other than from the Public Transportation Account (PTA), support cost-effectiveness, facilitate bus-only ticketing where this is not yet implemented, and utilize lessons learned from recent changes in partnership models to assess future governance models. SJJPA should closely monitor the performance of the new Route 5 between Redding and Sacramento to see if this is a model that can be deployed in other parts of the state. SJJPA needs to be careful to avoid future public or private partnerships where the cost share expected from SJJPA doesn't result in a cost-effective service with significant ridership and public benefits.

Deleted: SJJPA should coordinate with the private operator Flix North America (FNA) to explore potential partnerships that would mutually benefit Gold Runner, Flix Bus and Greyhound services.

SJJPA should coordinate with the private operator Flix North America (FNA) to explore potential partnerships that would mutually benefit Gold Runner, FlixBus and Greyhound services. FNA has proposed three complementary approaches which SJJPA may pursue in any combination or sequence:

1. **Interline service agreements** on existing Greyhound and FlixBus routes, letting passengers book one itinerary across Gold Runner and FNA service. This could potentially add no operating cost for SJJPA and extend Gold Runner's reach to every city on the FNA network nationwide. Route 10 is a successful, existing example for these types of agreements.
2. **Contracted or cooperative funding of added frequencies**, where demand exceeds Thruway capacity. Greyhound's depots, drivers, and maintenance base

and FlixBus's operating partners could allow added trips at lower marginal cost than a new stand-alone contract.

3. **Shared facilities and interlined ticketing,** co-locating at Gold Runner stations where feasible. FNA would contribute a proportional share of security, janitorial and customer service costs at shared facilities.

In summary, recommendations related to governance and partnerships are as follows:

- Monitor the performance of the new Route 5 to see if this is a model that can be deployed in other parts of the state.
- Explore partnerships with other transit providers as both future contract partners and for better timed service connections.
- Coordinate with FNA and Amtrak Real Estate on potential interline service agreements, shared facilities and interlined ticketing, and cooperative funding agreements to add service.

Service patterns, connections, on-time performance, and partnerships

General recommendations for Thruway Bus service focus on tailoring service patterns to better match the travel needs of different passenger markets, establishing more partnerships with other passenger rail, local/regional transit bus services, and private intercity bus services to promote Thruway Bus service across the broader transportation network, auditing bus stop locations across the Gold Runner network, and investigate strategies to address Gold Runner on-time performance issues.

Market demand should be assessed to determine temporal demand patterns as well as potential opportunities for geographic expansion. Providing seasonal service, for example, is a strategy that can address the fluctuations in demand observed throughout the year. This approach is currently used around the Thanksgiving holidays and should continue to be evaluated for other holidays and key travel days as well as for routes serving university markets or other highly seasonal travel patterns.

Some routes may further benefit from modified service patterns to better align capacity with weekly demand. Gold Runner typically has lower ridership mid-week (Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays), indicating opportunities to decrease the level of service on these days. In conjunction, routes should be evaluated for strategic service increases on higher-demand days. Right-sizing service across the network will improve passenger convenience while ensuring available operating resources are used as efficiently as possible.

As service is refined, SJJPA can prioritize partnerships with passenger rail, local or regional bus services, and private intercity bus services to promote Thruway Bus connections to key travel markets and transportation hubs. The Los Angeles Metropolitan Area and the Bay Area remain the state's largest and most diverse passenger markets and should continue to be a focus for expanded connectivity. Similarly, airports represent an important long-distance travel market. While the current network provides access to Burbank Airport, this study recommends evaluating opportunities to expand connections to additional regional airports to strengthen the overall network.

The Gold Runner Thruway Bus network has been operating for many years, and there have been many changes to passenger rail, local and regional transit, and private intercity bus services throughout the state. SJJPA should conduct an audit of bus stop locations throughout the Gold Runner network to see if there are opportunities to improve transit network connectivity, passenger experience, and ridership.

On-time Thruway Bus departures are important not only to train riders, but also to Gold Runner bus-only riders as well. Thruway buses provide guaranteed connections with Gold Runner trains and connecting buses, which may require holding departures when trains are delayed. While maintaining these guaranteed connections remains a priority, delays can impact the reliability and desirability of the service for bus only passengers. SJJPA should explore feasible alternatives to minimize these impacts and better protect scheduled departures for bus only riders, while continuing to prioritize improvements in Gold Runner train on time performance.

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In summary, recommendations related to service patterns and connections are as follows:

- Conduct a market assessment that looks at potential new partnerships, markets, and temporal demand.
- Work with partner public transportation agencies and private operators whose services connect with Gold Runner Thruway Bus stops to try to get them to better support, promote, and market these connections.
- Audit bus stop locations across the network to see if there are opportunities to improve transit network connectivity, passenger experience, and ridership.
- Investigate strategies to address Gold Runner on-time performance issues.

Data and reliability

Data availability has historically posed a constraint in SJJPA's oversight of the Thruway Bus network. The availability of reliable data related to the performance and operations of the Thruway Bus network is essential to optimizing the network and ensuring that service can

be adjusted appropriately to address performance constraints. It is critical that Amtrak consistently provides Cost Recovery reports, at minimum on a semi-annual basis, so that SJJPA can effectively manage all routes and appropriately evaluate if changes are needed to the system. For this reason, it is important that future governance structures and operating contracts guarantee that performance data is produced and submitted to the SJJPA at regular intervals.

Additionally, upgrading data and tracking systems is essential to improving service reliability, timetable accuracy, and the overall passenger experience across the Thruway Bus network. Implementing real-time bus tracking through GTFS would provide passengers with accurate information on vehicle locations and delays while also generating the on-time performance data needed to refine schedules. By using observed travel times rather than planned schedules alone, SJJPA can better align bus and rail connections, reduce unnecessary transfer wait times, and improve the reliability of timed transfers. These improvements would enhance the passenger experience by reducing uncertainty and making transfers between Thruway buses and Gold Runner rail service more seamless.

Auditing the GTFS data feed would help identify and correct existing issues, improving the accuracy of passenger information and the overall customer experience. Currently, GTFS feeds do not consistently encode "discharge-only" restrictions for routes without bus-only ticketing.

In summary, recommendations related to data and reliability are as follows:

- Ensure updated cost-effectiveness data is received from Amtrak on a semi-annual basis for all Gold Runner Thruway Bus Routes.
- Ensure the provision to collect performance and tracking data in future operating contracts.
- Implement real-time tracking.
- Audit and validate the GTFS feed to identify, prioritize, and correct data inconsistencies, missing or invalid records, schedule discrepancies, geographic inaccuracies, and accessibility or passenger information issues, ensuring compliance with GTFS standards and reliable trip planning information.

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Communication, marketing, and passenger experience

As part of this study, SJJPA reviewed the Gold Runner website to identify opportunities to improve the accuracy, clarity, and consistency of passenger information. Opportunities include improving information on guaranteed transfers and passenger protections, better marketing Thruway routes that supplement rail service, correcting accessibility information on the Amtrak website, and enhancing station descriptions and directions to

better identify transfer opportunities. Partnering agencies should also include Thruway Bus connections in their station and trip-planning information.

Gold Runner Thruway Bus stops connect with passenger rail services and bus transit services throughout California. SJJPA should prioritize working with other partner agencies to encourage them to help improve and market these connections to the Gold Runner network (on their websites, newsletters, at stations, on trains/buses, etc.). In addition, Gold Runner Thruway Bus stops connect to universities, colleges, and other key destinations throughout California. SJJPA should investigate ways to expand marketing to/from these destinations and to try and get them to market the Gold Runner services to their students/customers.

The SJJPA's Passenger Experience and Marketing team will continue to expand college outreach efforts to increase awareness and encourage student ridership through a coordinated, multi-channel communications strategy. Staff will participate in campus events to engage directly with students, answer questions, and distribute information about available train and Thruway Bus connections. Service information will continue to be promoted through college parking and transportation websites, ensuring students, faculty, and staff have easy access to travel resources. Outreach materials will be provided for inclusion in new student orientation programs to introduce transportation options early in the academic year, and digital outreach toolkits will continue to be distributed to University of California campuses, California State University campuses, and community colleges to equip campus partners with ready-to-use promotional materials. The program will also continue to leverage its Student Ambassador Program to expand awareness of the Gold Runner Train and Thruway Service through peer-to-peer engagement, with a particular emphasis on colleges and universities located along the Thruway Bus route. Student ambassadors will serve as on-campus advocates, helping educate their peers about available transportation options, promoting special offers and service updates, and increasing visibility through campus activities and social media engagement. Together, these efforts will strengthen awareness of the service, encourage greater student utilization, and foster long-term ridership growth across the collegiate market.

In order to improve the passenger experience at bus stops, SJJPA will ensure that signage at stops is updated, with information available for passengers to access route schedules and ticketing information. Additionally, SJJPA can work with Caltrans to secure funding to improve bus shelters and other bus stop amenities, and measures to enhance passenger safety and security at Thruway Bus stops and SJJPA should evaluate how best to maintain the Gold Runner stops throughout the state.

As part of a broader statewide effort to improve the integration and ease of use across California's intercity rail network, this study recommends that the State develop an integrated statewide passenger information system centered around a single map showing rail, Thruway bus, and connecting transit services across all participating agencies. A consistent statewide network map, supported by coordinated wayfinding, transfer information, and trip-planning resources, would help passengers better understand available connections and reinforce the concept of a seamless statewide passenger rail network. Once available, this statewide information should be linked to Gold Runner, Capitol Corridor, Pacific Surfliner, and Amtrak websites. Improving statewide communication also includes utilizing announcement systems, such as in the Venture cars, to alert passengers of alternate service options. It is also important the Caltrans takes the lead role in making sure that the SJJPA, Capitol Corridor, and LOSSAN JPA coordinate before making changes to their routes and/or schedules (train and bus) that would impact the other services.

In summary, recommendations related to communication and marketing are as follows:

- Update the Gold Runner webpage to improve the accuracy, clarity, and consistency of passenger information and provide additional information regarding routes and connectivity to other passenger rail and transit services, universities and colleges, and other key destinations on its website and marketing materials.
- Work with Caltrans to have an integrated statewide passenger information system coordinating information related to rail, Thruway bus, and connecting transit services developed.
- Increase coordination with JPAs (SJJPA, Capitol Corridor, and LOSSAN) regarding schedule changes.
- Improve online information regarding guaranteed transfer policies and passenger protections.
- Utilize electronic announcements on Gold Runner trains to send advertising messages to passengers, such as reminders of connecting locations to destinations such as Yosemite.
- Update all stop signage and provide additional information alongside QR codes at all stops for passengers to access route schedules and ticketing.
- Increase marketing and advertising of key destinations, including universities and colleges and destinations like Yosemite National Park.

- Work with Caltrans to secure Thruway Bus-specific minor capital program funding and explore alternative funding sources for bus shelters, other bus stop amenities, and passenger safety/security measures.

Recommendations by Route

Route 1: Fresno – Bakersfield – Los Angeles – San Diego

Route Overview

As the highest ridership route in the network with a very high cost-recovery ratio of 187%, recommendations for Route 1 focus on furthering growth through service enhancements and improving broader network connectivity. The strong ridership and cost effectiveness of Route 1 was helped in part due to actions taken in 2023 to reduce the number of Route 1 buses and shorten several bus trips to truncate at Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS). Implementing bus-only ticketing has the potential to further boost ridership, while additional service should also be explored to meet the existing high level of demand. Additionally, stops can be evaluated to improve available connection options to local and regional transit services including Metrolink.

Greyhound and FlixBus provide direct trips from Fresno to San Diego and provide connections between Bakersfield-LA, Bakersfield-San Diego, and Fresno-Los Angeles. The cost of a ticket from Fresno to Los Angeles on Greyhound or FlixBus is competitive with the Gold Runner and Thruway Bus connection ticket; however, Greyhound and FlixBus have greater price fluctuations depending on passenger demand.

Potential Improvements

Improve connections

Metrolink's Newhall Station is a key transfer point between Route 1 and Metrolink's Antelope Valley Line connecting to the broader Los Angeles metropolitan area. Connectivity at this hub can be strengthened through increased coordination with Metrolink. For example, transfers can be improved with timed connections between Route 1 and Metrolink service at Newhall, which would require coordination to hold trains for arriving buses when necessary. A pilot program could involve connecting additional Route 1 trips between Bakersfield and Newhall, creating more transfer opportunities at Newhall for passengers whose final destination is not downtown Los Angeles. Santa Clarita Station could also be considered as an alternative transfer location. This concept would require a

considerable amount of coordination with Caltrans and Metrolink and should be evaluated through a feasibility study.

As integration with the Metrolink network expands, these connections should be prominently marketed through onboard train announcements, station signage, and online trip planning resources to ensure passengers are aware of the additional travel options. In the near-term, SJJPA should work with partner public transportation agencies whose services connect with Route 1 stops to try to get them to better support, promote, and market these connections. In particular, SJJPA should be partnering with the LOSSAN Joint Powers Authority to have them assist in marketing the Route 1 connections to the Pacific Surfliner.

Burbank Airport officially opened its new $1.3 billion passenger terminal on October 13, 2026. The new facility is located on the northeast section of the airfield near Winona Avenue and Hollywood Way. Therefore, Burbank Airport is no longer a close walk to the Gold Runner stop at the Burbank Airport South (Metrolink and Pacific Surfliner) Station. SJJPA should investigate moving the Burbank Airport stop to better connect with the airport and also investigate the option of serving the downtown Burbank Station.

Explore bus only ticketing

Bus-only ticketing has not yet been implemented on Route 1. Exploring implementation strategies consistent with the California Legislature's SB 742, which authorizes bus-only ticketing, could expand the route's ability to serve additional passenger markets with limited alternative options, particularly for travelers between Bakersfield and other destinations in Southern California. Implementation on Route 1 remains challenging, however, because SB 742 requires SJJPA to coordinate with public and private operators providing overlapping service before bus-only tickets can be sold on the corridor. This includes private operators such as FlixBus/Greyhound, which could oppose SJJPA's bus-only service if it is done in a manner which they believe competes with their existing offerings rather than a collaborative approach (such as was deployed for Route 10) . Further study is needed to identify viable strategies for implementing bus-only ticketing given these challenges. SJJPA needs to investigate establishing partnerships with private and/or public operators to facilitate implementation. Given the route's existing high demand, it may also be appropriate to consider bus-only ticketing in conjunction with increased service levels. This could provide additional capacity for potential new passengers while maintaining sufficient capacity for passengers transferring to and from Gold Runner trains. All bus-only ticketing recommendations must be studied and evaluated carefully, as Route 1 is the most important route in the system and must be

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protected and prioritized. If implementing bus-only ticketing ultimately compromises the cost-effectiveness of the route, it should not be moved forward.

Increase service

The single San Diego round trip has high ridership and is therefore a candidate for additional service. The current San Diego round trip complements the Pacific Surfliner schedule by providing service during a gap in the Pacific Surfliner's timetable. Additional service can potentially be added in remaining gaps in Pacific Surfliner's schedule, such as during the morning from San Diego and the early afternoon from Los Angeles. SJJPA could also consider bringing back service that was reduced in 2023 between Bakersfield and Los Angeles or adding additional Bakersfield to Los Angeles service during peak travel periods such as high-ridership days (Fridays and Sundays) and or around holidays.

Additionally, service to Burbank Airport can be expanded on Route 1 by adding Burbank stops to additional trips and ensuring convenient departure and arrival times at the station. This would allow all Burbank Airport service to be shifted from Route 1C, allowing Route 1C to focus on other destinations that make the service more cost-effective. Some Route 1 trips that connect to Burbank Airport could also take the form of an express service skipping Glendale, providing faster connectivity between Los Angeles and Burbank Airport. Any schedule changes regarding adding or removing Burbank from a Route 1 timetable must be further studied and coordinated with Amtrak to ensure that changes do not compromise the success of the route.

Improve marketing to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX)

Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) is the highest ridership destination for Route 1, with transfer options to the LAX FlyAway Bus service with 40 daily round-trip connections to Los Angeles International Airport and 30-minute headways for the majority of the day. Improved marketing for this connection can encourage riders to use Route 1 to connect to the airport and getting the LAX FlyAway Bus into Amtrak ticketing could also significantly increase ridership. From LAUS, riders can also connect to LA Metro and either take the A-Line to Metro Center and transfer to the C Line for connection to LAX or the E Line to Expo / Crenshaw and transfer to the K Line for connection to LAX. Both LA Metro options take around 1 hour 30 minutes, compared to the 45 minutes on the LAX FlyAway Bus.

Recommendations

- Study the feasibility of improving Metrolink connectivity at Newhall. This would include investigating a pilot program/partnership with Metrolink to have a Gold Runner Thruway bus round trip terminate at Newhall and connect with Metrolink to provide service to Los Angeles Union Station.

- Study opportunities to deploy bus-only ticketing along Route 1, including potential partnerships with public and private operators along the corridor.
- Study opportunities to increase Route 1 service including additional San Diego service, enhancing Burbank Airport service (including consideration of express airport connections and relocating the stop), and more service between Bakersfield and Los Angeles Union Station.
- Increase marketing and advertising of Thruway Bus connection to LAX FlyAway connection at Los Angeles Union Station and see if LAX Flyaway could get into Amtrak ticketing.
- Partner with the LOSSAN Joint Powers Authority to have them assist in marketing the Route 1 connections to the Pacific Surfliner.

Route 1C: Bakersfield – Santa Monica

Route Overview

The recommendations for Route 1C focus on improving connectivity, strengthening access to major Southern California destinations, and positioning the service for long-term success. With the cost recovery ratio at 110%, there is still potential to improve the route's performance. To help improve cost-effectiveness, potential improvements can include removing Burbank Airport Station to streamline travel times. Additional recommendations include improving timed connections with Metrolink and other non-Gold Runner transit services, adding a stop in San Fernando if Burbank Airport is dropped, and working with the City of Santa Monica to improve the passenger experience at the route's western terminus. Looking ahead, it is worth considering the possibility of shortening Route 1C and monitoring how future transportation investments, particularly the LA Metro Purple Line Extension, will affect travel patterns and determine whether the route should evolve to serve new markets or be restructured to complement expanding rail service.

Potential Improvements

Streamline the route

Removing the Burbank Airport Station stop on Route 1C and keeping it on Route 1 is a potential route adjustment that would enable a shorter, more direct route between Bakersfield and Van Nuys (the largest Route 1C market). Route 1C makes a circuitous route between Bakersfield and Van Nuys via Burbank Airport, staying on I-5 and increasing trip times. Removing Burbank Airport would allow the route to run along I-405 and shorten trip times by approximately 15 minutes. This proposal would be coupled with added

Burbank Airport service on Route 1 to ensure that a similar overall level of service is maintained at this station.

Improve connectivity to local transit

Additional stops at LA Metro rail stations present an opportunity to better connect Thruway Bus passengers to the broader Los Angeles transit network. In West Los Angeles, serving E Line stations such as Expo/Sepulveda or Westwood/Rancho Park would provide passengers with direct connections to Metro's A, B, D, E, and K Lines, as well as numerous local bus routes. Both stations are located closer to the high-demand Westwood/UCLA area, while passengers traveling to Santa Monica, a relatively low-ridership stop, would continue to have convenient access to their final destination via local transit. SJJPA should provide Thruway bus passengers with a connection map to LA Metro on the Gold Runner website to better highlight LA Metro accessibility within the network and identify optimal connection points.

Once the LA Metro D Line (Purple Line) Extension to Westwood opens, Route 1C can be re-evaluated with the potential for Westwood to become its western terminus. This would provide a direct connection to the expanding Metro rail network, allowing passengers to conveniently access destinations throughout the Los Angeles region via local transit connections.

Evaluate additional or alternative stops

If Burbank Airport Station is dropped, San Fernando is a potential new stop location to evaluate to serve a new market while avoiding detours along the route.

The route should also be evaluated for extension to an alternative terminus. LAX, Hollywood, and Long Beach are examples of potential new markets that can be assessed for addition to Route 1C. A market assessment should be conducted prior to adding or removing any stops from the route to ensure that demand justifies any additional costs.

Enhance passenger experience at stations

The Santa Monica bus stop served by Route 1C should continue to be evaluated for its location and additional focused marketing in Santa Monica. This effort should be done in coordination with the City of Santa Monica. With the stop having very low ridership, the station’s bus stop needs to be more visible and be advertised with LA Metro and Santa Monica Big Blue Bus to promote passenger connections. Improving the stop location to be next to the E-line station could provide better visibility and connectivity to passengers. If ridership continues to be low, there should be additional evaluation on whether to remove the Santa Monica stop and truncate the route at Westwood or another location. Another option is to move the Santa Monica stop to the LA Metro E-Line at Expo/Sepulveda Station,

due to the fact that this stop provides the same transfer opportunities to the E-Line yet saves travel time compared to truncating in Santa Monica.

The stop at Westwood is at UCLA, making it a key destination for Route 1C. SJJPA should be working to increase marketing for this connection and to get UCLA to promote the Gold Runner service including putting Gold Runner information in orientation packets, e-blasts/newsletters to students. Additionally, as part of the audit of existing stops, SJJPA should study moving the stop to the intersection of Le Conte and Westwood for more seamless connections to local transit.

Recommendations

- Study implications of removing Burbank Airport service from Route 1C to streamline service
- Study connectivity to LA Metro in the near term as well as the long-term implications of the D-line extension.
- Evaluate adding new stations to the route such as San Fernando and further study alternative terminus options such as LAX, Hollywood, Expo-Sepulveda Station, and Long Beach.
- Evaluate the Santa Monica stop for passenger experience and convenience and whether it remains the optimal terminus. Work with the City of Santa Monica and the local and regional transit to assist with increasing marketing to see if Santa Monica should remain a stop.
- Work to get UCLA to better promote the Gold Runner service to UCLA.

Route 3: Stockton – Sacramento – Chico

Route Overview

Route 3, one of the network's top performing routes, has the second highest ridership of the Thruway Bus network with a high cost-recovery ratio of 195%. The route's cost effectiveness was previously improved by separating out the Chico-Redding segment to a public operating partnership, which has now been replaced by the new Route 5. There are additional opportunities to harness the high demand on this route to further improve performance and align service with demand. Recommendations include pursuing a partnership with Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG) to operate service between Sacramento and Chico, in turn allowing SJJPA to truncate service in the Sacramento area and facilitating bus-only ticketing between Sacramento and Chico. Additional recommendations include serving the future Midtown Sacramento Station that would provide a connection to Valley Rail and nearby SacRT light rail service and evaluating

additional station stops where warranted. Because of the route's high ridership and cost-effectiveness, changes to the route should be thoroughly evaluated to ensure they do not have a negative impact on existing ridership.

Potential Improvements

Pursue partnership opportunities

Partnering with BCAG to serve Chico and transfer responsibility for the Sacramento–Chico segment presents an opportunity to reduce operating costs while maintaining regional connectivity and creating the potential for a public operator partnership. Beginning in Spring 2027, BCAG plans to operate more frequent service than Route 3 currently provides between Sacramento and Chico, as well as offer better access to Sacramento International Airport and more connections to Capitol Corridor service. Additional coordination is needed to quantify potential cost savings, define operational responsibilities, ticketing cooperation, and ensure service objectives remain aligned for any partnership between BCAG and SJJPA. As part of the coordination with BCAG, SJJPA should evaluate the opportunity to establish an additional connection with BCAG's Chico Transit Center (with16 local and regional services). A partnership with BCAG on the Sacramento–Chico segment would allow SJJPA to redirect operating funds currently dedicated to that portion of the route toward service improvements and expansion in higher-demand markets, particularly along the Stockton–Sacramento–Davis corridor. This would facilitate the possible addition of a stop at Sacramento Midtown.

If a partnership is implemented with BCAG, SJJPA could pursue a similar partnership with San Joaquin RTD (SJRTD) for service between Sacramento/Davis and Stockton.

Implement bus-only ticketing

Bus-only ticketing is a priority recommendation for Route 3 as it is one of the three remaining routes in the network that does not have bus-only ticketing. Like Route 1, Route 3 faces challenges with the implementation of bus-only ticketing due to alternative services (Greyhound, and Flix Bus) operating along this well-established corridor. This requires SJJPA to engage in further coordination and negotiation to sell bus-only tickets as part of the stipulations under SB 742. SJJPA should work with FNA to see if there is a potential complementary partnership opportunity for Route 3 which would enable bus-only ticketing and provide more travel options for the public. A public operator partnership could also provide an avenue to implement bus-only ticketing and may be feasible with BCAG-operated service between Sacramento and Chico and SJRTD-operated service between Sacramento and Stockton.

Add additional Sacramento stations

Route 3 has the opportunity to service the future Midtown Sacramento Station with transfer opportunities to Valley Rail and light rail service. The Midtown Sacramento Station would also provide connections to regional commuter and transit services serving Placer, Auburn, Roseville, and El Dorado counties, as well as major employment centers, state offices, and destinations throughout downtown and Midtown Sacramento. SJJPA can plan Route 3 service to Midtown Sacramento prior to future rail service implementation to establish it as a viable stop along the route. Also, due to low ridership at the State Capitol stop, SJJPA can study service discontinuation at the drop-off only stop.

Recommendations

- Coordinate with BCAG, Amtrak, and Caltrans on implementing a potential partnership to have BCAG operate the Thruway Bus service between Sacramento and Chico in advance of BCAG's proposed start of new service in early 2027. Coordinate service realignment to best serve the Stockton-Sacramento-Davis corridor.
- If a partnership can be reached with BCAG, investigate having some Route 3 service to connect to the new Valley Rail Midtown Sacramento Station once it is constructed.
- Investigate the opportunities to fully open Route 3 for bus-only ticketing including complementary partnerships with FNA.
- Pursue a potential partnership with SJRTD for service between Stockton and Sacramento/Davis if a partnership is made with BCAG for service between Chico and Sacramento.
- Request Cal State Chico to help promote the Gold Runner service and future BCAG service between Chico and Sacramento.

Route 5: Sacramento – Redding

Route Overview

Route 5 has replaced Route 3R and offers more direct service between Redding and Sacramento along the I-5 corridor, fully implementing the cost-effective measures planned for the northern-most segment of Route 3. With the introduction of Route 5 (August 2026) this service now acts as a pilot for a new operating model where SJJPA partners with local/regional transit agencies to utilize new funding sources for a Thruway Bus service that connects with Gold Runner and Capitol Corridor trains. This partnership provides new connectivity within the Redding-Sacramento corridor, including stops at Sacramento

International Airport that was highly requested by the public in Shasta County. The route's viability is contingent upon the local transit partnership approach with the Redding Area Bus Authority (RABA) to ensure cost effectiveness.

Potential Improvements

Monitor overall route performance

Following the transition from Route 3R to Route 5, it is important to monitor the timed train connections, operational performance of, and marketing for Route 5's improved connection to Redding.

Route 5 will serve as a pilot for partnering with local/regional transit agencies to operate Thruway Bus routes as part of a potentially more cost-effective service delivery model. Ongoing evaluation should assess service reliability, the effectiveness of train-holding procedures as RABA has agreed to hold northbound buses for the train, and whether the partnership structure successfully supports reliable operations and customer needs.

Additionally, Route 5 is a new corridor that serves a number of new markets along with the historically small Thruway Bus markets to/from Redding and Red Bluff, so it is critical that ridership and revenue for the route is closely monitored. A strong and continuing marketing effort in conjunction with the new service will be essential to prove route viability and meet the expected performance.

Recommendations

- Monitor ridership and revenue performance and timed train connections.
- Continue active marketing measures throughout FY 26/27 and track performance.

Route 6: Stockton – San Jose – Santa Cruz

Route Overview

Route 6 connects Stockton to San Jose with transfer opportunities in San Jose to Santa Cruz Metro's Route 17, connecting passengers to and from Santa Cruz. Route 6 is currently a cost-effective route with a cost recovery ratio of 154%, but with the recent launch of Route 40, which offers a more direct connection between Merced to San Jose, the new route may take ridership away from Route 6 due to its significantly faster travel time to much of the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California. Recommended next steps focus on evaluating the impacts of the January service addition of Route 40 and identifying opportunities to strengthen the corridor's long-term performance. This includes conducting a follow-up assessment in 2027 to measure changes in ridership and cost effectiveness, analyzing passenger travel patterns to better understand demand as a result of Route 40 implementation, and identifying new markets that could offset the effects of

Route 40 service changes. Other recommendations include evaluating coordination opportunities with SJRTD Route 150 service between Stockton and Dublin BART, to implement bus-only ticketing on Route 6 (as is recommended in the 2026 Business Plan), investigate establishing a partnership with SJRTD, and evaluate whether the service could be better structured to complement Capitol Corridor operations and expand regional connectivity. SJJPA can also consider a partnership with VTA to strengthen connections to Mineta San Jose Airport from San Jose Diridon Station. Additionally, SJJPA can work with San Jose State University to promote Thruway Bus service to students and explore opportunities for a direct marketing partnership.

Potential Improvements

Analyze and compare Route 40's impact on Route 6

Analyzing the changes in ridership and cost effectiveness of Route 6 will help compare those metrics against Route 40 once the route becomes more established.

Route 40 connects Merced and San Jose and may draw San Jose riders away from Route 6, as Route 40 provides more direct service between the Central Valley and San Jose. As mentioned in Chapter 2, preliminary ridership data between January and May 2026 shows that Route 6 ridership declined by approximately 23-40%, compared to the same period of time in 2025. This decline coincides with the introduction of Route 40 in January 2026, suggesting a need for further evaluation of travel patterns, market shifts, and the degree to which Route 40 impacts the ridership demand of Route 6. Furthermore, schedule adjustments should continue to be studied, specifically with Route 3, Route 40, and Route 6 to improve efficiency and connectivity, as outlined in the 2026 SJJPA Business Plan. If Route 40 takes away a substantial amount of the Route 6 ridership and the cost-effectiveness of Route 6 drops considerably, SJJPA should then investigate the possibility of a partnership with RTD to operate Route 6 which could include having this service truncate at the Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station.

Implement bus-only ticketing

As indicated in the 2026 SJJPA Business Plan Update, implementing bus only ticketing is a priority for Route 6.[1] Bus-only ticketing on Route 6 should be complementary to existing local and regional transit along this route and should also have minimal impacts to the services offered by private intercity bus operators in this corridor. Bus-only ticketing can increase the ridership, cost-effectiveness, and benefits of Route 6 without increasing the costs of the route. To implement bus-only ticketing on Route 6, SJJPA staff will need to first coordinate with public and private operators and then bring this as an action item to the

[1] San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority 2026 Business Plan Update, https://sjjpa.com/business-plan/

SJJPA Board. As part of the coordination with private operators, SJJPA will investigate the opportunity for complementary partnerships with FNA in this corridor.

Work with VTA to strengthen connections to Mineta San Jose Airport

Route 6 can coordinate with VTA to strengthen connections to Mineta San Jose Airport from San Jose Diridon Station.

Recommendations

- Study long-term implications of Route 40 ridership to San Jose in relationship to the cost-effectiveness of Route 6 (which also connects to San Jose).
- Implement bus-only ticketing on Route 6 as indicated in the 2026 Business Plan.
- Investigate a potential partnership with RTD if Route 6's cost effectiveness declines.
- Coordinate with VTA to strengthen connections to Mineta San Jose International Airport.
- Work with San Jose State University to promote Gold Runner service.

Route 7: Martinez – Santa Rosa – Arcata/Cal Poly Humboldt

Route Overview

Route 7 is one of the longest routes in the Thruway Bus network, connecting Martinez with Santa Rosa and Arcata/Cal Poly Humboldt. With a 61% cost recovery ratio, the route's length and associated operating costs prevent it from achieving the established threshold for cost effectiveness, making it important to identify opportunities to improve efficiency while maintaining connectivity to key passenger markets.

Recommendations for this route focus on optimizing stopping patterns, evaluating stop locations to improve passenger and operator safety, and better aligning service with demand through seasonal or day-of-week service patterns. Particular attention should be given to the Highway 101 corridor, where targeted service modifications could streamline operations while continuing to serve the corridor's strong ridership demand.

Although this study focuses on near-term recommendations, SJJPA should investigate the potential for a longer-term partnership with Humboldt Transit Authority (HTA) for service north of Ukiah. This approach has the potential to improve operating efficiency while maintaining connectivity to destinations in Northern California.

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Potential Improvements

Evaluate alternative service patterns

Route 7 is a prime opportunity to explore alternative service patterns to improve cost effectiveness based on ridership patterns.

The route exhibits its highest ridership from Friday through Monday, with the highest ridership occurring at Martinez, Eureka, Arcata, Santa Rosa, and Ukiah.[1] **Figure 26** below illustrates total annual ridership by day of the week for Route 7, segmented by county. Ridership for stops in Humboldt County follow the same pattern as the overall route, with lower ridership on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

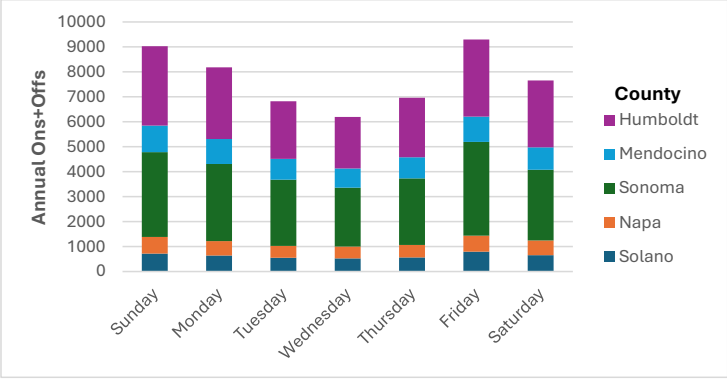


Figure 26: *Route 7 Total Annual Ridership by Day of Week and County (June 2025-2026)*

Route 7 also exhibits seasonal variation in ridership patterns. Specifically, ridership to Arcata and Cal-Poly Humboldt exhibits high peaks during key university holiday periods, indicating an opportunity to tailor service beyond Ukiah to meet demand during these peak periods. **Figure 27** below illustrates daily ridership beyond Ukiah to Cal Poly-Humboldt from June 2025 to June 2026. The data indicates that demand spikes significantly during holiday periods such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, spring break, and long weekends.

[1] On Sundays, Napa has around 40 more riders than at Ukiah

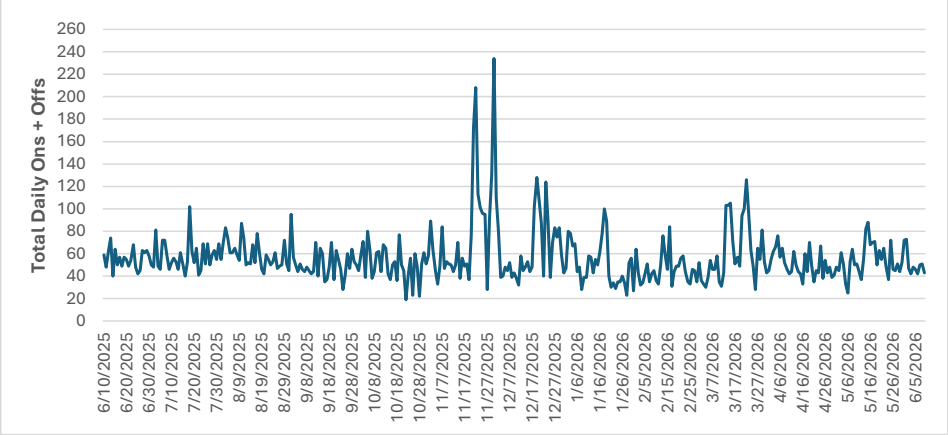


Figure 27: *Route 7 Daily Ridership beyond Ukiah to Cal Poly[1] (June 2025-2026)*

Based on these trends, there is the opportunity to adjust weekly service patterns to focus higher levels of service on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays, with lower levels of service on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Deleted: For example, one round trip between Martinez and Arcata can be truncated to Santa Rosa on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays in order to right-size service to the level of demand. Alternatively, an entire round trip from Martinez to Arcata could be eliminated mid-week, and the potential for increased service on peak days (Friday and Sunday) could be explored. This may better allocate resources to the route based on observed demand in order to boost cost effectiveness.

Seasonal ridership trends indicate a potential to introduce or focus service to Arcata around peak periods. While additional round trips could be considered for these days, another option could involve a college express bus which would provide additional express service with limited stops including Santa Rosa, Ukiah, and Cal Poly Humboldt. This would reduce travel times while targeting higher performing stops with higher levels of service during peak periods. This strategy has been implemented to an extent in recent schedule modifications to Route 7, but can be further studied to align additional service with university-based peak travel periods.

Opportunities to tailor service to day-of-week and seasonal ridership patterns should continue to be explored, and planning work should be conducted in coordination with Amtrak, Caltrans, local and regional agencies, and universities along the route with the goal of improving service. This approach of aligning service patterns to observed ridership trends can constitute a pilot service model on Route 7, with key focus on the effect of a temporal demand-derived service plan on the cost effectiveness of the route. If successful, this model could be adopted for other routes facing similarly uneven ridership patterns.

[1] The chart does not include riders departing from Martinez because it is a transfer station.

Assess service in Sonoma County

Route 7 serves five stops in Sonoma County. Petaluma, Rohnert Park, and Santa Rosa exhibit particularly high ridership, while Healdsburg and Cloverdale experience very low usage. The route's stopping pattern along this corridor can be assessed to identify potential ways to cut down travel time on the route, either through express service or stop consolidation. Efforts in this region to optimize local transit services include the Marin Sonoma Coordinated Transit Plan (MASCOTS), which can be analyzed to determine potential for coordination with Route 7 and streamlining of service along Highway 101.

Evaluate stop locations and potential new stops

Stop locations across the route can be evaluated to improve service quality, safety, and customer comfort. Some stop locations to the north of the route, including Arcata, are being assessed due to safety issues. Stop locations can additionally be examined for convenience and connectivity.

Napa is of particular interest due to the detour required to serve this location. Due to the high ridership at this stop, however, the benefit of this detour to passengers may offset the length added to the route.

Rohnert Park is another stop that can be evaluated, with the potential to serve the Rohnert Park SMART station. This would create an additional transfer opportunity with SMART, while also providing closer access to the nearby Sonoma State University.

The City of Santa Rosa has requested that the Santa Rosa stop be reevaluated. Route 7 currently stops in Santa Rosa at the Coddingtown Transit Hub. The City has requested to relocate this stop to the 3rd Street Transit Mall due to the planned service changes in February 2027 that will result in all Sonoma County Transit (SCT) intercity routes terminating at the Santa Rosa Transit Mall and no longer serving Coddingtown. As a result, Coddingtown will no longer function as an effective regional transfer point. Santa Rosa is currently the highest ridership stop on Route 7, and is very near Santa Rosa Junior College – any change to this stop should avoid disrupting this ridership.

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In addition to evaluating existing stops, there are potential opportunities for new stops along the route. However, any new stops need to be combined with streamlining efforts and ensure that they do not add significant travel time to the already lengthy route.

Sonoma County has requested an additional stop in the City of Sonoma; however, with the high density of stops already serving Sonoma County and the limitations on route length and travel time, this is most likely not feasible in the near term. This request would need to be considered alongside streamlining of service in Sonoma County.

Sonoma County Airport is another potential market in this region currently not served by Route 7. While this is a highly requested stop for passengers, it would add approximately 15 minutes of travel time in each direction, which is not feasible given the preexisting concerns with the length of the route. There is potential to instead serve the Sonoma County Airport via SMART's station at Sonoma County Airport, which provides transfer opportunities to Sonoma County Airport via SMART's Connect Shuttle. These stops would require less of an increase in the route's runtime, and combined with other streamlining efforts in Sonoma County could offer a compromise between serving important markets and limiting the travel time of the route. Additionally, SJJPA should evaluate co-locating with the future SMART Healdsburg station.

Coordinate with HTA and Mendocino Transit Authority to investigate the potential for partnership with HTA between Ukiah and Arcata

While HTA is not ready or equipped to discuss a partnership with SJJPA in the near-term, SJJPA should explore the possibility for a future partnership with HTA as the operator for Gold Runner service between Ukiah and Arcata. This potential partnership would be supported with operational funding from Gold Runner (since it would be the Route 7 service between Ukiah and Cal Poly Humboldt), and other potential state, local, and regional funding sources.

SJJPA should coordinate with HTA and Mendocino Transit Authority to investigate whether a partnership model similar to that of Route 5 could work in the longer-term future for Route 7. This study would include determining if HTA could provide Route 7 service north of Ukiah while maintaining guaranteed connections to Thruway Bus service and integrated ticketing with Amtrak. This concept could potentially maintain connectivity to the full Route 7 corridor while reducing SJJPA's operational costs associated with the long route by introducing additional funding sources. This service could potentially be supported by a diversified mix of local, regional, and state funding sources, including additional support from Caltrans.

Recommendations

- Study feasibility of alternative service patterns based on day of week and seasonality with the goal of improving service.
- Study connectivity to SMART stations, including at Rohnert Park and the future Healdsburg Station.
- Study locations of stops along the route for safety and customer experience including Santa Rosa, Arcata, Sonoma, and connections to Sonoma County Airport.

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- Initiate discussions with Caltrans, HTA, Mendocino Transit Authority, and Amtrak to study the potential for a partnership in the long-term with HTA for service between Ukiah and Cal Poly Humboldt.
- Partner with transportation agencies along the Highway 101 corridor to study whether targeted service modifications could streamline Route 7 operations in the North Bay Area while continuing to serve the corridor's strong ridership demand.
- Work with Cal Poly Humboldt, Sonoma State, and Santa Rosa Junior College to better promote the Gold Runner service to these educational institutions.
- Study the possibility for connecting service to Richmond, potentially through coordination with CJJPA

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Route 10: Santa Barbara – Bakersfield – Las Vegas

Route Overview

Route 10 connects Las Vegas and Santa Barbara via Bakersfield with one daily round-trip. This route has the highest overall cost effectiveness (603%) and with only one round trip, the route may warrant additional attention in future service planning efforts to add service. Alternative service patterns may be an option to boost cost effectiveness, with the potential for seasonal service tailored to university-related travel demand at Santa Barbara and/or an additional round trip between Santa Barbara and Bakersfield.

The primary concern on this route is the current interlining and cost-sharing agreement, which limits SJJPA's ability to fully evaluate performance due to lack of details regarding the operator's costs. While the cost effectiveness for this route is extraordinary, the 603% number only includes the cost borne to the state for this route. Most of the operator's cost is covered by the bus fares collected by Amtrak which go directly to the operator. The cost recover ratio for this route is calculated by taking the train revenue associated with Route 10 riders and dividing it by the cost paid by the state.

Potential Improvements

Evaluate the current operating agreement for Route 10

Route 10 currently performs well, and the existing operating agreement is characterized by certain advantages that boost this route's performance and cost effectiveness. Nevertheless, the nature of this agreement can be further optimized to ensure adequate operational oversight by SJJPA.

Under the current agreement, FlixBus and Greyhound are allotted a portion of tickets on the route, which limits competition on the corridor and removes obstacles to selling bus-only tickets on the route under SB 742. However, despite these advantages and the route's

satisfactory performance, the lack of comprehensive data on route performance hinders SJJPA's ability to respond to ridership trends and to ensure the route meets cost effectiveness standards. Accordingly, the agreement should be refined in the future to include clear guidelines and accountability for data transparency in order to allow SJJPA oversight over the route and leverage the full utility of this agreement structure.

Evaluate additional service during peak days on the western half of the route

The western segment of Route 10 terminates at UC Santa Barbara (UCSB), with a significant portion of the route's ridership coming from the Santa Barbara and UCSB stops. Additional marketing for Route 10 can be targeted toward the student market, with emphasis on incoming students. The very high cost recovery ratio for Route 10 suggests that a second round trip between Santa Barbara and Bakersfield could be warranted. **Figure 28** below shows daily ridership for the Bakersfield-Santa Barbara portion of the route from January 2025 to February 2026. Ridership trends indicate clear peaks in ridership around university holiday periods at Carpinteria, Santa Barbara, and UCSB, with more even ridership throughout the year at the remaining stops between Bakersfield and Ventura. This indicates the potential to implement additional seasonal service to Santa Barbara during peak periods – this could take the form of additional round trips making all stops between Bakersfield and UCSB, or express services focused on faster travel between Bakersfield and Santa Barbara.

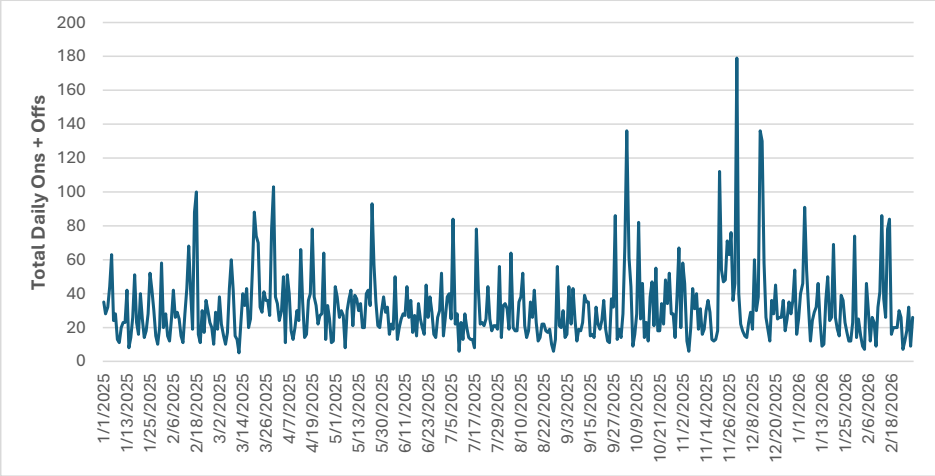


Figure 28: *Route 10 Total Daily Ons + Offs at UCSB, Santa Barbara, and Carpinteria (Jan 2025- Feb 2026)*

In addition to seasonal trends, ridership on the western half of Route 10 exhibits clear trends based on day of the week. **Figure 29** below illustrates total ridership from January 2025 to February 2026 by day of the week, focusing on ridership at stops along the Bakersfield-Ventura segment and along the Carpinteria-UCSB segment. Both segments exhibit clear peaks on Fridays and Sundays, with lower ridership mid-week. This indicates a potential opportunity to add additional weekend service on this half of the route, focused on Fridays and Sundays, in order to address observed demand, facilitate weekend trips, and supplement Metrolink Ventura County Line service.

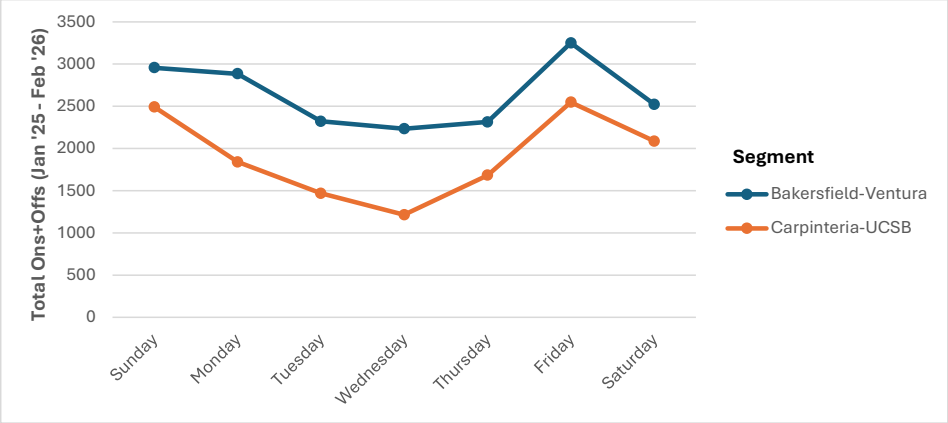


Figure 29: *Route 10 Day-of-Week Travel Patterns between Bakersfield and Santa Barbara (Jan 2025 - Feb 2026)*

Explore holiday and event-based service increases to Las Vegas

Las Vegas is the third largest market on Route 10, behind Oxnard and Santa Barbara. This is supported by FlixBus and Greyhound passengers who are able to purchase tickets on Route 10 through the current operating agreement. While Las Vegas exhibits weaker temporal trends compared to the western half of Route 10, ridership throughout the year does still peak on key dates, illustrated below in **Figure 30**. Demand to Las Vegas appears to peak regularly on key holidays like New Years, but may also spike based on major events – the spike in demand on June 6, for example, appears to be related to a major concert that took place on that day. Major events in Las Vegas vary year to year and should thus be monitored to develop strategic increases in service tailored to demand.

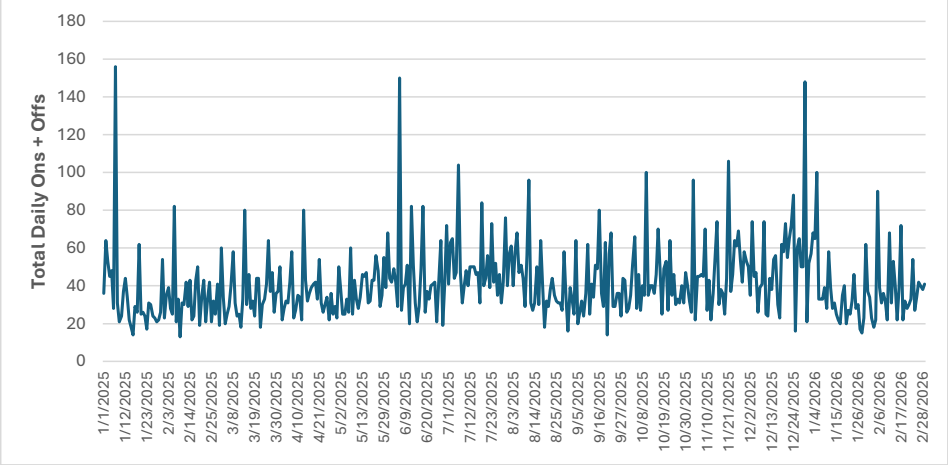


Figure 30: *Route 10 Daily Ons + Offs between Bakersfield and Las Vegas (Jan 2025 - Feb 2026)*

Recommendations

- Evaluate the current operating agreement for Route 10 and get Amtrak to provide more information regarding the route's performance or consider pursuing a future agreement that ensures data transparency.
- Evaluate providing an additional round trip between Santa Barbara and Bakersfield, additional seasonal service to UCSB, and additional weekend service along the western half of the route.
- Evaluate seasonal or event-based service increases to Las Vegas.
- Work with UCSB to better promote the Gold Runner service to UCSB.

Route 15/15A/15B: Yosemite Routes

Route Overview

Routes 15, 15A, and 15B are operated through a contract with YARTS, connecting various stops in the Yosemite National Park area to Merced and Fresno Gold Runner stations. These routes suffer from very low ridership and Route 15A doesn't meet the threshold for cost-effectiveness with a cost recovery ratio of 49%, stemming in part from limited coordination between YARTS schedules and Gold Runner trains. SJJPA is currently the second largest funding contributor to YARTS, and while the contribution represents a relatively low percentage of SJJPA's total costs across the Thruway Bus network, SJJPA and Gold Runner passengers do not experience a proportionate level of benefit from the

operating agreement. Considerations for this route relate to the nature of the contract with YARTS, as well as the utility of the service to Gold Runner passengers.

Potential Improvements

Reassess partnership and funding structure

In order to develop a management and funding structure for these routes that better serves SJJPA and Gold Runner passengers, a comprehensive review of SJJPA's financial contribution to YARTS is necessary. Strategies to reduce SJJPA's subsidy through additional State or federal funding sources can be explored, though these may be limited. Additionally, an alternative operating or partnership model that better serve SJJPA's goals may be necessary. Gold Runner payment to YARTS for Routes 15 and 15B is different from the agreement for Route 15A. Gold Runner pays a set amount for Route 15A (regardless of how many Gold Runner passengers use the service) whereas for Routes 15 and 15B Gold Runner pays YARTS based on the number of Gold Runner passengers on the routes. SJJPA needs to discuss the contract agreements with YARTS to develop a more appropriate compensation structure for Route 15A. At a minimum, any contract with YARTS should focus on guaranteeing transfers to and from the last or second to last YARTS bus of the day by requiring YARTS to hold buses for Gold Runner trains. This would provide passengers the confidence that they will be able to ride a connecting service and will not be stranded in Merced or Fresno. Currently, YARTS is only required to hold their buses for 15 minutes to wait for a Gold Runner transfer.

Understand passenger use cases

Routes 15/15A/15B represent a unique set of trip opportunities in the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network, with their primary goal to serve a tourist destination. Accordingly, it is important that SJJPA understands how their passengers use this service in practice and what the feasible use cases are to this end. While a substantial portion of passengers using these routes are for leisure or tourism purposes, there are substantial obstacles that might prevent these passengers from using the service. Trip times often make day trips difficult, and with additional outdoors equipment and luggage for multi-day trips. This makes taking Gold Runner to and from a YARTS bus connection more inconvenient and less competitive compared to private automobile travel. Given these constraints, SJJPA can opt to focus marketing of the routes on destinations that are better served by this service, such as hotels and points of interest that are easily accessible without a car. Understanding how passengers can use Gold Runner to access Yosemite National Park can better guide tactical recommendations to changes in this Thruway service, whether they be via improved train connections, revised schedules, or more robust marketing. In addition, it is possible that at least some Gold Runner train passengers purchase their YARTS ticket separately (rather than through Amtrak ticketing). If this is true, then the cost-

effectiveness of this service could be considerably higher than is being calculated. SJJPA should work with YARTS to determine if a significant number of Gold Runner train passengers are purchasing YARTS tickets separately and are therefore not being counted as passengers to Yosemite (using Route 15A) when they are actually using the service.

Encourage and support MCAG and YARTS to pursue alternate State and Federal funding for Route 15

In coordination with Caltrans, Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) and YARTS should be encouraged and supported to seek alternative state and local funding sources to support the continued operation of Route 15. Further coordination should also take place with YARTS to ensure buses better accommodate Gold Runner schedules and more likely guarantee transfers for passengers.

One state funding program to consider is the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP), which provides capital assistance for agencies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve mobility, with a focus on serving disadvantaged communities.[1] Caltrans should closely coordinate with MACAG and YARTS in order to ensure a seamless funding application process and / or discuss other funding opportunities that may be a better fit for Route 15 service.

Recommendations

- Analyze how passengers use Routes 15, 15A, and 15B to identify barriers, travel patterns, and market opportunities that inform service planning, schedule coordination, and targeted marketing efforts.
- Include provisions in the partnership structure for holding buses for Gold Runner trains. Specifically, get YARTS to agree to have one of their later buses hold for the last Gold Runner train for at least one hour (rather than 15 minutes) should it be delayed.
- Encourage and assist MCAG and YARTS in pursuing additional state and federal funding sources in coordination with Caltrans, in order to support service operations and reduce reliance on SJJPA funding.
- Pursue an alternative partnership / compensation structure for Route 15A, in coordination with Caltrans.
- Work with YARTS to determine if significant number of Gold Runner passengers purchase YARTS tickets separately when taking a trip to Yosemite (and therefore the

[1] Caltrans, Low Carbon Transit Operations Program, https://dot.ca.gov/programs/rail/low-carbon-transit-operations-program-lctop

number of Gold Runner passengers and benefits for Route 15A could be significantly higher than reported).

Route 18: Visalia – Hanford – San Luis Obispo

Route Overview

Route 18 has recently been modified to address concerns around low ridership and the operator terminating their interline agreement with Amtrak. As a result of the recently implemented route modification, updated cost-effectiveness numbers are not yet available. Route 18 now provides seasonal service between Hanford and San Luis Obispo, targeting peak university-related travel periods. Additionally, year-round service is provided between Hanford and Visalia through a contract with KART. Future service may additionally be provided by Visalia Transit. As this change was implemented in June 2026, data is not yet available on the updated performance of the route. This route should be monitored to evaluate the outcomes of its new configuration in the future. If seasonal service is successful in improving cost effectiveness, this may represent a service model that can be carried over to other key destinations with high seasonality. The service between Hanford and Visalia operated by KART currently does not run on Sundays and certain holidays, and tickets for this service are not available for purchase using the Amtrak website.

Potential Improvements

Evaluate the Hanford to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo route once more data becomes available

The new configuration of Route 18 represents a unique service concept within the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network. Outside of routes operated by YARTS, Route 18 is the only route that now runs on a seasonal basis, while also relying on a contract with a public agency to operate the year-round segment of the route. Performance will be monitored in the coming months to evaluate this hybrid model of service, with outcomes that may help inform optimization efforts to other Thruway bus routes in the future. While seasonal service exists on YARTS routes based on park travel, no other route in the network uses seasonality as a strategy to improve cost-effectiveness.

Due to one of the largest markets on this route coming from university-related travel to and from San Luis Obispo, this creates a prime opportunity to focus service on the student market. A key to the success of this new service focused on college students will be the partnership with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to consistently provide marketing information to students to encourage them to use this service.

Encourage KART to get a ticketing agreement with Amtrak and operate service 365 days a year

The KART service between Hanford and Visalia that initially provides increased connections to Gold Runner is the beginning of new Cross Valley Corridor express bus service between Tulare, Kings, and Fresno counties to future high-speed rail at the Kings/Tulare HSR Station. For this initial service to be successful, Gold Runner passengers need to be able to purchase tickets via the Amtrak website. This requires a ticketing agreement between King County Area Public Transit Agency (the operator of KART) and Amtrak. Furthermore, Sundays and holidays are key days for Gold Runner ridership. It is imperative for the success of the Hanford-Visalia service and future Cross Valley Corridor services that they offer daily services (365 days a year).

Recommendations

- Study the impact of changes to the route as more data becomes available, specifically whether seasonal university service is a successful model.
- Continue partnership efforts with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to market the service and see if this partnership can be a model for working with other universities/colleges that are served by Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes.
- Strongly encourage KART to get a ticketing agreement with Amtrak and to operate the Hanford to Visalia service on Sundays and holidays.
- The Gold Runner website needs to be updated to include the KART service between Hanford and Visalia.

Route 19: Bakersfield – San Bernardino

Route Overview

Route 19 connects Gold Runner trains to the Inland Empire and provides a strong example of how strategic service adjustments can improve cost effectiveness without significantly reducing ridership. In response to changing demand, Route 19 was reduced from four daily round trips to two, with service focused on the highest performing trips. This strategy was successful, as the route improved its cost-effectiveness despite increasing operating costs. While this route achieved a cost recovery ratio of 121% in 2025, it is still necessary to evaluate strategies to ensure that the cost effectiveness of this route remains stable in future years. SJJPA should look to study why Route 19 has modest ridership levels despite serving major population centers in Southern California and look for opportunities to optimize the route to make it more attractive to potential passengers. Strategies include evaluation of stop locations to address low ridership at specific stops, potential reconfiguration of service around weekly service patterns, and exploration of additional markets that may be served seasonally to attract leisure travelers.

Potential Improvements

Assess Stop Locations

La Crescenta experiences particularly low ridership, with roughly 400 annual on-offs. While service to La Crescenta runs in both directions, tickets on the Amtrak website are only available in the southbound direction; this may contribute to the reduced usage of this stop. Alternative stop locations along the same alignment can be explored in order to serve more riders. Particularly, an alternative stop along the Foothill Gold Line at Arcadia, Monrovia, Glendora, or San Dimas may be more attractive to riders while integrating with the local transit network.

Similarly, investigating moving the stop in Pasadena to the Del Mar Station or to the Pasadena Memorial Park Station to provide an additional connection opportunity to local transit is recommended.

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SJJPA should also evaluate the feasibility of relocating the Claremont station approximately one mile east to Montclair to improve connectivity with local and regional transit services, as well as Greyhound.

Explore partnerships with Metrolink, LA Metro, and local transit providers

Route 19 should evaluate the feasibility of partnering with Metrolink to better promote service and to better coordinate bus arrival and departure times to allow for more seamless connections to the San Bernardino Line at Claremont. With two round trips per day, Route 19 stops at Claremont at 3:55PM and 7:50PM en route to San Bernardino and then at 7:15AM and 12:25PM en route to Bakersfield. With clockface Metrolink service at :30 heading towards LAUS and :45 heading towards San Bernardino, connecting to the San Bernardino Line becomes a long transfer period with waits as long as 50 minutes between trains; better coordinating bus arrival times will make transfers more seamless.

The Metrolink San Bernardino Line runs parallel to the LA Metro A-Line Extension (Foothill Gold Line), which provides an opportunity to help market connections to and from Route 19. A marketing campaign can include advertising Route 19 at A-Line Extension stations and on LA Metro light rail vehicles.

Evaluate alternative service patterns

Route 19's service can be examined against ridership patterns**. Figure 31** below illustrates ridership by day of the week, while **Figure 32** below shows ridership by day to highlight seasonal trends.

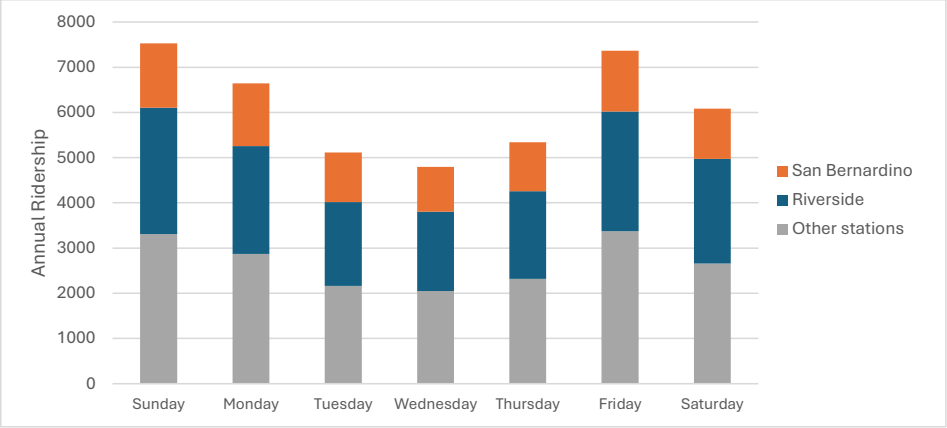


Figure 31: *Route 19 Annual Ridership by Day of Week and by Station (Jun '25 - '26)*

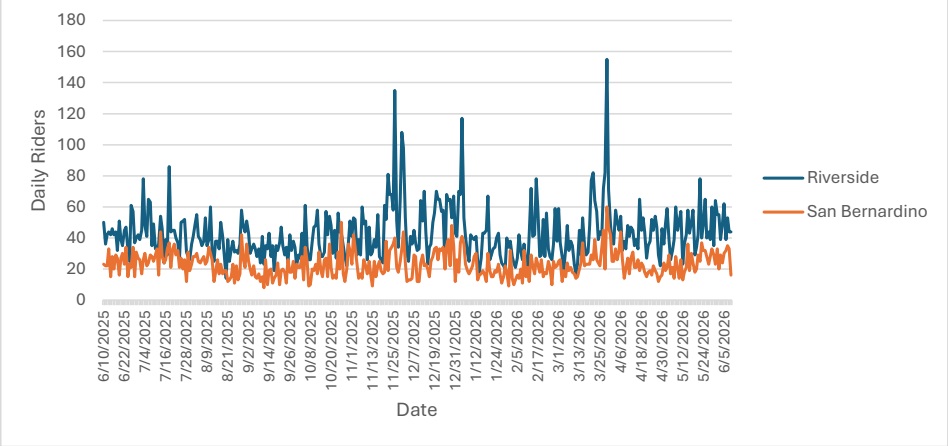


Figure 32: *Route 19 Daily Ridership at Riverside and San Bernardino (Jun '25 - '26)*

Ridership is highest on Fridays, Sundays, and Mondays, indicating the potential to focus higher levels of service from Friday to Monday to boost cost effectiveness. 64% of total route ridership occurs from Friday through Monday. Due to the route exceeding the cost effectiveness threshold, and that the route recently had its frequency reduced, it does not currently make sense to reduce service from Tuesday through Thursday – on the other hand, increasing service on peak days of the week (particularly Friday and Sunday) could be a strategy to add service in a cost-effective manner.

The route also exhibits clear seasonality, with high peaks during Thanksgiving, New Year's, and spring break periods. These peaks are especially pronounced at Riverside, likely driven by the large student population at UC Riverside. The highest ridership day at Riverside is in late March, and attracts a level of ridership 3.6 times higher than the station's daily average of 43 passengers. Based on these large peaks in demand, additional service could target Riverside and specifically UC Riverside during these times of year. Targeted service increases could improve the route's overall cost effectiveness by capturing more ridership from proven high-demand periods.

Explore opportunities for expansion

While stops currently serve multiple Metrolink stations including Claremont, Ontario, Riverside, and San Bernardino, the route may be able to attract additional ridership by providing additional connections to major population centers like Rancho Cucamonga, where Brightline West will stop. Additionally, seasonal service extensions to locations such as the Coachella Valley may be considered to address tourist and leisure travel demand during peak tourist season (October– April), with a focus on April due to high tourism for music festivals.

It also may be worth investigating coordinating Route 19 with Route 39 (without usurping Route 19 service), which is operated by LOSSAN and serves Fullerton (Metrolink OC Line & Pacific Surfliner), Palm Springs, Riverside, and Indio with two daily round trips.

Recommendations

- Study the implications of removing or replacing the La Crescenta stop with another stop which connects with the Gold Line.
- Develop partnerships with Metrolink and other transit providers to help promote service and evaluate Route 19 arrival and departure times at Metrolink stops to achieve easy transfers.
- Investigate the possibility of moving the Pasadena stop to be located at the Del Mar Pasadena Gold Line Station or to the Pasadena Memorial Park Station, and the feasibility of relocating the Claremont station approximately one mile east to Montclair.
- Evaluate opportunities to connect to future Brightline West service in Rancho Cucamonga, and to provide seasonal service to Coachella Valley or supplemental service on Route 39.
- Evaluate additional seasonal service or daily service patterns for Route 19.

Route 40: Merced – San Jose

Route Overview

Route 40 is SJJPA'S newest Thruway bus route, providing service between Merced and San Jose since January 2026. As a result, cost effectiveness data is not yet available. This route aims to provide an efficient connection between the Central Valley and Bay Area. While evaluating the route, SJJPA should also consider its broader network benefit, as Route 40 provides communities such as Fresno and other Central Valley locations with connections to the Bay Area. Riders have requested more Bay Area connections to the Central Valley; broader connectivity is a key purpose of the Thruway Bus network and should be advertised as such to potential riders. Potential improvements on this route include improved marketing for the Los Banos and Gilroy markets, connection opportunities to Santa Cruz, and service to institutions such as UC Merced and San Jose State University. Additionally, additional commuter service can be considered in partnership with public agencies.

Potential Improvements

Market Route 40 for the Los Banos and Gilroy markets

Preliminary performance data reveals that a majority of travelers using this route to access San Jose, with few riders traveling between San Jose and Gilroy and Los Banos. While this aligns with the primary goal of this route, it may also indicate potential to improve marketing of the route to these additional destinations, or connections to local and regional transit at the Merced Transit Center

Market the connection to Santa Cruz and Yosemite from Route 40

Route 40 also provides connectivity to SC Metro's Route 17 between San Jose and Santa Cruz. While this route is marketed as a connection to SJJPA's Route 6, it is currently not marketed as a connection to Route 40, which has potential to attract additional riders on this route. Evaluate performance of new route and its impacts on Route 6. Route 40 also provides a faster trip from destinations like San Jose or Santa Cruz to Yosemite, and this is something that can be marketed for this new route. However, there are currently issues with Amtrak ticketing which need to be fixed. Santa Cruz to Yosemite is currently not an option on Amtrak ticketing, and the trip from San Jose to Yosemite via Route 40 is not linked to the correct connecting YARTS 15A bus.

As Route 40 matures and more data becomes available, it will need to be evaluated against Route 6, as it is expected that Route 40 will draw some ridership from Route 6, which also connects the Central Valley to the Bay Area.

Evaluate MCAG funding additional round trip

MCAG expressed interest in providing funding to run an additional round trip on Route 40 that would be focused on serving commuter markets. This commuter service could potentially also serve the Great America stop in Santa Clara and connect to ACE shuttles that take passengers throughout the Silicon Valley. Alternatively, this service could terminate at Gilroy to connect to Caltrain services.

Recommendations

- Conduct targeted marketing for Route 40 particularly for the Los Banos and Gilroy markets which were previously not served by Gold Runner, but also at Merced and San Jose where the reduced trip times make these more viable markets for Gold Runner.
- Coordinate with MCAG on potential partnership to run a commuter round trip between Merced and the Silicon Valley (San Jose, Great America, Gilroy).
- Market the connection to Santa Cruz to/from Route 40.
- Work with San Jose State University and UC Merced to promote Gold Runner service.
- Monitor the performance of this new route and its impacts on Route 6.
- Work with Amtrak to get ticketing issues fixed for markets from Route 40 and Santa Metro's Route 17 to enable ticketing to Yosemite via YARTS (15, 15A, & 15B) and then provide marketing between these routes to Yosemite.

Route 99: San Francisco – Emeryville

Route Overview

Route 99 provides connectivity between Emeryville and San Francisco. This is the most cost-effective route in SJJPA's Thruway Bus network with a cost recovery ratio of 412%. Looking into the future, the primary consideration for this route is to secure access to the Salesforce Transit Center. Negotiations are currently in progress to achieve this and provide more seamless connectivity to this integrated transit hub in San Francisco. Due to the success of this route and joint partnership with CCJPA, significant changes are not recommended at this time. While the route overlaps with BART and AC Transit services, it remains popular as it provides a seamless and comfortable connection for rail passengers to access San Francisco. Thruway buses are integrated with Gold Runner, Capitol Corridor and Amtrak (Long-Distance) schedules and provide luggage storage, while BART and AC Transit services may be seen as less convenient and particularly difficult to access for passengers with luggage or with mobility issues.

Potential Improvements

Secure access to the Salesforce Transit Center

The primary recommendation for this route is to secure access to the Salesforce Transit Center. Negotiations are currently underway to provide a more seamless connection to this multimodal transit facility in San Francisco.

Serve additional stop to connect with Caltrain in San Francisco

With the success of the route, service extensions to connect with Caltrain at 4th and King in San Francisco would decrease travel times for passengers traveling onward to locations along the Caltrain corridor. This may be a useful temporary extension of Route 99 until Caltrain service is extended to the Salesforce Transit Center.

Pursue new contracting structure

The current contracting structure is **not** recommended to modify at this time. While AC Transit does provide similar transit services, pursuing a partnership with AC Transit would require substantial additional negotiation and for AC Transit to agree to operate the service as a connecting service for Gold Runner, Capitol Corridor, and Amtrak long-distance trains. Based on coordination with AC Transit between SJJPA, Capitol Corridor and the state, the cost to provide Route 99 would significantly increase if AC Transit was used as the operator, which would decrease the overall cost-effectiveness of this route. In addition, AC Transit would not agree to hold the Thruway Bus service for late arriving trains.

Recommendations

- Connect the service directly to the Salesforce Transit Center.
- Study the possibility of expanding Route 99 to connect to Caltrain at 4th and King until Caltrain is extended to the Salesforce Transit Center.

Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations presented throughout this chapter identify a range of opportunities to maintain and build upon the existing success of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network. Because these recommendations vary in their urgency, complexity, and readiness to advance, they have been organized into three tiers to help SJJPA prioritize its efforts and establish a clear path forward. The prioritization considers the anticipated benefit to the network, the level of coordination or additional analysis required, and the appropriate timeframe for advancing each recommendation.

The three tiers are intended to distinguish between actions that can be addressed immediately, opportunities that warrant focused study in the near term, and longer-term strategies that may depend on future conditions or additional planning. This approach

allows SJJPA to focus resources on the most urgent priorities while continuing to evaluate opportunities that may strengthen the network over time.

- **Tier 1 – Immediate Priorities**: These recommendations represent the immediate actions that should be advanced by the end of 2026. They generally include actions that are sufficiently defined to move forward now and where near-term coordination, decision-making, or implementation is required.
- **Tier 2A + 2B – 2027 Priorities:** Tier 2A recommendations should be studied and assessed during the first half of 2027 and Tier 2B recommendations should be studied and assessed during the second half of 2027. They may require additional analysis, coordination with operating or transit partners, monitoring of service performance, or further development before a decision on implementation can be made. Advancing these considerations will help SJJPA determine which opportunities are most appropriate to pursue.
- **Tier 3 – Longer-Term Priorities:** These recommendations represent longer-term opportunities that should remain under consideration as the Gold Runner network evolves. These recommendations provide a longer-term planning framework without requiring immediate action.

The full list of recommendations organized by tier can be found below in **Table 27.**

Table 27: *Tiered List of Recommendations*

	Route	Recommendation
Tier 1	General	Update the Gold Runner webpage to improve the accuracy, clarity, and consistency of passenger information and provide additional information regarding routes and connectivity to other passenger rail and transit services, universities and colleges, and other key destinations on its website and marketing materials.
	General	Work with partner public transportation agencies and private operators whose services connect with Gold Runner Thruway Bus stops to try to get them to better support, promote, and market these connections.
	General	Update all stop signage and provide additional information alongside QR codes at all stops for passengers to access route schedules and ticketing.
	General	Improve online information regarding guaranteed transfer policies and passenger protections.
	General	Increase marketing and advertising of key destinations, including universities and colleges and destinations like Yosemite National Park.
	General	Utilize electronic announcements on Gold Runner trains to send advertising messages to passengers, such as reminders of connecting locations to destinations such as Yosemite.

	1	Increase marketing and advertising for the Thruway Bus connection to LAX FlyAway at Union Station and see if LAX Flyaway could get into Amtrak ticketing.
	1	Partner with the LOSSAN Joint Powers Authority to have them assist in marketing the Route 1 connections to the Pacific Surfliner.
	1C	Work with UCLA to better promote the Gold Runner service to UCLA.
	3	Coordinate with BCAG, Amtrak, and Caltrans on implementing a potential partnership to have BCAG operate the Thruway Bus service between Sacramento and Chico in advance of BCAG's proposed start of service in early 2027. Coordinate service realignment to best serve the Stockton-Sacramento-Davis corridor.
	5	Monitor ridership and revenue performance and timed train connections. Continuous active marketing measures throughout FY 26/27 and track performance.
	18	Strongly encourage KART to secure a ticketing agreement with Amtrak and to operate the Hanford to Visalia service on Sundays and holidays.
	18	Update the Gold Runner website to include KART service between Hanford and Visalia.
	19	Develop partnerships with Metrolink and other transit providers to help promote service and evaluate Route 19 arrival and departure times at Metrolink stops to achieve easy transfers.
	19	Investigate the possibility of moving the Pasadena stop to be located at the Del Mar Pasadena Gold Line Station or to the Pasadena Memorial Park Station, and the feasibility of relocating the Claremont station approximately one mile east to Montclair.
	40	Conduct targeted marketing for Route 40, particularly for the Los Banos and Gilroy markets, which were previously not served by Gold Runner, as well as Merced and San Jose, where reduced trip times make these more viable markets for Gold Runner.
	40	Market the connection to Santa Cruz to/from Route 40.
	40	Work with Amtrak to get ticketing issues fixed for markets from Route 40 and Santa Cruz Metro's Route 17 to enable ticketing to Yosemite via YARTS (15, 15A, & 15B) and then provide marketing between these routes to Yosemite.

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Deleted: Study feasibility of alternative service patterns and service reductions based on day of week and seasonality.

Tier 2A	General	Ensure updated cost-effectiveness data is received from Amtrak on a semi-annual basis for all Gold Runner Thruway Bus Routes.
	General	Explore partnerships with other transit providers as both future contract partners and for better timed service connections.
	General	Work with Caltrans to have an integrated statewide passenger information system coordinating information related to rail, Thruway bus, and connecting transit services developed.
	General	Increase coordination with JPAs (SJJPA, Capitol Corridor, and LOSSAN) regarding schedule changes.

	General	Ensure the provisions to collect performance and tracking data in future operating contracts.
	General	Work with Caltrans to secure Thruway Bus-specific minor capital program funding and explore alternative funding sources for bus shelters, other bus stop amenities, and passenger safety/security measures.
	General	Coordinate with Flix North America (FNA), and Amtrak Real Estate on potential interline service agreements, shared facilities and interlined ticketing, and cooperative funding agreements to add service
	General	Investigate strategies to address Gold Runner on-time performance issues.
	General	Audit and validate the GTFS feed to identify, prioritize, and correct data inconsistencies, missing or invalid records, schedule discrepancies, geographic inaccuracies, and accessibility or passenger information issues, ensuring compliance with GTFS standards and reliable trip planning information.
	1C	Study the implications of removing Burbank Airport from Route 1C to streamline service.
	1C	Evaluate adding San Fernando to the route with the removal of Burbank Airport. Furthermore, study alternative terminus options such as LAX, Hollywood, Westwood-UCLA, and Long Beach.
	1C	Evaluate the Santa Monica stop for passenger experience and convenience and whether it remains the optimal terminus. Work with the City of Santa Monica and the local and regional transit to assist with increasing marketing to see if Santa Monica should remain a stop.
	3	Investigate opportunities to fully open Route 3 for bus-only ticketing including complementary partnership with FNA.
	3	Request Cal State Chico to help promote the Gold Runner service and future BCAG service between Chico and Sacramento.
	6	Implement bus-only ticketing on Route 6 as indicated in the 2026 Business Plan.
	6	Study long-term implications of Route 40 ridership to San Jose in relationship to the cost-effectiveness of Route 6 (which also connects to San Jose).
	6, 40	Work with San Jose State University (RTs 6 & 40) and UC Merced (RT 40) to promote Gold Runner service.
	7	Work with Cal Poly Humboldt, Sonoma State, and Santa Rosa Junior College to better promote the Gold Runner service to these educational institutions.
	7	Initiate discussions with Caltrans and HTA regarding the possibility for long-term service coordination between Ukiah and Cal Poly Humboldt.
	10	Evaluate providing an additional round-trip between Santa Barbara and Bakersfield, additional seasonal service to UCSB, and additional weekend service along the western half of the route.
	10	Evaluate the current operating agreement for Route 10 and get Amtrak to provide more information regarding the route's performance or consider pursuing a future agreement that ensures data transparency.
	10	Work with UCSB to better promote the Gold Runner service to UCSB.

	15	Encourage and assist MCAG and YARTS in pursuing additional state and federal funding sources in coordination with Caltrans, in order to support service operations and reduce reliance on SJJPA funding.
	15	Pursue an alternative partnership/compensation structure for Route 15A in coordination with Caltrans.
	15	Include provisions in the partnership structure for holding buses for Gold Runner trains. Specifically, get YARTS to agree to have one of their later buses hold for the last Gold Runner train for at least one hour (rather than 15 minutes) should it be delayed.
	15	Work with YARTS to determine if significant number of Gold Runner passengers purchase YARTS tickets separately when taking a trip to Yosemite (and therefore the number of Gold Runner passengers and benefits for Route 15A could be significantly higher than reported).
	18	Continue partnership efforts with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo to market the service and see if this partnership can be a model for working with other universities/colleges that are served by Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes.
	19	Study the implications of removing or replacing the La Crescenta stop with another stop which connects with the Gold Line.
	99	Connect service directly to the Salesforce Transit Center.

Tier 2B	General	Conduct a market assessment that looks at potential new markets and temporal demand.
	General	Audit bus stop locations across the network to see if there are opportunities to improve transit network connectivity, passenger experience, and ridership.
	General	Implement real-time tracking.
	1	Study opportunities to deploy bus-only ticketing along Route 1, including potential partnerships with public and private operators along the corridor.
	1	Study opportunities to increase Route 1 service including additional San Diego service, enhancing Burbank Airport service (including consideration of express airport connections and relocating the stop), and more service between Bakersfield and Los Angeles Union Station.
	1C	Study connectivity to LA Metro in the near term and the long-term, including implications of the D-Line extension.
	3	Pursue a potential partnership with SJRTD for service between Stockton and Sacramento/Davis if a partnership is established with BCAG for service between Chico and Sacramento.
	6	Investigate a potential partnership with RTD if Route 6's cost-effectiveness declines.
	7	Study locations of stops along the route for safety and customer experience including Santa Rosa, Arcata, Sonoma, and connections to Sonoma County Airport.

	7	Study connectivity to SMART stations, including Rohnert Park and the future Healdsburg Station.
	7	Partner with transportation agencies along the Highway 101 corridor to study whether targeted service modifications could streamline Route 7 operations in the North Bay Area while continuing to serve the corridor's strong ridership demand.
	7	Study feasibility of alternative service patterns based on day of week and seasonality with the goal of improving service.
	10	Evaluate seasonal or event-based service increases to Las Vegas.
	15	Analyze how passengers use Routes 15, 15A, and 15B to identify barriers, travel patterns, and market opportunities that can inform service planning, schedule coordination, and targeted marketing efforts.
	18	Study the impact of changes to the route as more data becomes available, specifically whether seasonal university service is a successful model.
	19	Evaluate additional seasonal service or daily service patterns for Route 19.
	40	Monitor the performance of this new route and its impact on Route 6.
	40	Coordinate with MCAG on a potential partnership to run a commuter round-trip between Merced and Silicon Valley (San Jose, Great America, Gilroy).
	99	Study the possibility of expanding service to connect to Caltrain at 4th and King until Caltrain is extended to the Salesforce Transit Center.

Tier 3	General	Monitor the performance of the new Route 5 to see if this is a model that can be deployed in other parts of the state.
	1	Study the feasibility of improving Metrolink connectivity at Newhall. This would include investigating a pilot program/partnership with Metrolink to have a Gold Runner Thruway bus round-trip terminate at Newhall and connect with Metrolink to provide service to Los Angeles Union Station.
	3	If a partnership can be reached with BCAG, investigate having some Route 3 service connect to the new Valley Rail Midtown Sacramento Station once it is constructed.
	6	Coordinate with VTA to strengthen connections to Mineta San Jose International Airport.
	7	In coordination with HTA, Mendocino Transit Authority, Caltrans, and Amtrak, evaluate the potential for a partnership with HTA for service between Ukiah and Arcata.
	7	Study the possibility for connecting service to Richmond, potentially through coordination with CJJPA.
	19	Evaluate opportunities to connect to future Brightline West service in Rancho Cucamonga, and to provide seasonal service to Coachella Valley or supplemental service on Route 39.

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Deleted: truncate route in Ukiah in the future

Conclusion

The Gold Runner Thruway Bus network is performing very well and remains a strong and valuable component of California's intercity transportation system. In the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, SJJPA and its partners made a series of difficult but important decisions to right-size the network, including reducing lower-performing routes, portions of routes, and individual bus trips. These decisions have resulted in a highly cost-effective network, with the overall system cost-recovery ratio at 119%, while retaining the vast majority of the network's ridership. This is a positive outcome given the significant increases in operating costs experienced across the transit industry in recent years.

The strong performance of the network provides an important foundation for the recommendations in this study. These recommendations are not intended to restructure a system that is already successful, but rather to build on that success through targeted improvements. Given the reductions that have already been made, future changes to service levels should be approached carefully and strategically, with consideration given to both the benefits of additional service and the potential impacts of further reductions. The focus should remain on protecting the performance of successful routes while identifying opportunities to improve connectivity, service quality, and cost effectiveness.

The greatest need for improvement is concentrated on Route 15A (Merced – Yosemite) and Route 7 (Martinez – Arcata), where cost effectiveness remains below the desired level. These routes warrant particular attention to identify strategies that can improve performance while maintaining important connections and passenger benefits. At the same time, the broader network presents opportunities to further strengthen performance through targeted service adjustments, improved connections, enhanced data and reliability, and partnerships with local and regional transit and private intercity bus providers.

Ultimately, the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network should be viewed as exceptionally successful and cost-effective. The 119% overall cost recovery ratio for the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network is something the SJJPA, Amtrak, and Caltrans can be very proud of. The recommendations in this study provide a practical framework for preserving what is working, addressing the areas where improvement is most needed, and taking advantage of opportunities to further enhance an already successful program. By continuing to make strategic, data-informed decisions and pursuing partnerships that can expand connectivity and leverage additional funding, SJJPA can build on the progress already achieved and ensure that the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network remains a reliable, convenient, and cost-effective extension of the rail system for communities throughout California.

Appendix

Appendix 1.1: Status of SB 742 Implementation Efforts by SJJPA & Reductions made during COVID Pandemic

San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA) staff began working with Amtrak and coordinating with the Capitol Corridor and LOSSAN JPA on preparing for the implementation of SB 742 shortly after SB 742 was signed by the Governor on October 9, 2019. It was not practicable for the SJJPA to roll out the program on all Thruway bus routes at the same time because of the size of the network, and the coordination and documentation needed. Thus, the SJJPA concluded that the implementation of SB 742 needed to be phased in over time. SJJPA staff decided to start SB 742 implementation with routes that were underutilized and had the fewest conflicts with other existing private intercity operators and local/regional transit services. Since the passing of SB 742, SJJPA staff has continued to seek new partnerships with public or private bus operators with the goal of more efficient operations and allowing non-Amtrak passengers to utilize excess seating capacity on buses that connect with San Joaquins trains to save on operations costs.



As specified in SB 742, before offering bus-only tickets on Thruway bus routes contracted to private operators and funded by the state, SJJPA staff extensively researched and coordinated with existing public and private operators along these routes. SJJPA staff

consulted with and considered relevant local and regional public transit operators to determine whether a local or regional public transit operator could provide the planned service and attempted to avoid conflicts with existing public transit services. Staff also coordinated with private motor carrier services that provide intercity bus services along these routes. SJJPA staff researched the differences, including time of day, between the proposed motor carrier services and the existing services in communities served by the routes where bus-only ticketing was being proposed. These efforts were documented, presented, and available for public review in advance of SJJPA board meetings. Agencies, private operators, and the public were given the opportunity to comment on proposed actions.

The provisions of SB 742 became effective on January 1, 2020. At the January 24, 2020, SJJPA Board Meeting, the SJJPA took action to open selected bus stop pairs for bus-only ticketing on Route 10 (Bakersfield – Santa Barbara) and Route 12 (Bakersfield – Victorville). At the March 27, 2020, SJJPA Board Meeting, SJJPA took action to open selected bus stop pairs for bus-only ticketing on Route 1C (Bakersfield – Van Nuys – West Los Angeles – Torrance), Route 19 (Bakersfield – Pasadena - San Bernardino – Indio – Hemet), and Route 40 (Merced – Los Banos – Merced). However, after the COVID-19 pandemic hit California, the deployment of bus-only ticketing and further implementation of SB 742 needed to be delayed because of the capacity restrictions and need to make service reductions for the Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes. The SJJPA took action on May 29, 2020, to make reductions to several of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus routes. These reductions included shortening several of the routes and indefinitely suspending some routes.

The suspension of Routes 9, 10, and 18 was included as part of the SJJPA Board action from May 29, 2020, and the SJJPA had Amtrak terminate the existing contracts for these routes. However, Amtrak was able to negotiate revenue-sharing agreements with private operators to continue providing connecting bus service along these three routes. Routes 9 and 10 were merged into a single Route 10 (Santa Barbara – Bakersfield – Las Vegas). Once Amtrak entered into the revenue sharing agreements, bus-only ticketing became available for all bus stop pairs along these routes. Bus-only ticketing had historically been available for all bus stop pairs along Route 18 since this privately operated route had pre-dated the Amtrak operated Gold Runner service.

With capacity constraints no longer in place on Gold Runner Thruway buses and service being restored to near pre-pandemic levels, SJJPA staff presented plans to the SJJPA Board to re-initiate the implementation of SB 742 for approved Gold Runner Thruway bus routes at the September 24, 2021, SJJPA Board Meeting. Additional action was taken at that SJJPA Board meeting to continue a number of the reductions that had been approved on May 29,

2020 (as a result of the pandemic) for the foreseeable future because these reductions resulted in a more cost-effective network. Action was also taken on May 29, 2020, to enable bus-only ticketing for bus stop pairs to and from Santa Monica for Route 1C. Action was taken at the November 19, 2021, SJJPA Board Meeting to open specified bus stop pairs for bus-only ticketing for Route 7. In coordination with Amtrak, bus-only ticketing became available on Routes 1C, 7, and 19 on December 13, 2021. Based on the conclusion of a study led by Caltrans on Route 7, the SJJPA took action on July 21, 2023, to open all bus stop pairs to bus-only ticketing. On January 26, 2024, the SJJPA took action to enable bus-only ticketing on Route 3 for bus stop pairs with at least one end at Redding or Red Bluff, between Redding and Sacramento. **Table 28** lists the SB 742 implementation status by route.

Table 28: *SB 742 Implementation Status by Route*

Route	SB 742 Implementation Status	Notes
Route 1 Bakersfield – Los Angeles – San Diego	Not implemented on this route. Would require coordination with public/ private operators and SJJPA Board action to be implemented.	Coordination will be needed with Greyhound, Flixbus, and public operators along the route in advance of bringing a future action item to the SJJPA Board.
Route 1B Bakersfield – Los Angeles – Long Beach – San Pedro	Route truncated. Now this is part of Route 1.	This route was truncated at Los Angeles Union Station during the pandemic. SJJPA took action to continue the truncation of this route for the foreseeable future at their September 24, 2021, Board Meeting. Bus only ticketing would be done through action on Route 1.
Route 1C Bakersfield – Van Nuys – West LA	Implemented on approved bus stop pairs	Bus-only ticketing for selected bus stop pairs was approved at the March 27, 2020, SJJPA Board Meeting for this route. Subsequent to that approval, Route 1C was changed. Several stops were eliminated, and a new terminus stop at Santa Monica was added. On September 24, 2021, SJJPA Board approved bus-only ticketing for bus stop pairs to and from Santa Monica.
Route 3 Stockton – Sacramento – Chico – Redding	Currently only available between bus stop pairs with one end at either Redding or Red Bluff – between Redding and Sacramento (approved January 26, 2024). Working with BCAG to develop a partnership to allow bus only ticketing between Chico and Sacramento.	SJJPA staff are working in partnership with the Redding Area Bus Authority (RABA) and Shasta Regional Transportation Agency (SRTA) to bring new bus service (Route 5) between Redding and Sacramento along the I-5 corridor (that would include bus-only ticketing throughout this new route). The implementation of this new service is expected by the end of August 2026. Once this new intercity bus service is in operation, the Route 3 service will be truncated at Chico. SJJPA has been working with Butte Council of Governments (CAG) to study the possibility of Butte CAG providing bus service for San Joaquins passengers between Chico and Sacramento/Stockton that would include bus-only ticketing.

Route	SB 742 Implementation Status	Notes
Route 6 Stockton – Dublin/Pleasanton – Fremont – San Jose	Expected to be implemented upon coordination with public/ private operators and SJJPA Board action	Coordination will be needed with Greyhound, Flixbus, and public operators along the route in advance of bringing an action item to the SJJPA Board. Staff will coordinate with San Joaquin Regional Transit District (RTD) to determine whether a partnership can be developed to have RTD operate this route in the future.
Route 7 Martinez – Santa Rosa – Arcata	Implemented on all bus stop pairs	SJJPA staff coordinated with Greyhound and public operators along the route in advance of the SJJPA Board taking action on November 19, 2021. SJJPA worked with Caltrans, Greyhound, and local/regional agencies on an integration study for the Route 7 corridor that concluded that SJJPA should enable bus-only ticketing for all bus stop pairs. SJJPA took action on July 21, 2023, to open all bus stop pairs for bus-only ticketing.
Route 9 Bakersfield – Las Vegas	Route consolidated with Route 10	This route is currently in a revenue sharing interline service agreement between a private bus vendor and Amtrak. This route is now part of Route 10.
Route 10 Bakersfield – Santa Barbara	Implemented on all bus stop pairs (which includes the previous Route 9)	Bus only ticketing for selected bus stop pairs was approved for this route at the January 24, 2020, SJJPA Board Meeting. However, this route is now in a revenue sharing interline service agreement between the bus vendor and Amtrak, with the operations costs shifted to the bus vendor in exchange for a portion of bus revenue generated from the route. Bus-only ticketing is available on Route 10 through the interline agreement for all bus stop pairs.
Route 12 Bakersfield – Palmdale – Victorville	Route canceled	Bus-only ticketing was approved at the January 24, 2020, SJJPA Board Meeting; however, SJJPA took action May 29, 2020, to suspend this route at the beginning of the pandemic. On September 24, 2021, SJJPA took action to suspend this route for the foreseeable future because it was not a cost-effective route prior to the pandemic.
Routes 15, 15a, & 15b Merced – Yosemite	Implemented on all bus stop pairs	These routes are operated by the public local/regional provider Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS). Bus-only ticketing is available on these routes through YARTS and has been available for many years since it is operated by a public agency.
Route 18 Visalia – Hanford – San Luis Obispo	Implemented on all bus stop pairs	This route is currently operating with seasonal service between Hanford and San Luis Obispo only on key dates focused on Cal Poly San Luis Obispo students with bus-only ticketing available when operating. A partnership with KCAPTA for service between Visalia and Hanford also allows for bus-only ticketing on that publicly operated service (but it does not currently operate on Sundays and holidays). Bus-only ticketing has been available on this route for many years because its previous operator's service predated Amtrak.

Route	SB 742 Implementation Status	Notes
Route 19 Bakersfield – Pasadena – Riverside – San Bernardino	Implemented on approved bus stop pairs	SJJPA approved bus-only ticketing on Route 19 at the March 27, 2020, SJJPA Board Meeting. Pre-COVID, Route 19 operated a split route schedule that served two extensions beyond the core route between Bakersfield and San Bernardino. SJJPA took action on September 24, 2021, to continue the truncation of this route (to have all buses end in San Bernardino) for the foreseeable future. The extensions to the Palm Springs area and Hemet area contributed minor amounts of ridership and revenue to the overall route's performance and added considerable operational costs. For passengers who want to connect beyond San Bernardino, local and regional transit connections can be utilized to complete those trips.
Route 34 Stockton – Oakland – San Francisco	Route canceled	SJJPA took action to suspend this route at the May 29, 2020, Board Meeting during the beginning of the pandemic. SJJPA Board took action on September 24, 2021, to suspend this route for the foreseeable future because it was not a cost-effective route prior to the pandemic.
Route 40 Merced – Los Banos – San Jose	Implemented on all bus stop pairs	SJJPA approved bus-only ticketing on selected bus stop pairs at the March 27, 2020, SJJPA Board Meeting. This route was to be deployed in 2020 but has been delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Route 40 was deployed in FY 2025-2026 with bus-only ticketing allowed for all bus stop pairs.
Route 99 Emeryville – San Francisco	Not suitable for implementation	No changes to service are recommended at this time. Emeryville to SF market is served by AC Transit. This route is not well suited for bus-only tickets since the route is very short and already served by frequent/low-cost public transportation.

Appendix 1.2: Outreach Plan & Public Engagement Strategy

Outreach Plan Summary

The Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study outreach program will provide a comprehensive, multi-phased public engagement effort designed to gather input from riders, partner agencies, stakeholders, and corridor communities regarding the future optimization of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus network. Outreach activities will occur during two primary engagement periods: early June 2026 and August 2026, with both phases directing stakeholders and the public to a dedicated Thruway Bus Study webpage hosted on the San Joaquin Joint Powers SJJPA website. The outreach campaign will include coordinated social media promotions, e-mail marketing, onboard rider engagement, stakeholder briefings, and direct outreach to transit agencies, regional planning organizations, rail partners, and advocacy groups. The study webpage will serve as the central hub for project updates, surveys, study materials, meeting information, and opportunities for public comment. Outreach activities will be conducted in accordance with the SJJPA Public Participation Policy and will emphasize inclusive participation, multilingual accessibility, and broad regional coordination.

Outreach Objectives

1. Inform

Increase public and stakeholder awareness regarding the purpose, timeline, and goals of the Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study.

2. Engage

Gather operational, rider, and regional planning input from agencies, partners, riders, and corridor communities.

3. Coordinate

Align the study with concurrent statewide and regional mobility planning efforts, including intercity rail and bus integration initiatives.

4. Improve Customer Experience

Identify opportunities to improve:

- Schedule coordination

- Reliability
- Transfers
- Amenities
- Rider communications
- Multimodal connectivity

Outreach Phases

Outreach Phase	Timing	Focus
Phase 1 – Initial Outreach & Existing Conditions	Early June 2026	Introduce study, launch webpage, gather rider and stakeholder input
Phase 2 – Draft Recommendations & Alternatives	August 2026	Present preliminary findings and gather feedback on proposed improvements

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Study Webpage Strategy

Dedicated Study Webpage

A dedicated "Gold Runner Thruway Bus Study" webpage will be created on the SJJPA website to the June 2026 outreach launch.

Proposed Webpage Features

- Study overview and purpose
- Interactive corridor map
- Public surveys
- Timeline and milestones
- Public meeting information
- Stakeholder materials and presentations
- Contact information
- Study documents and updates

Website Placement & Visibility

SJJPA Website Placement

The study webpage will be prominently featured:

- On the SJJPA homepage rotating banner/hero image
- Within the “Projects & Planning” section
- Through homepage news articles and announcements
- Via featured “Latest Updates” links

Gold Runner Website Placement

The study webpage link will also be highlighted:

- On the Gold Runner homepage banner
- Through rider alerts and travel updates
- Within Thruway Bus service pages
- In digital rider newsletters and trip-planning communications

Public Outreach & Marketing Activities

Social Media Campaign

The Gold Runner marketing team and consultants will conduct coordinated outreach across:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- X/Twitter
- LinkedIn

Content Types

- Study launch announcements
- Rider survey promotions
- “Tell Us About Your Trip” campaigns
- Corridor spotlight posts
- Behind-the-scenes bus ride observations
- Public meeting reminders
- Service optimization education graphics

Social Media Objectives

- Drive traffic to the study webpage
- Increase survey participation

- Reach existing and future riders
- Engage underserved and rural communities

E-Mail Marketing & E-Blasts

Stakeholder E-Blast Distribution List

Local & Regional Stakeholders

- Chambers of Commerce
- Visitor bureaus and tourism agencies
- Economic development organizations
- Community-based organizations
- Universities and colleges
- Local elected officials
- City and county staff

Transportation & Planning Agencies

- San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council (SJV RPC)
- SJV RPC Passenger Rail, Transit & Land Use Working Group
- Network Integration Study Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) participants
- San Joaquin Valley Rail Committee
- North State Super Region Working Group
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs)

Rail & Transit Partners

- Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority
- LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency
- Amtrak
- California High-Speed Rail Authority
- California Department of Transportation
- California State Transportation Agency
- Local/regional transit operators

Private Operators & Advocacy Groups

- Greyhound Lines
- FlixBus
- Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada (RailPAC)
- Sacramento Advocates for Rail and Transit (SMART)

Onboard & Field Outreach

Rider Engagement Activities

SJJPA staff and/or Gold Runner marketing consultants with direct corridor experience will:

- Ride select Thruway routes (or have ridden routes recently)
- Conduct onboard observations
- Speak with riders
- Distribute surveys and promotional materials
- Assess transfer conditions and passenger experience

Potential Thruway Bus Routes for Ride-Alongs & Outreach

Recently Ridden / Previously Evaluated Routes

- Route 1: Bakersfield – Los Angeles – Santa Ana – Oceanside – San Diego
- Route 1C: Bakersfield – Burbank – Westwood/UCLA – Santa Monica
- Route 19: Bakersfield – Pasadena – Riverside – San Bernardino
- Route 10: Santa Barbara – Bakersfield – Barstow – Las Vegas
- Route 3: Stockton – Sacramento
- Route 6: San Jose – Santa Cruz corridor connections

Potential Future Ride-Alongs & Outreach Corridors

- Route 3: Stockton – Sacramento
- Route 6: San Jose – Santa Cruz corridor connections
- Route 7: Martinez - Arcadia
- Route 15B: Fresno – Yosemite corridor connections

- Route 18: (Seasonal) Hanford – San Luis Obispo
- Route 40: Merced – San Jose connectivity routes
- Route 99: Bay Area transfer corridors
- Route 19: Inland Empire connections
- Airport connection routes

Stakeholder Engagement Meetings

Planned Coordination Activities

- Technical working group meetings
- Stakeholder briefings
- MPO/RTPA coordination meetings
- Transit operator discussions
- Public comment opportunities
- Board and committee updates

Public Participation Policy Compliance

Outreach activities will comply with the SJJPA Public Participation Policy by emphasizing:

- Broad public access
- Transparency
- Multilingual communication
- Equity-focused outreach
- ADA accessibility
- Open public comment opportunities

Expected Outreach Deliverables

- Outreach summary reports
- Rider survey results
- Stakeholder contact database
- Meeting summaries
- Social media analytics
- Public comment logs
- Final outreach findings memorandum

Appendix 2.1: Train Connections to Thruway Bus Route 1 and 3

Route 1 serves multiple connections to the following Gold Runner trains:

NB Buses 5713 & 5813 connect to	Gold Runner train 713 at 8:58AM
NB Buses 5715 & 5815 connect to	Gold Runner train 715 at 10:58AM
NB Buses 5717 & 5817 connect to	Gold Runner train 717 at 2:02PM
NB Buses 5719 & 5819 connect to	Gold Runner train 719 at 4:02PM
SB Buses 5702 & 5802 connect from	Gold Runner train 702 at 12:41PM
SB Buses 5710 & 5810 connect from	Gold Runner train 710 at 2:39PM
SB Buses 5712 & 5812 connect from	Gold Runner train 712 at 4:39PM

Route 3 serves multiple connections to the following Gold Runner trains:

NB Buses 3715 & 3815 connect to	Gold Runner train 715 at 3:19PM in Stockton
SB Buses 3710 & 3810 connect to	Gold Runner train 710 at 10:05AM in Stockton

Appendix 2.2: Cost Recovery Data

Cost recovery by route from FY 17 to FY 25:

Route 1

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$9,736,951.00	$3,135,909.00	$6,601,042.00	310%
17-18	$8,557,377.00	$4,243,720.00	$4,313,657.00	202%
21-22	$5,872,466.00	$2,890,109.00	$2,982,357.00	203%
24-25	$12,691,271.00	$6,803,509.00	$5,887,762.00	187%

Route 1C

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$1,529,214.00	$1,483,384.00	$45,830.00	103%
17-18	$1,290,350.00	$1,758,691.00	$(468,341.00)	73%
21-22	$507,224.00	$903,871.00	$(396,647.00)	56%
24-25	$1,343,055.00	$1,217,738.00	$125,316.00	110%

Route 3

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$5,589,502.00	$2,235,279.00	$3,354,223.00	250%
17-18	$5,017,204.00	$2,618,838.00	$2,398,366.00	192%
21-22	$2,690,751.00	$1,652,505.00	$1,038,246.00	163%
24-25	$6,705,183.00	$3,445,185.00	$3,259,998.00	195%

Route 6

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$1,220,592.00	$1,104,748.00	$115,844.00	110%
17-18	$1,164,072.00	$1,280,825.00	$(116,753.00)	91%
21-22	$400,639.00	$277,292.00	$123,347.00	144%
24-25	$1,055,169.00	$683,677.00	$371,491.00	154%

Route 7

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$2,643,212.00	$1,949,426.00	$693,786.00	136%
17-18	$2,289,601.00	$2,310,428.00	$(20,827.00)	99%
21-22	$718,302.00	$1,174,546.00	$(456,244.00)	61%
24-25	$1,971,053.00	$3,246,049.00	$(1,274,996.00)	61%

Route 10

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$1,119,632.00	$1,196,949.00	$(77,317.00)	94%
17-18	$984,346.00	$1,269,862.00	$(285,516.00)	78%
21-22	$134,245.00	-	$134,245.00	-
24-25	$745,348.00	$123,575	$621,773.00	603%

Route 15

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$340,584.00	$380,236.00	$(39,652.00)	90%
17-18	$221,406.00	$432,495.00	$(211,089.00)	51%
21-22	$94,032.00	$137,873.00	$(43,841.00)	68%
24-25	$198,271.00	$406,457.00	$(208,186.00)	49%

Route 18

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$715,252.00	$966,466.00	$(251,214.00)	74%
17-18	$729,140.00	$970,293.00	$(241,153.00)	75%
21-22	$63,503.00	-	$20,344.00	-
24-25	$193,679.00	$85,399	$108,280.00	227%

Route 19

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$2,152,807.00	$2,300,087.00	$(147,280.00)	94%
17-18	$1,977,263.00	$2,849,079.00	$(871,816.00)	69%
21-22	$856,901.00	$1,234,783.00	$(377,882.00)	69%

24-25	$2,107,336.00	$1,743,350.00	$363,987.00	121%

Route 99

FY	Revenue	Expense	Net	Recovery Ratio
16-17	$1,928,779.00	$723,752.00	$1,205,027.00	266%
17-18	$1,657,456.00	$723,311.00	$934,145.00	229%
21-22	$1,107,429.00	$275,537.00	$831,892.00	402%
24-25	$2,242,054.00	$544,557.00	$1,697,497.00	412%

Amtrak Cost Recovery Dataset for Gold Runner Thruway Bus: 2018

Thruway Route Calif. Timetable Number	AFR	Amtrak Train Route Assignment	Typical Thruway Route Endpoints	Type of Service	(a) Bus Riders (Ticket Lift Closed Data)	(b) Multiride Ticket Scans on Thruway	(a)+(b) Thruway Bus RouteTotal Riders	Ticketed Riders: Pacific Surfliner (AFR 35)	Ticketed Riders: Capitol Corridor (AFR 37)	Ticketed Riders: San Joaquins (AFR 39)	Ticketed Riders: All Other Network Trains	Total Ticketed Amtrak Train Riders Connected (including Multirides)	Thruway Tickets: Ticket Lift Close Ticket Revenue	Multiride Revenue Estimate @ Factor of Regular-Price Tickets	Connecting Ticket Revenue: Pacific Surfliner (AFR 35)	Connecting Ticket Revenue: Capitol Corridor (AFR 37)	Connecting Ticket Revenue: San Joaquins (AFR 39)	Ticket Revenue: California System Total	Connecting Ticket Revenue: All Other Network Trains (AFR 00-69 except 35, 37, 39)	Bus Contract Payments	Other CC_6512 Costs	PRIIA 209 Shared Support Services	Total Costs	Net California Result	Cost Recovery Ratio (Revenue / Cost)
Gold Runner Bus Routes																									
6	71	San Joaquins	Stockton - San Jose	Dedicated	37,531	985	38,516	607	190	38,934	654	41,370	$489,584	$12,560	$9,520	$2,885	$663,087	$1,177,636	$71,327	$1,166,675	$8,742	$38,201	$1,213,618	($35,982)	97%
7	71	San Joaquins	Martinez - Arcata	Dedicated	50,640	196	50,836	1,358	13,484	35,886	3,740	54,664	$1,202,312	$3,233	$23,476	$241,837	$850,325	$2,321,183	$455,618	$2,104,517	$15,769	$68,909	$2,189,196	$131,987	106%
9	71	San Joaquins	Bakersfield - Las Vegas, NV	Dedicated	14,082	20	14,102	91	91	14,397	788	15,387	$501,718	$362	$879	$583	$350,330	$853,872	$71,464	$787,172	$5,898	$25,775	$818,845	$35,027	104%
10	71	San Joaquins	Bakersfield - Santa Barbara	Dedicated	23,978	2	23,980	381	254	24,169	471	25,277	$426,827	$34	$5,965	$3,919	$556,942	$993,687	$39,133	$1,156,689	$8,667	$37,874	$1,203,231	($209,544)	83%
12	71	San Joaquins	Bakersfield - Victorville	Dedicated	12,792	21	12,813	44	62	13,383	408	13,918	$182,429	$420	$669	$782	$358,281	$542,581	$30,502	$820,263	$6,146	$26,858	$853,267	($310,686)	64%
19	71	San Joaquins	Bakersfield - Indio	Dedicated	42,174	213	42,387	688	152	43,106	1,300	45,459	$1,006,598	$3,562	$11,284	$1,668	$966,811	$1,989,922	$106,943	$2,595,163	$19,446	$84,975	$2,699,583	($709,661)	74%
34	71	San Joaquins	Stockton - San Francisco	Dedicated	7,981	423	8,404	571	132	10,419	177	11,722	$75,281	$7,513	$8,617	$1,673	$253,102	$346,186	$15,075	$356,850	$2,674	$11,685	$371,208	($25,022)	93%
56	71	San Joaquins	San Jose - Stockton	Commuter Rail	3,229	39	3,268	118	21	4,659	56	4,893	$42,731	$451	$1,599	$461	$71,872	$117,113	$3,573	$74,344	$557	$2,434	$77,335	$39,778	151%
15A	71	San Joaquins	Merced - Yosemite	Mixed Mode	6,547	-	6,547	215	52	8,919	501	9,687	$65,211	$0	$1,856	$203	$171,926	$239,196	$54,727	$393,950	$2,952	$12,899	$409,801	($170,605)	58%
15B	71	San Joaquins	Fresno - Yosemite	Mixed Mode	208	-	208	5	2	152	13	172	$2,599	$0	$0	$19	$2,295	$4,913	$1,650	$2,629	$20	$86	$2,734	$2,178	180%
18-A	71	San Joaquins	Hanford - Santa Maria	Dedicated	21,564	595	22,159	272	308	20,258	1,194	22,627	$340,286	$5,538	$7,095	$6,278	$245,237	$604,434	$115,399	$770,883	$5,776	$25,241	$801,900	($197,466)	75%
18-B	71	San Joaquins	Hanford - Visalia	Dedicated	5,596	-	5,596	224	17	5,269	309	5,819	$25,710	$0	$3,063	$218	$97,328	$126,319	$27,534	$112,936	$846	$3,698	$117,480	$8,839	108%
1A	71	San Joaquins	Bakersfield - Los Angeles - San Diego	Dedicated	168,122	2,695	170,817	78,288	1,131	194,542	31,128	307,784	$3,079,708	$40,938	$1,371,652	$13,072	$4,164,001	$8,669,370	$3,691,397	$3,820,073	$28,624	$125,083	$3,973,780	$4,695,590	218%
1B	71	San Joaquins	Bakersfield - Los Angeles - San Pedro	Dedicated	72,679	660	73,339	1,411	31	12,193	697	14,992	$1,226,075	$12,082	$37,836	$346	$294,629	$1,570,968	$89,475	$1,665,240	$12,478	$54,526	$1,732,244	($161,275)	91%
1C	71	San Joaquins	Bakersfield - Los Angeles - Torrance	Dedicated	35,706	247	35,953	3,512	91	34,128	511	38,489	$500,568	$3,927	$89,597	$1,047	$709,116	$1,304,254	$45,878	$1,610,867	$12,070	$52,745	$1,675,683	($371,429)	78%
3A	71	San Joaquins	Stockton - Sacramento - Redding	Dedicated	136,863	4,988	141,851	4,194	18,669	130,840	20,708	179,399	$1,891,118	$75,650	$65,745	$413,031	$2,629,376	$5,074,920	$2,212,215	$2,385,441	$17,874	$78,108	$2,481,424	$2,593,497	205%
99B	71	San Joaquins	Emeryville - San Francisco	Dedicated	55,377	3,496	58,873	834	3,326	58,570	2,038	68,264	$188,855	$60,517	$12,045	$84,179	$1,351,612	$1,697,208	$276,078	$635,863	$4,765	$20,820	$661,448	$1,035,761	257%
Gold Runner Total					**695,069**	**14,580**	**709,649**	**84,560**	**36,184**	**568,784**	**54,781**	**758,889**	**$11,247,609**	**$226,786**	**$1,525,991**	**$746,285**	**$11,522,531**	**$25,269,202**	**$6,184,660**	**$20,459,554**	**$153,306**	**$669,918**	**$21,282,778**	**$3,986,425**	**119%**

Amtrak Cost Recovery Dataset for Gold Runner Thruway Bus: 2025

Thruway Routes	Route Type	Thruway Route One-way & Multi-ride Tickets	Riders - Gold Runner Trains	Riders - Capitol Corridor Trains	Riders - Pacific Surfliner Trains	Riders - Other Connecting Trains	Riders - Total All Trains	Total California System Revenue	Revenue - Other Connecting Trains	Net Operating Cost	Net Incremental Impact	Cost Recovery Ratio
Gold Runner Bus Routes												
California Thruway 01A (Fresno - Bakersfield - Los Angeles - Santa Ana - San Diego)	Dedicated	116,976	118,992	864	44,101	19,947	183,904	$6,763,078	$3,160,988	$4,148,526	$2,614,552	163%
California Thruway 01B (Bakersfield - Los Angeles)	Dedicated	104,794	132,727	384	18,071	11,299	162,481	$5,928,193	$1,817,182	$2,654,983	$3,273,210	223%
California Thruway 01C(Bakersfield - Van Nuys - Santa Monica)	Dedicated	33,248	29,656	103	995	530	31,284	$1,343,055	$66,336	$1,217,738	$125,316	110%
California Thruway 03A (Stockton - Sacramento - Chico)	Dedicated	159,008	183,285	41,219	2,261	22,656	249,421	$6,705,183	$2,865,977	$3,445,185	$3,259,998	195%
California Thruway 03R (Chico - Redding)	Dedicated	6,533	4,835	1,149	331	123	6,438	$193,035	$7,267	$426,480	($233,445)	45%
California Thruway 06 (Stockton - San Jose [buses, not ACE trains])	Dedicated	27,358	34,639	158	173	691	35,661	$1,055,169	$95,976	$683,677	$371,491	154%
California Thruway 07 (Martinez - Eureka / McKinleyville)	Dedicated	46,467	27,917	13,579	624	4,090	46,210	$1,971,053	$615,019	$3,246,049	($1,274,996)	61%
California Thruway 10 (Bakersfield - Santa Barbara - Las Vegas)	Revenue Guarantee	32,382	24,808	170	1,179	3,105	29,262	$745,348	$444,944	$123,575	$621,773	603%
California Thruway 15A (Merced - Yosemite)	Interline	4,066	6,206	13	20	325	6,564	$198,271	$40,878	$406,457	($208,186)	49%
California Thruway 18-A (Hanford Santa Maria)	Revenue Guarantee	10,390	9,070	79	400	350	9,899	$193,679	$33,136	$85,399	$108,280	227%
California Thruway 19 (Bakersfield - San Bernardino)	Dedicated	41,390	40,719	101	98	956	41,874	$2,107,336	$86,284	$1,743,350	$363,987	121%
California Thruway 34 (Stockton - San Francisco)	Dedicated	204	153	0	1	223	377	$14,639	$33,252	$16,419	($1,781)	89%
California Thruway 56 (Stockton - San Jose [ACE trains, not buses])	Interline	9,564	1,601	497	144	368	2,610	$149,957	$22,472	$79,965	$69,992	188%
California Thruway 99B (Emeryville / Oakland - San Francisco)	Dedicated	47,564	61,377	9,124	681	7,284	78,466	$2,242,054	$1,450,893	$544,557	$1,697,497	412%
California Thruway Special Event Shuttle - Gold Runner (Merced-Castle Air Museum)	Dedicated	102	210	0	0	0	210	$2,252	$ -		$2,252	
Consolidated SJJPA Routes		***640,046***	***449,886***	***43,590***	***50,840***	***51,405***	***595,721***	***$22,439,878***	***$7,785,270***	***$18,822,361***	***$3,617,517***	***119%***