Inyo County Local Transportation Commission

TDA Triennial Performance Audit of the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority FY 2022/23 - FY 2024/25

FINAL REPORT
JUNE 2026

moore & associates
CELEBRATING 35 YEARS

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Table of Exhibits

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Chapter 1 | Executive Summary

In 2025, the Inyo County Local Transportation Commission (ICLTC) selected Moore & Associates, Inc., to prepare Triennial Performance Audits of itself as the RTPA and the single transit operator to which it allocates State of California Transportation Development Act funding.

The California Public Utilities Code requires all recipients of Transit Development Act (TDA) Article 4 funding to undergo an independent performance audit on a three-year cycle in order to maintain funding eligibility. Although not mandatory, audits of Article 8 funding recipients are encouraged.

The Triennial Performance Audit is designed to be an independent and objective evaluation of the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) as a public transit operator, providing operator management with information on the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of its programs across the prior three fiscal years. In addition to assuring legislative and governing bodies (as well as the public) that resources are being economically and efficiently utilized, the Triennial Performance Audit fulfills the requirement of PUC Section 99246(a) that the RTPA designate an entity other than itself to conduct a performance audit of the activities of each operator to whom it allocates funds.

This chapter summarizes key findings and recommendations developed during the Triennial Performance Audit (TPA) of the ESTA's public transit program for the period:

- Fiscal Year 2022/23,
- Fiscal Year 2023/24, and
- Fiscal Year 2024/25.

The Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) provides a variety of bus services, including deviated fixed routes, local in-town dial-a-ride services, multiple town-to-town services throughout the Highway 395 and Highway 6 corridors, and interregional service (CREST) extending from Reno, Nevada, to Lancaster, California, with connections to the Los Angeles area. The ESTA operates four routes along Highway 395 and three community routes. Some stops are on-call stops that require 24-hour advance notice. In partnership with the Town of Mammoth Lakes, the ETSA operates two free year-round bus service throughout Mammoth Lakes called the Purple Route and the Teal Route. Both lines operates daily from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Additionally, the ESTA offers seasonal routes. In the summer, the ESTA operates two trolleys and a shuttle service in the Mammoth Lakes area. In the winter, additional fixed routes and two night trolleys are operated.

This performance audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that the audit team plans and performs the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for its findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives. Moore & Associates, Inc. believes the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for its findings and conclusions.

This audit was also conducted in accordance with the processes established by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), as outlined in the *Performance Audit Guidebook for Transit Operators and Regional Transportation Planning Entities*.

The Triennial Performance Audit includes five elements:

- Compliance requirements,
- Prior recommendations,
- Analysis of program data reporting,
- Performance Audit, and
- Functional review.

Test of Compliance

Based on discussions with ESTA staff, analysis of program performance, and an audit of program compliance and function, the auditors present no compliance findings.

Status of Prior Recommendations

The prior audit – completed in June 2023 by Moore & Associates, Inc. for the three fiscal years ending June 30, 2022 – included two recommendations:

1. The ESTA should enhance its service information program to ensure updated service brochures are available throughout the community and old service brochures are removed from distribution locations.
   Status: Implemented.

2. The ESTA should consider developing formal marketing and information technology plans as supplements to its recently completed Short Range Transit Plan.
   Status: Implemented.

Findings and Recommendations

Based on discussions with ESTA staff, analysis of program performance, and a review of program compliance and function, the audit team submits no findings related to TDA compliance for the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority.

Recommendations are intended to assist in bringing the operator into compliance with the requirements and standards of the TDA as well as address non-compliance-related issues, challenges, or opportunities observed during the site visit and functional review. The following recommendations are presented for ESTA.

Exhibit 1.1 Summary of Audit Recommendations

Recommendations		Importance	Timeline
1	Evaluate driver shifts to accommodate those who cannot or do not want to work 10- to 12-hour shifts.	Medium	FY 2026/27
2	Begin tracking the driver attrition rate as part of the annual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).	Medium	Ongoing
3	Work toward strengthening ESTA's maintenance program in Bishop.	Medium	Ongoing
4	Consider restructuring the organizational chart to better accommodate growth and provide better support for supervisors and drivers.	High	FY 2026/27

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Chapter 2 | Audit Scope and Methodology

The Triennial Performance Audit (TPA) of the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority public transit program covers the three-year period ending June 30, 2025. The California Public Utilities Code requires all recipients of Transit Development Act (TDA) funding to complete an independent review on a three-year cycle in order to maintain funding eligibility.

In 2025, the Inyo County Local Transportation Commission (LTC) selected Moore & Associates, Inc., to prepare Triennial Performance Audits of itself as the RTPA and the single transit operator to which it allocates TDA funding. Moore & Associates, Inc. is a consulting firm specializing in public transportation, including audits of non-TDA Article 4 recipients. Selection of Moore & Associates, Inc. followed a competitive procurement process.

The Triennial Performance Audit is designed to be an independent and objective evaluation of the ESTA as a public transit operator. Direct benefits of a Triennial Performance Audit include providing operator management with information on the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of its programs across the prior three years; helpful insight for use in future planning; and assuring legislative and governing bodies (as well as the public) that resources are being economically and efficiently utilized. Finally, the Triennial Performance Audit fulfills the requirement of PUC Section 99246(a) that the RTPA designate an entity other than itself to conduct a performance audit of the activities of each operator to whom it allocates funds.

This performance audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that the audit team plans and performs the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for its findings and conclusions based on the audit objectives. The auditors believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions.

The audit was also conducted in accordance with the processes established by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), as outlined in the *Performance Audit Guidebook for Transit Operators and Regional Transportation Planning Entities*, as well as *Government Auditing Standards* published by the U.S. Comptroller General.

Objectives

A Triennial Performance Audit (TPA) has four primary objectives:

1. Assess compliance with TDA regulations;
2. Review improvements subsequently implemented as well as progress toward adopted goals;
3. Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the transit operator; and
4. Provide sound, constructive recommendations for improving the efficiency and functionality of the transit operator.

Scope

The TPA is a systematic review of performance evaluating the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of the transit operator. The audit of the ESTA included six tasks:

1. A review of compliance with TDA requirements and regulations.
2. A review of the status of recommendations included in the prior Triennial Performance Audit.
3. A verification of the methodology for calculating performance indicators including the following activities:
    - Assessment of internal controls,
    - Test of data collection methods,
    - Calculation of performance indicators, and
    - Evaluation of performance.
4. Comparison of data reporting practices:
    - Internal reports,
    - State Controller Reports, and
    - National Transit Database.
5. Examination of the following functions:
    - General management and organization;
    - Service planning;
    - Administration;
    - Marketing and public information;
    - Scheduling, dispatching, and operations;
    - Personnel management and training; and
    - Maintenance.
6. Conclusions and recommendations to address opportunities for improvement based upon analysis of the information collected and the audit of the transit operator's major functions.

Methodology

The methodology for the Triennial Performance Audit of the ESTA included thorough review of documents relevant to the scope of the audit, as well as information contained on the ESTA's website. The documents reviewed included the following (spanning the full three-year period):

- Monthly performance reports;
- State Controller Reports;
- Annual budgets;
- TDA fiscal audits;
- Transit marketing collateral;
- TDA claims;
- Fleet inventory;
- Preventive maintenance schedules and forms;
- California Highway Patrol Terminal Inspection reports;
- National Transit Database reports;

- Accident/road call logs; and
- Organizational chart.

The methodology for this audit included a virtual site visit with ESTA representatives on March 30, 2023. The audit team met with Phil Moores (Executive Director), Dawn Vidal (Administration Manager), and Jarett Chytka (Operations Supervisor, Bishop), and reviewed materials germane to the triennial audit.

This report is comprised of eight chapters divided into three sections:

1. Executive Summary: A summary of the key findings and recommendations developed during the Triennial Performance Audit process.
2. TPA Scope and Methodology: Methodology of the review and pertinent background information.
3. TPA Results: In-depth discussion of findings surrounding each of the subsequent elements of the audit:
    - Compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements,
    - Status of prior recommendations,
    - Consistency among reported data,
    - Performance measures and trends,
    - Functional review, and
    - Findings and recommendations.

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Chapter 3 | Program Compliance

This section examines the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority's compliance with the Transportation Development Act as well as relevant sections of the California Code of Regulations. An annual certified fiscal audit confirms TDA funds were apportioned in conformance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations. The ESTA considers full use of funds under California Code of Regulations (CCR) 6754(a) as referring to operating funds but not capital funds. The TPA findings and related comments are delineated in Exhibit 3.1.

Status of compliance items was determined through discussions with ESTA staff as well as an inspection of relevant documents including the fiscal audits for each year of the triennium, State Controller annual filings, California Highway Patrol terminal inspections, annual operating budgets, year-end performance reports, and other compliance-related documentation.

No compliance issues were identified for ESTA.

Developments Occurring During the Audit Period

For many transit operators in California, recent years have reflected both the acute impacts of and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of FY 2024/25 – even earlier in some cases – most operators had exhausted federal relief funds, even though penalties for non-compliance with farebox recovery ratios continued to be waived. However, the receipt of federal relief funds complicated matters, as they impacted the amount of TDA funding operators were eligible to receive and, in some cases, resulted in over-payments that had to be resolved after the funds were spent. Many operators, even more than five years after the onset of the pandemic, still struggle with ridership that has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.

California Assembly Bill 90, signed into law on June 29, 2020, provided temporary regulatory relief for transit operators required to conform with Transportation Development Act (TDA) farebox recovery ratio thresholds in FY 2019/20 and FY 2020/21. California Assembly Bill 149, signed into law on July 16, 2021, provided additional regulatory relief by extending the provisions of AB 90 through FY 2022/23 and adjusting definitions of eligible revenues and operating costs. Most recently, California Senate Bill 125, signed into law on July 10, 2023, extended protections provided via earlier legislation through FY 2025/26. While this means the audit period covered by this audit is fully exempt from penalties for non-compliance with the farebox recovery ratio, for example, it also means that transit operators may need to be in compliance by the second year of the next audit period.

While the ability to maintain state mandates and performance measures is important, these measures enabled transit operators to adjust to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing to receive their full allocations of funding under the TDA.

Together, these three pieces of legislation include the following additional provisions specific to transit operator TDA funding under Article 4:

- Prohibits the imposition of the TDA revenue penalty on an operator that did not maintain the required ratio of fare revenues to operating cost from FY 2019/20 through FY 2025/26.

- Expands the definition of "local funds" to enable the use of federal funding to supplement fare revenues and allows operators to calculate free and reduced fares at their actual value.
- Adjusts the definition of operating cost to exclude the cost of ADA paratransit services, demand-response and micro-transit services designed to extend access to service, ticketing/payment systems, security, some pension costs, and some planning costs.
- Allows operators to use STA funds as needed to keep transit service levels from being reduced or eliminated through FY 2025/26.

SB 125 also called for the establishment of the Transit Transformation Task Force to develop policy recommendations aimed at increasing transit ridership and improving the customer experience statewide. In the more than 50 years since the adoption of the Transportation Development Act (TDA), California's public transportation landscape has evolved significantly. Many transit operators have struggled to meet the farebox recovery ratio requirement, raising questions about whether it remains an appropriate or effective measure of TDA compliance.

In 2018, the chairs of California's legislative transportation committees asked the California Transit Association to convene a policy task force to examine the TDA. That effort produced a draft framework for reform in early 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Transit Transformation Task Force released its report in December 2025. While the report includes several recommendations to modernize the TDA – including identifying the farebox recovery ratio and operating cost per hour requirements as outdated and recommending that farebox recovery and cost-inflation penalties be replaced – these proposals represent an initial step rather than immediate policy changes. Achieving the necessary funding and statutory reforms will require sustained advocacy over the coming years.

Exhibit 3.1 Transit Development Act Compliance Requirements

Compliance Element	Reference	Compliance	Comments
State Controller Reports submitted on time.	PUC 99243	In compliance	FY 2022/23: January 30, 2024 FY 2023/24: January 14, 2025 FY 2024/25: January 30, 2026
Fiscal and compliance audits submitted within 180 days following the end of the fiscal year (or with up to 90-day extension).	PUC 99245	In compliance	FY 2022/23: January 19, 2024 FY 2023/24: December 20, 2024 FY 2024/25: January 30, 2026
Operator's terminal rated as satisfactory by CHP within the 13 months prior to each TDA claim.	PUC 99251 B	In compliance	Bishop November 2-3, 2022 November 15-16, 2023 November 15, 2024 November 21, 2025 Mammoth September 29, 2022 October 12, 2023 October 2-3, 2024 October 9, 2025 Lone Pine July 26 & 28, 2022 July 25 & 28, 2023 July 30, 2024 July 21, 2025 Walker July 26, 2022 July 25, 2023 July 30, 2024 July 22, 2025
Operator's claim for TDA funds submitted in compliance with rules and regulations adopted by the RTPA.	PUC 99261	In compliance	
If operator serves urbanized and non-urbanized areas, it has maintained a ratio of fare revenues to operating costs at least equal to the ratio determined by the rules and regulations adopted by the RTPA.	PUC 99270.1	Not applicable	
An operator receiving allocations under Article 8(c) may be subject to regional, countywide, or subarea performance criteria, local match requirements, or fare recovery ratios adopted by resolution of the RTPA.	PUC 99405	Not applicable	
The operator's definitions of performance measures are consistent with the Public Utilities Code Section 99247.	PUC 99247	In compliance	
The operator does not routinely staff with two or more persons a vehicle for public transportation purposes designed to be operated by one person.	PUC 99264	In compliance	

Compliance Element	Reference	Compliance	Comments
The operator's operating budget has not increased by more than 15% over the preceding year, nor is there a substantial increase or decrease in the scope of operations or capital budget provisions for major new fixed facilities unless the operator has reasonably supported and substantiated the change(s).	PUC 99266	In compliance	FY 2022/23: +12.73% FY 2023/24: +6.62% FY 2024/25: +0.85% *Source: FY 2023 and FY 2024 TDA claims; FY 2025 ESTA budget.*
If the operator serves an urbanized area, it has maintained a ratio of fare revenues to operating cost at least equal to one-fifth (20 percent).	PUC 99268.2, 99268.4, 99268.1	Not applicable	
If the operator serves a rural area, it has maintained a ratio of fare revenues to operating cost at least equal to one-tenth (10 percent).	PUC 99268.2, 99268.4, 99268.5	In compliance	FY 2022/23: 32.78% (45.50%) FY 2023/24: 32.25% (47.00%) FY 2024/25: 47.66% *Source: Audited financial statements, FY 2023-FY 2025*
For a claimant that provides only services to elderly and handicapped persons, the ratio of fare revenues to operating cost shall be at least 10 percent.	PUC 99268.5, CCR 6633.5	Not applicable	
If the operator has utilized the exemption from the farebox recovery requirement for extension of services, it shall submit a report on the service to the RTPA within 90 days of the end of the first year of implementation.	PUC 99268.8, CCR 6633.8	Not applicable	
The current cost of the operator's retirement system is fully funded with respect to the officers and employees of its public transportation system, or the operator is implementing a plan approved by the RTPA, which will fully fund the retirement system for 40 years.	PUC 99271	In compliance	
An operator claiming funds under Article 4.5 (CTSA) is in compliance with PUC 99268.3, 99268.4, 99268.5, or 99268.9, or regional, countywide, or county subarea performance criteria, local match requirements, or fare recovery ratios adopted by the RTPA.	PUC 99275.5	Not applicable	
If the operator receives State Transit Assistance funds, the operator makes full use of funds available to it under the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964 before TDA claims are granted.	CCR 6754 (a) (3)	In compliance	

Compliance Element	Reference	Compliance	Comments
In order to use State Transit Assistance funds for operating assistance, the operator's total operating cost per revenue hour does not exceed the sum of the preceding year's total plus an amount equal to the product of the percentage change in the CPI for the same period multiplied by the preceding year's total operating cost per revenue hour. An operator may qualify based on the preceding year's operating cost per revenue hour or the average of the three prior years. If an operator does not meet these qualifying tests, the operator may only use STA funds for operating purposes according to a sliding scale.	PUC 99314.6	In compliance	Eligibility to use STA fund for operating is evaluated as part of the TDA claim. ESTA has reserved STA funds for capital purposes when it does not meet the requirement. This requirement was waived during the audit period under AB 149 and SB 125.
A transit claimant is precluded from receiving monies from the Local Transportation Fund and the State Transit Assistance Fund in an amount which exceeds the claimant's capital and operating costs less the actual amount of fares received, the amount of local support required to meet the fare ratio, the amount of federal operating assistance, and the amount received during the year from a city or county to which the operator has provided services beyond its boundaries.	CCR 6634	In compliance	

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Chapter 4 | Prior Recommendations

This section reviews and evaluates the implementation of prior Triennial Performance Audit recommendations. This objective assessment provides assurance the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority has made quantifiable progress toward improving both the efficiency and effectiveness of its public transit program.

The prior audit – completed in June 2023 by Moore & Associates, Inc. for the three fiscal years ending June 30, 2022 – included two recommendations:

1. The ESTA should enhance its service information program to ensure updated service brochures are available throughout the community and old service brochures are removed from distribution locations.

   Discussion: The prior auditor recommended the ESTA develop a more robust service information distribution program that ensures only current service information is maintained at distribution locations. Points of contact at each distribution location should be identified, and when new brochures are available, all old materials should be removed and destroyed. The ESTA may also wish to engage a graphic designer to update the design of the brochure.

   Progress: Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) worked with a graphic designer to update its brochures, resulting in a more consistent, professional, and easier-to-read format. These brochures are available online and through community partners. Additionally, passengers can visit the "Routes & Schedule" page of the ESTA website to access detailed transit information. ESTA continues to expand its network of business and government partners that distribute printed guides; staff check in with these partners quarterly to restock supplies as needed, and partners may also request additional materials when inventories run low. Other marketing materials have been developed to complement the updated brochure design. Furthermore, passengers can find information on obtaining real-time route updates by visiting the "Real-Time Bus Info" page on the ESTA website.

   Most requests for new brochures are because the community partners have run out of materials. As such, there are no old brochures to collect. Whenever ESTA staff deliver brochures to a location, they are sure to remove any old brochures so that only the new ones remain available.

   Status: Implemented.

2. The ESTA should consider developing formal marketing and information technology plans as supplements to its recently completed Short Range Transit Plan.

   Discussion: A formal marketing plan can maximize the value of dollars set aside for marketing by proactively planning activities and strategies. The prior auditor also recommended ESTA consider an information technology plan, which could overlap with the marketing plan in several areas. Both could be developed as a supplement to the recently completed Short Range Transit Plan and would not necessarily require a completely new planning effort. The prior auditor noted development of the plans would benefit the ESTA by recommending strategies and tactics (including costs) that can be budgeted annually or as special projects, especially if additional funding is required for implementation.

Progress: Since initiating its updated marketing approach, ESTA worked closely with a graphic designer to create greater consistency in its messaging and overall brand identity. This effort began with the development of a new logo that reflects the natural beauty of the region while presenting a more modern look. The updated theme was carried across newly wrapped vehicles, advertising materials, and other marketing pieces, resulting in a cohesive visual identity that resonates with passengers. Leadership continues to meet regularly to develop strategic communication plans, focusing on what information should be shared with the public and the most effective methods for distribution. ESTA has also expanded its outreach through partnerships with organizations such as Town of Mammoth Lakes, Mule Days Association, Visitor's Center, Latino Leaders, Senior Center, Cerro Coso Community College, Grocery Outlet, and The Salvation Army to better reach diverse populations. Educational initiatives have also been introduced, including a youth program that teaches preschool and grade school students, as well as ADA participants, about the benefits of public transit. In addition, partnerships aimed at addressing food insecurity further strengthen ESTA's community impact.

In the area of information technology, ESTA has implemented several upgrades to improve the experience for passengers, administrative staff, and drivers. The agency transitioned to a new website provider, Streamline, which specializes in special district websites, resulting in a more intuitive platform that is easier to update and has received positive user feedback. A significant improvement has been the implementation of a reservation system for Route 395 corridor services, allowing passengers to make real-time reservations, giving staff better insight into ridership trends, and enabling more efficient service planning. This system has also increased prepaid trips by approximately 80 percent, reducing boarding times and helping drivers stay on schedule. Additionally, ESTA launched the Spare platform for its Bishop DART service, replacing the previous system and allowing passengers to book trips directly. Expansion to other service areas is currently underway. Safety improvements include the installation of cameras on all buses and security systems at both the Bishop and Mammoth hubs, enhancing safety for passengers and employees.

ESTA is also working with Carmichael Business Technology to convert legacy Microsoft Access databases to a more robust SQL-based system, which will improve reliability and support capabilities. Looking ahead, ESTA plans to implement a contactless payment system following the full rollout of the Spare platform, further modernizing the passenger experience.

Status: Implemented.

Chapter 5 | Data Reporting Analysis

An important aspect of the Triennial Performance Audit process is assessing how effectively and consistently the transit operator reports performance statistics to local, state, and federal agencies. Often as a condition of receipt of funding, an operator must collect, manage, and report data to different entities. Ensuring such data are consistent can be challenging given the differing definitions employed by different agencies as well as the varying reporting timeframes. This chapter examines the consistency of performance data reported by the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority both internally as well as to outside entities during the audit period.

- **Operating cost:** Operating costs reported in the TDA audit and to the State Controller are fully consistent. The amount reported to the NTD was lower than that reported elsewhere in FY 2022/23 and FY 2023/24, but higher in FY 2024/25.

- **Fare Revenue:** Variances in fare revenue between the NTD reports and other reports is due primarily to differences in what revenues are reported. ESTA includes marketing and Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) revenues in its definition of fare revenues for the TDA fiscal audit and State Controller Reports. The amount reported to the NTD was significantly lower each year, as the marketing and contracted revenues are reported separately as “Directly Generated Funds” rather than fare revenue. However, once the contract revenues are added to the fare revenues, those figures exhibit much smaller variances.

- **Vehicle Service Hours (VSH):** This metric is generally reported consistently between the State Controller and the NTD reports. However, in FY 2022/23, demand-response VSH was incorrectly reported to the State Controller using the data for passengers, resulting in a significantly higher total. Data reported internally was lower than that reported elsewhere. The cause of this is unknown.

- **Vehicle Service Miles (VSM):** This metric was reported consistently among all three reports in FY 2022/23, and between the State Controller and NTD reports in FY 2023/24 and FY 2024/25. In FY 2023/24, the VSM reported internally was slightly higher than that reported elsewhere, while in FY 2024/25 it was slightly lower. The cause of this is unknown.

- **Passengers:** In FY 2022/23, fixed-route ridership was significantly under-reported to the State Controller. It is not clear if this was a data entry error or a calculation error. The passengers reported internally and to the NTD were consistent that year. Data reported to all three entities was consistent in FY 2023/24. In FY 2024/25, internal data was slightly lower than that reported to the NTD and State Controller. The cause of this is unknown.

- **Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Employees:** While ESTA demonstrated use of the proper definition of FTE during the audit, it does not use that definition for reporting to the State Controller. As a result, Employees were over-reported to the State Controller during all three years. ESTA should take care to segregate Employees between fixed-route and demand-response based on their work hours, rather than reporting all Employees under both modes.

Exhibit 5.1 Data Reporting Comparison

Performance Measure	System-Wide FY 2022/23	FY 2023/24	FY 2024/25
Operating Cost (Actual $)			
TDA fiscal audit	$6,606,489	$7,284,975	$7,184,312
National Transit Database	$5,972,694	$7,139,190	$7,247,155
State Controller Report	$6,606,489	$7,284,975	$7,184,312
Fare Revenue (Actual $)			
TDA fiscal audit	$2,165,759	$2,349,137	$2,327,191
National Transit Database	$2,235,633	$1,185,421	$1,123,295
State Controller Report	$2,165,759	$2,349,137	$2,327,191
Vehicle Service Hours (VSH)			
Monthly Performance Reports	50,284	56,891	58,946
National Transit Database	56,343	59,434	64,636
State Controller Report	91,205	59,434	64,635
Vehicle Service Miles (VSM)			
Monthly Performance Reports	857,987	970,818	1,050,884
National Transit Database	857,987	967,218	1,087,283
State Controller Report	857,987	967,218	1,087,283
Passengers			
Monthly Performance Reports	907,249	956,618	961,315
National Transit Database	907,249	956,618	965,296
State Controller Report	594,137	956,618	965,296
Full-Time Equivalent Employees			
State Controller Report	90	90	126
Per operator methodology	48	58	58
Per TDA methodology	48	58	58

Chapter 6 | Performance Analysis

Performance indicators are typically employed to quantify and assess the efficiency of a transit operator's activities. Such indicators provide insight into current operations as well as trend analysis of operator performance. Through a review of indicators, relative performance as well as possible inter-relationships between major functions is revealed.

The Transportation Development Act (TDA) requires recipients of TDA funding to track and report five performance indicators:

- Operating Cost/Passenger,
- Operating Cost/Vehicle Service Hour,
- Passengers/Vehicle Service Hour,
- Passengers/Vehicle Service Mile, and
- Vehicle Service Hours/Employee.

To assess the validity and use of performance indicators, the auditors performed the following activities:

- Assessed internal controls in place for the collection of performance-related information,
- Validated collection methods of key data,
- Calculated performance indicators, and
- Evaluated performance indicators.

The procedures used to calculate TDA-required performance measures for the current triennium were verified and compared with indicators included in similar reports to external entities (i.e., State Controller and Federal Transit Administration).

Operating Cost

The Transportation Development Act requires an operator to track and report transit-related costs reflective of the Uniform System of Accounts and Records developed by the State Controller and the California Department of Transportation. The most common method for ensuring this occurs is through a compliance audit report prepared by an independent auditor in accordance with California Code of Regulations Section 6667[1]. The annual independent financial audit should confirm the use of the Uniform System of Accounts and Records. *Operating cost* – as defined by PUC Section 99247(a) – excluded the following during the audit period[2]:

- Cost in the depreciation and amortization expense object class adopted by the State Controller pursuant to PUC Section 99243,

[1] CCR Section 6667 outlines the minimum tasks which must be performed by an independent auditor in conducting the annual fiscal and compliance audit of the transit operator.

[2] Given the passage of AB 149, the list of excluded costs will be expanded beginning with FY 2021/22.

- Subsidies for commuter rail services operated under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission,
- Direct costs of providing charter service, and
- Vehicle lease costs.

Vehicle Service Hours and Miles

Vehicle Service Hours (VSH) and *Miles* (VSM) are defined as the time/distance during which a revenue vehicle is available to carry fare-paying passengers, and which includes only those times/miles between the time or scheduled time of the first passenger pickup and the time or scheduled time of the last passenger drop-off during a period of the vehicle's continuous availability.[3] For example, demand-response service hours include those hours when a vehicle has dropped off a passenger and is traveling to pick up another passenger, but not those hours when the vehicle is unavailable for service due to driver breaks or lunch. For both demand-response and fixed-route services, service hours will exclude hours of "deadhead" travel to the first scheduled pick-up, and will also exclude hours of "deadhead" travel from the last scheduled drop-off back to the terminal. For fixed-route service, a vehicle is in service from first scheduled stop to last scheduled stop, whether or not passengers board or exit at those points (i.e., subtracting driver lunch and breaks but including scheduled layovers).

Passenger Counts

According to the Transportation Development Act, *total passengers* is equal to the total number of unlinked trips (i.e., those trips that are made by a passenger that involve a single boarding and departure), whether revenue-producing or not.

Employees

Employee hours is defined as the total number of hours (regular or overtime) which all employees have worked, and for which they have been paid a wage or salary. The hours must include transportation system-related hours worked by persons employed in connection with the system (whether or not the person is employed directly by the operator). Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) is calculated by dividing the number of person-hours by 2,000.

Fare Revenue

Fare revenue is defined by California Code of Regulations Section 6611.2 as revenue collected from the farebox plus sales of fare media. Given other revenues may be added to fare revenue for the calculation of the farebox recovery ratio, the Farebox Recovery cited within this section is not necessarily consistent with the farebox recovery ratio used for compliance determination in Chapter 4.

[3] A vehicle is considered to be in revenue service despite a no-show or late cancellation if the vehicle remains available for passenger use.

TDA Required Indicators

To calculate the TDA indicators for the ESTA, the following sources were employed:

- Operating Cost was not independently calculated as part of this audit. Operating Cost data were obtained via State Controller Reports for each fiscal year covered by this audit. Operating Cost from the reports was compared against that reported in the ESTA's audited financial reports and appeared to be consistent with TDA guidelines. In accordance with PUC Section 99247(a), the reported costs excluded depreciation and other allowable expenses.
- Fare Revenue was not independently calculated as part of this audit. Fare revenue data were obtained via State Controller Reports for each fiscal year covered by this audit. This appears to be consistent with TDA guidelines as well as the uniform system of accounts. Fare revenue data reported to the National Transit Database may not reflect other revenues reported as fare revenue to the State Controller.
- Vehicle Service Hours (VSH) data were obtained via State Controller Reports for each fiscal year covered by this audit. The ESTA's calculation methodology is consistent with PUC guidelines.
- Vehicle Service Miles (VSM) data were obtained via State Controller Reports for each fiscal year covered by this audit. The ESTA's calculation methodology is consistent with PUC guidelines.
- Unlinked trip data were obtained via State Controller Reports for each fiscal year covered by this audit. The ESTA's calculation methodology is consistent with PUC guidelines.
- Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) data were obtained from State Controller Reports for each fiscal year covered by this review. Use of the TDA definition regarding FTE calculation was confirmed.

System Performance Trends

System-wide, operating cost experienced a net 8.7 percent increase during the audit period, and a 50.9 percent net increase across the last six years. Fare revenue (inclusive of contracted service and advertising revenue) increased every year after FY 2020/21 with the exception of a slight decrease in FY 2024/25. This decrease was due to a decline in fixed-route passenger fare revenue that year, not a decrease in the contracted revenues. This resulted in a 7.5 percent increase during the audit period and a 28.7 percent increase across the last six years.

Vehicle service hours (VSH) fluctuated, resulting in a net 17.7 percent increase during the audit period and a net 19.4 percent increase during the six-year period. Vehicle service miles (VSM) increased every year after FY 2020/21. This resulted in an overall net increase of 26.7 percent during the audit period and 25.9 percent increase over the six-year period. Ridership fluctuated every year, though the most significant decline (57 percent) occurred in FY 2020/21 as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This led to a 104 percent increased the following year; resulting in a net 6.4 percent increase during the audit period and a 9.6 percent increase across the six year period.

Cost-related metrics typically provide an indicator of a system's efficiency, while passenger-related metrics offer insight into its productivity. Improvements are characterized by increases in passenger-related metrics and decreases in cost-related metrics. Two cost-related metrics (operating cost per VSH and operating cost per VSM) decreased during the audit period, though operating cost per passenger increased by 2.2 percent. Passenger-related metrics declined during the audit period, with passengers per VSH decreasing 16 percent and passengers per VSM decreasing 7.3 percent.

Exhibit 6.1 System Performance Indicators

Performance Measure	System-wide					
	FY 2019/20	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2022/23	FY 2023/24	FY 2024/25
Operating Cost (Actual $)	$4,761,576	$4,646,088	$4,385,775	$6,606,489	$7,284,975	$7,184,312
Annual Change		*-2.4%*	*-5.6%*	*50.6%*	*10.3%*	*-1.4%*
Fare Revenue (Actual $)	$1,808,606	$1,305,608	$2,141,316	$2,165,759	$2,349,137	$2,327,191
Annual Change		*-27.8%*	*64.0%*	*1.1%*	*8.5%*	*-0.9%*
Vehicle Service Hours (VSH)	54,112	50,955	52,796	56,343	59,434	64,635
Annual Change		*-5.8%*	*3.6%*	*6.7%*	*5.5%*	*8.8%*
Vehicle Service Miles (VSM)	863,539	837,631	879,326	857,987	967,218	1,087,283
Annual Change		*-3.0%*	*5.0%*	*-2.4%*	*12.7%*	*12.4%*
Passengers	880,559	378,961	772,942	907,249	956,618	965,296
Annual Change		*-57.0%*	*104.0%*	*17.4%*	*5.4%*	*0.9%*
Employees	60	60	60	48	58	58
Annual Change		*0.0%*	*0.0%*	*-20.0%*	*20.8%*	*0.0%*
Performance Indicators						
Operating Cost/VSH (Actual $)	$87.99	$91.18	$83.07	$117.25	$122.57	$111.15
Annual Change		*3.6%*	*-8.9%*	*41.2%*	*4.5%*	*-9.3%*
Operating Cost/Passenger (Actual $)	$5.41	$12.26	$5.67	$7.28	$7.62	$7.44
Annual Change		*126.7%*	*-53.7%*	*28.3%*	*4.6%*	*-2.3%*
Passengers/VSH	16.27	7.44	14.64	16.10	16.10	14.93
Annual Change		*-54.3%*	*96.9%*	*10.0%*	*0.0%*	*-7.2%*
Passengers/VSM	1.02	0.45	0.88	1.06	0.99	0.89
Annual Change		*-55.6%*	*94.3%*	*20.3%*	*-6.5%*	*-10.2%*
Farebox Recovery	38.0%	28.1%	48.8%	32.8%	32.2%	32.4%
Annual Change		*-26.0%*	*0.0%*	*-32.9%*	*-1.6%*	*0.5%*
Hours/Employee	901.9	849.3	879.9	1,173.8	1,024.7	1,114.4
Annual Change		*-5.8%*	*3.6%*	*33.4%*	*-12.7%*	*8.8%*
TDA Non-Required Indicators						
Operating Cost/VSM	$5.51	$5.55	$4.99	$7.70	$7.53	$6.61
Annual Change		*0.6%*	*-10.1%*	*54.4%*	*-2.2%*	*-12.3%*
VSM/VSH	15.96	16.44	16.66	15.23	16.27	16.82
Annual Change		*3.0%*	*1.3%*	*-8.6%*	*6.9%*	*3.4%*
Fare/Passenger	$2.05	$3.45	$2.77	$2.39	$2.46	$2.41
Annual Change		*67.7%*	*0.0%*	*-13.8%*	*2.9%*	*-1.8%*

Sources: FY 2019/20 – FY 2021/22 data from prior Triennial Performance audit.
FY 2022/23 – FY 2024/25 data from State Controller Reports.
FY 2022/23 fixed-route passengers and demand-response VSH from NTD reports.
FY 2022/23 – FY 2024/25 Full-time Equivalent Employees from ESTA-provided calculations.

Exhibit 6.2 System Ridership

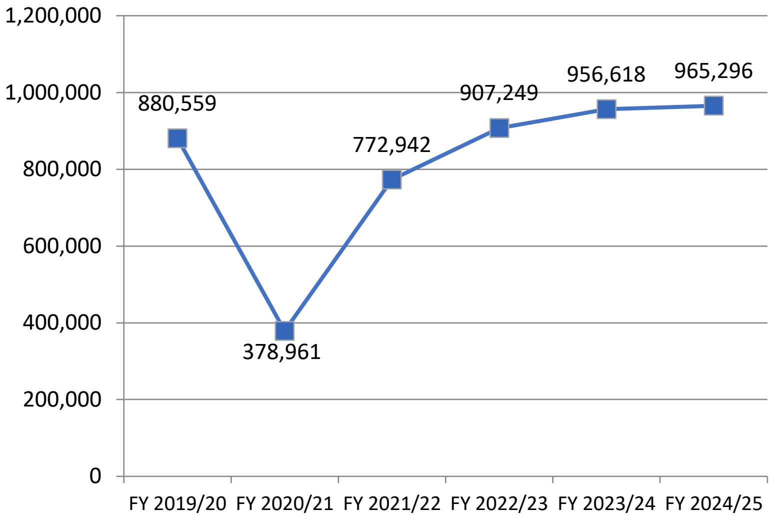


Exhibit 6.3 System Operating Cost/VSH

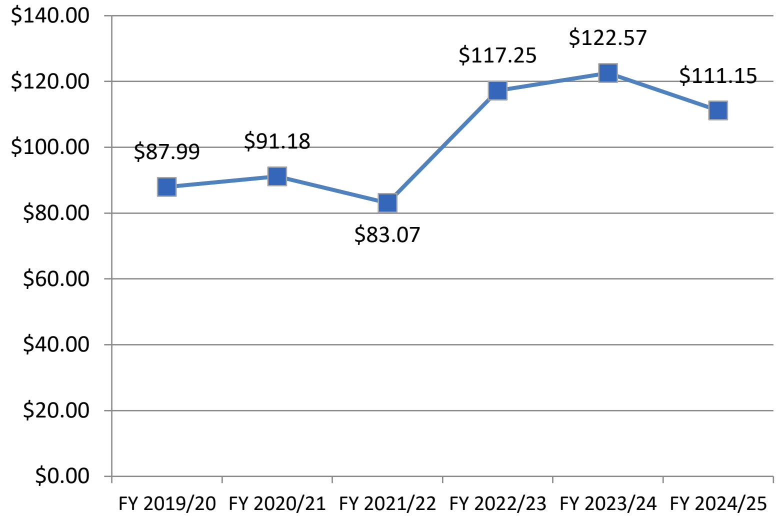


Exhibit 6.4 System Operating Cost/VSM

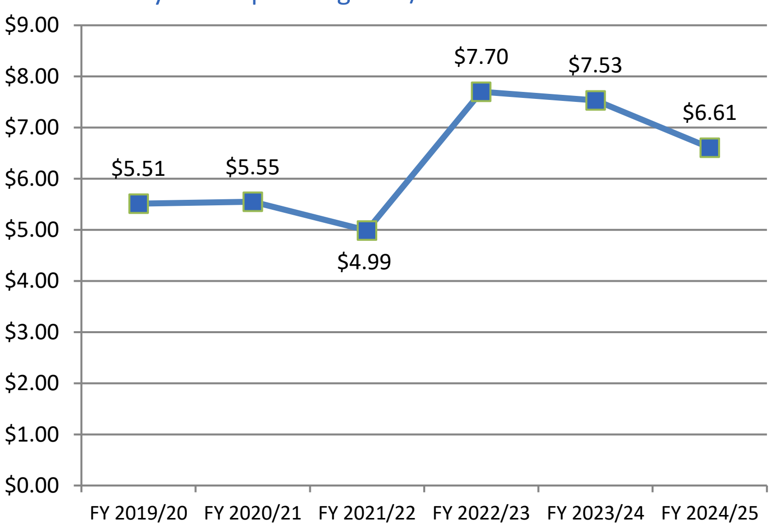


Exhibit 6.5 System VSM/VSH

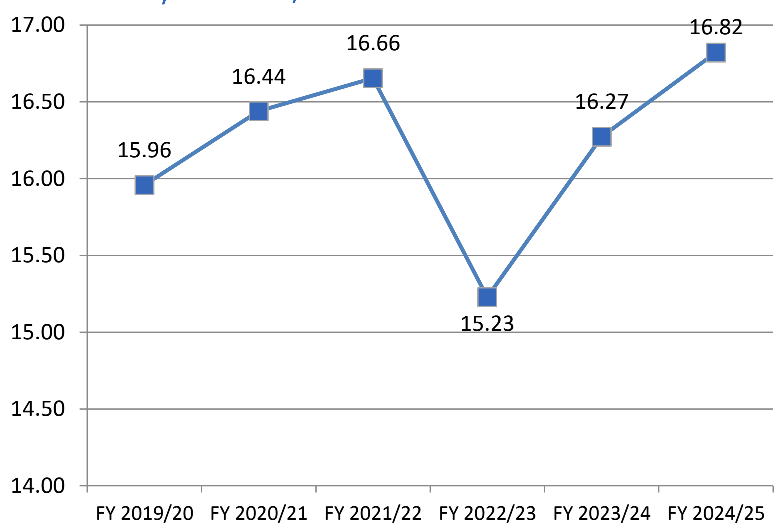


Exhibit 6.6 System Operating Cost/Passenger

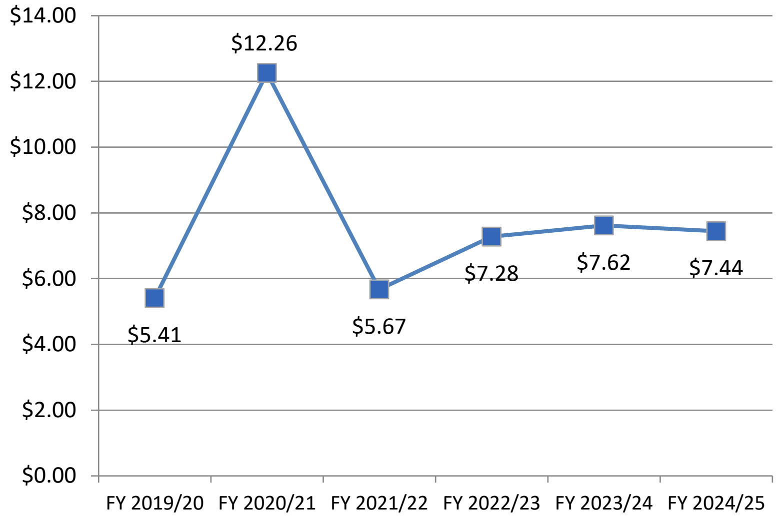


Exhibit 6.7 System Passengers/VSH

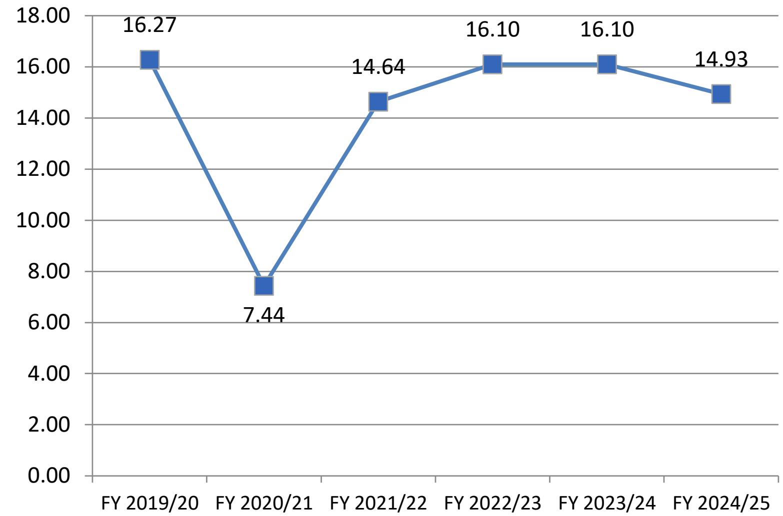


Exhibit 6.8 System Passengers/VSM

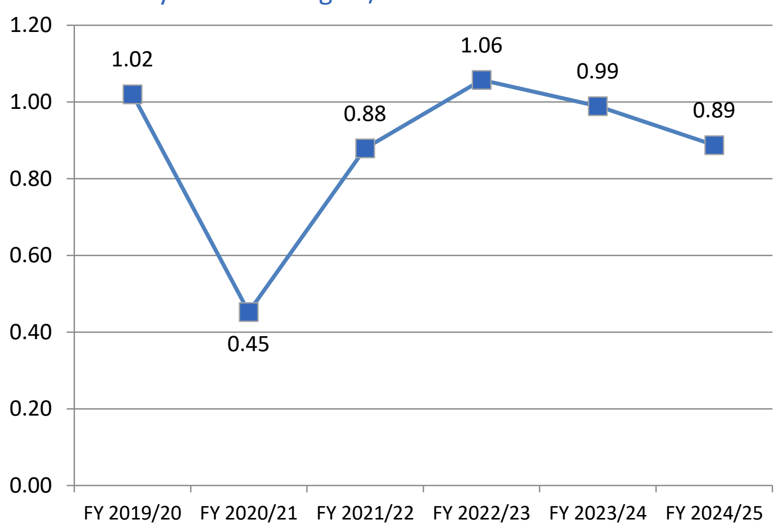


Exhibit 6.9 System VSH/FTE

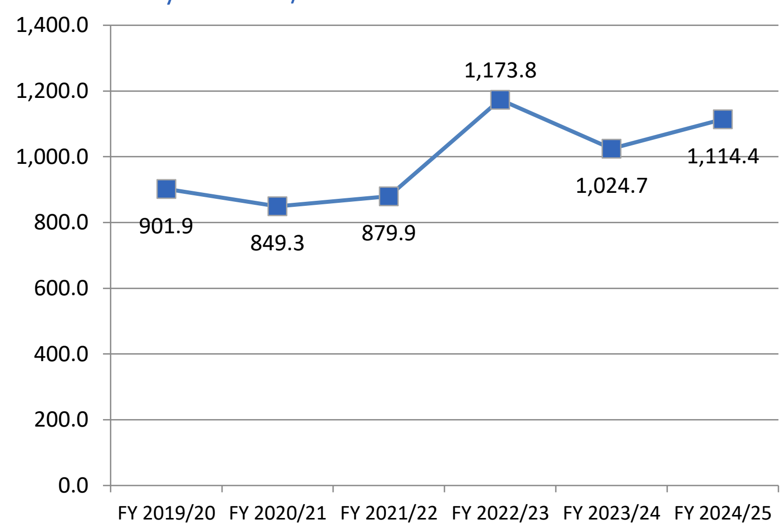


Exhibit 6.10 System Farebox Recovery

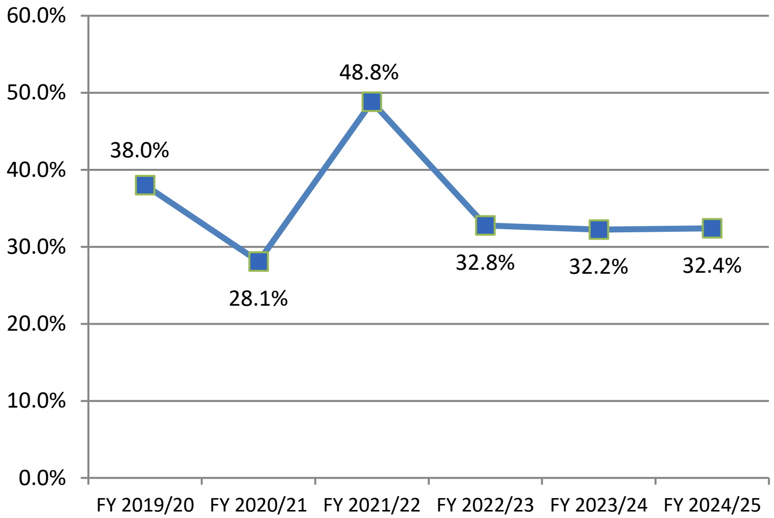
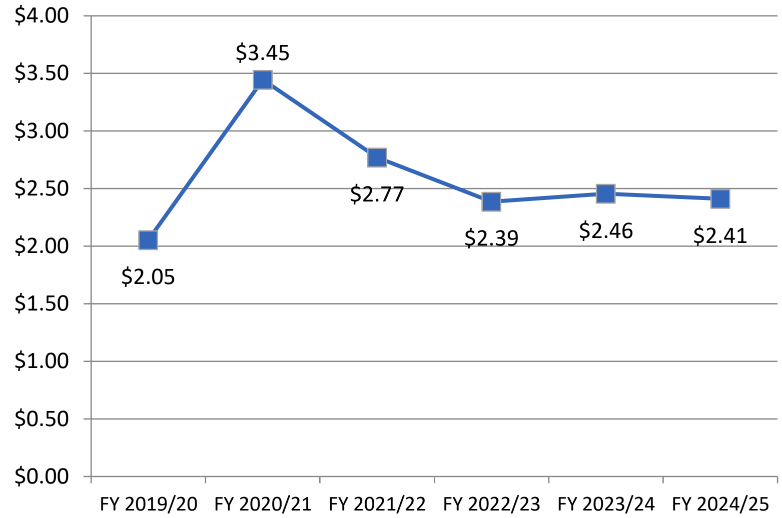


Exhibit 6.11 System Fare/Passenger



Fixed-Route Performance Trends

Fixed-route vehicle service hours increased every year after FY 2020/21. This resulted in a net 23.1 percent increase across the six-year period and a net 19.1 percent increase during the audit period. Vehicle service miles increased every year with the exceptions of FY 2020/21 and FY 2022/23. Ridership fluctuated with the most significant decrease occurring in FY 2020/21 (58.8 percent) and the most significant increase in FY 2021/22 (112.4 percent). Ultimately ridership experienced a net increase of 5.6 percent during the audit period and a net increase of 8.2 percent across the six-year period.

Passenger-related productivity metrics (passengers per VSH and passengers per VSM) decreased by 11.3 percent and 17.6 percent, respectively, during the audit period.

Exhibit 6.12 Fixed-Route Performance Indicators

Performance Measure	Fixed-Route					
	FY 2019/20	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2022/23	FY 2023/24	FY 2024/25
Vehicle Service Hours (VSH)	36,909	34,204	36,585	38,149	39,975	45,436
Annual Change		*-7.3%*	*7.0%*	*4.3%*	*4.8%*	*13.7%*
Vehicle Service Miles (VSM)	718,672	702,923	731,113	701,255	796,811	898,874
Annual Change		*-2.2%*	*4.0%*	*-4.1%*	*13.6%*	*12.8%*
Passengers	834,033	343,730	730,071	854,193	900,122	902,407
Annual Change		*-58.8%*	*112.4%*	*17.0%*	*5.4%*	*0.3%*
Performance Indicators						
Passengers/VSH	22.60	10.05	19.96	22.39	22.52	19.86
Annual Change		*-55.5%*	*98.6%*	*12.2%*	*0.6%*	*-11.8%*
Passengers/VSM	1.16	0.49	1.00	1.22	1.13	1.00
Annual Change		*-57.9%*	*104.2%*	*22.0%*	*-7.3%*	*-11.1%*
TDA Non-Required Indicators						
VSM/VSH	19.47	20.55	19.98	18.38	19.93	19.78
Annual Change		*5.5%*	*-2.8%*	*-8.0%*	*8.4%*	*-0.7%*

Sources: FY 2019/20 – FY 2021/22 data from prior Triennial Performance audit.
FY 2022/23 – FY 2024/25 data from State Controller Reports.
FY 2022/23 Passengers from the NTD report.

Exhibit 6.13 Fixed-Route Ridership

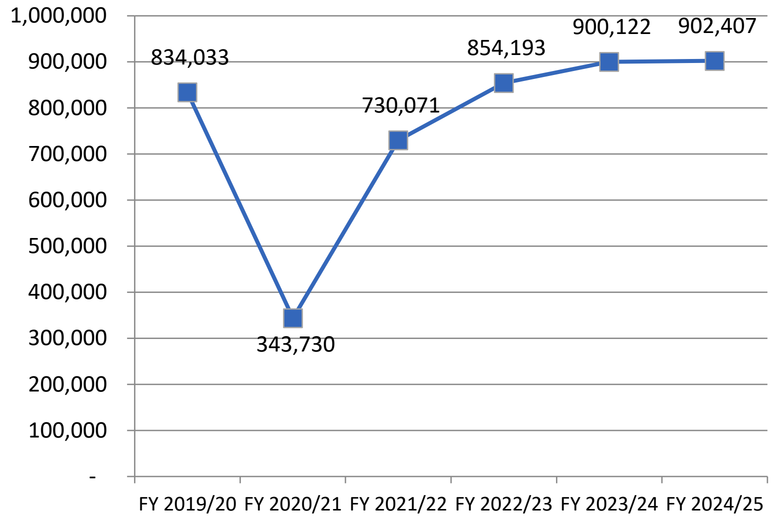


Exhibit 6.14 Fixed-Route VSM/VSH

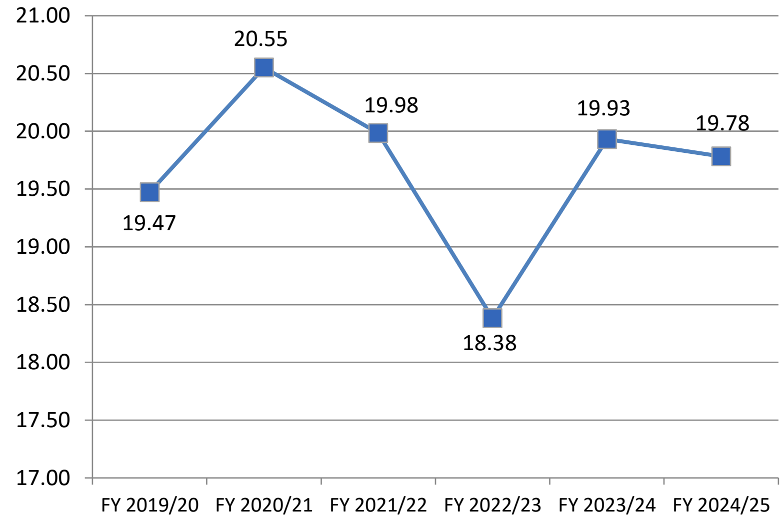


Exhibit 6.15 Fixed-Route Passengers/VSH

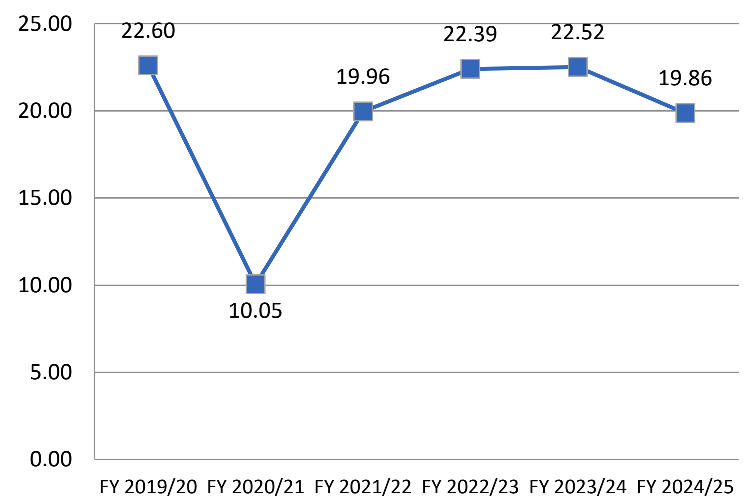
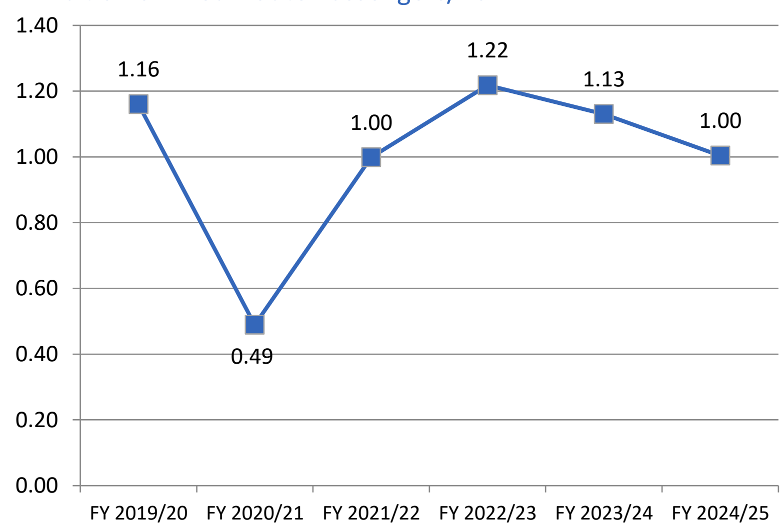


Exhibit 6.16 Fixed-Route Passengers/VSM



Demand-Response Performance Trends

Demand-response vehicle service hours decreased every year with the exception of FY 2022/23 and FY 2023/24. This resulted in a net 11.6 percent increase across the six-year period and a net 5.5 percent increase during the audit period. Vehicle service miles increased every year after experiencing a slight decrease in FY 2020/21, resulting in a 20.2 percent increase during the audit period. Ridership increased year over year following FY 2020/21. Ultimately ridership experienced a net increase of 18.5 percent during the audit period and 35.2 percent across the six-year period.

Passenger-related productivity metrics varied with passengers per VSH increasing by a net 12.3 percent during the audit period and passenger per VSM decreasing by a net 1.4 percent during the audit period.

Exhibit 6.17 Demand-Response Performance Indicators

Performance Measure	Demand-Response					
	FY 2019/20	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2022/23	FY 2023/24	FY 2024/25
Vehicle Service Hours (VSH)	17,203	16,751	16,211	18,194	19,459	19,199
Annual Change		*-2.6%*	*-3.2%*	*12.2%*	*7.0%*	*-1.3%*
Vehicle Service Miles (VSM)	144,867	134,708	148,213	156,732	170,407	188,409
Annual Change		*-7.0%*	*10.0%*	*5.7%*	*8.7%*	*10.6%*
Passengers	46,526	35,231	42,871	53,056	56,496	62,889
Annual Change		*-24.3%*	*21.7%*	*23.8%*	*6.5%*	*11.3%*
Performance Indicators						
Passengers/VSH	2.70	2.10	2.64	2.92	2.90	3.28
Annual Change		*-22.2%*	*25.7%*	*10.3%*	*-0.4%*	*12.8%*
Passengers/VSM	0.32	0.26	0.29	0.34	0.33	0.33
Annual Change		*-18.6%*	*10.6%*	*17.0%*	*-2.1%*	*0.7%*
TDA Non-Required Indicators						
VSM/VSH	8.42	8.04	9.14	8.61	8.76	9.81
Annual Change		*-4.5%*	*13.7%*	*-5.8%*	*1.7%*	*12.1%*

Sources: FY 2019/20 – FY 2021/22 data from prior Triennial Performance audit.
FY 2022/23 – FY 2024/25 data from State Controller Reports.
FY 2022/23 Vehicle Service Hours from the NTD report.

Exhibit 6.17 Demand-Response Ridership

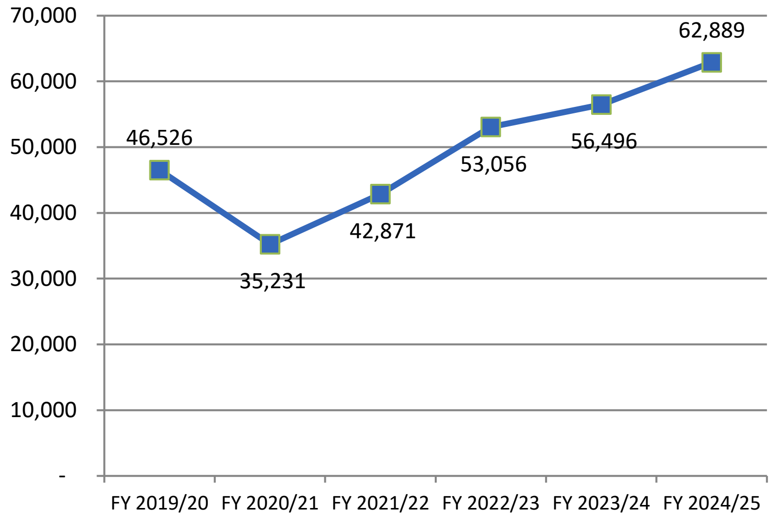


Exhibit 6.18 Demand-Response VSM/VSH

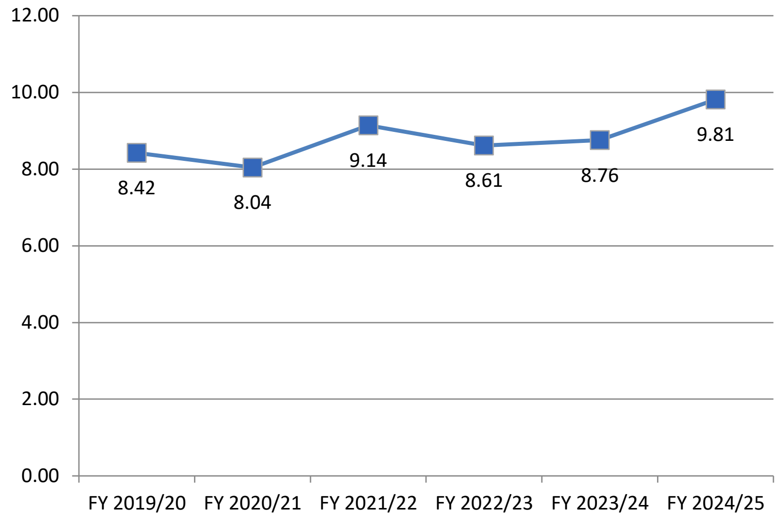


Exhibit 6.19 Demand-Response Passengers/VSH

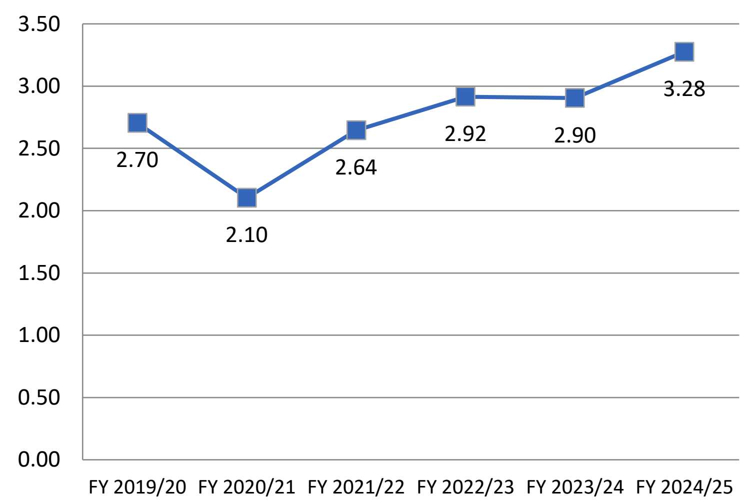
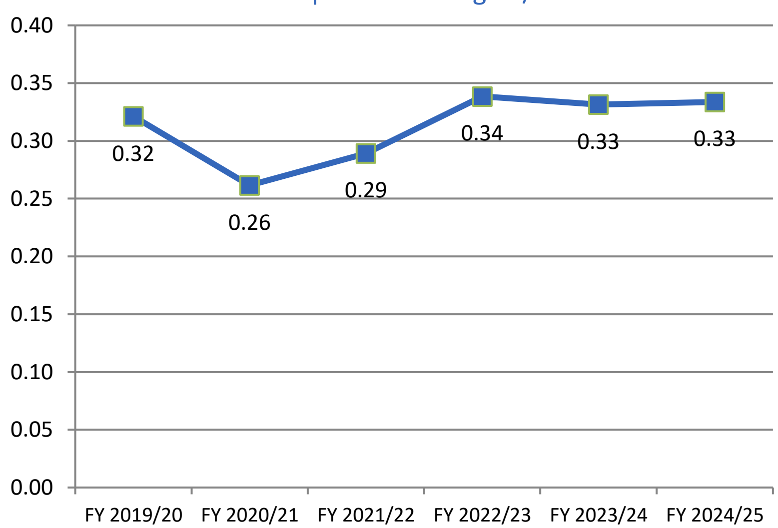


Exhibit 6.20 Demand-Response Passengers/VSM



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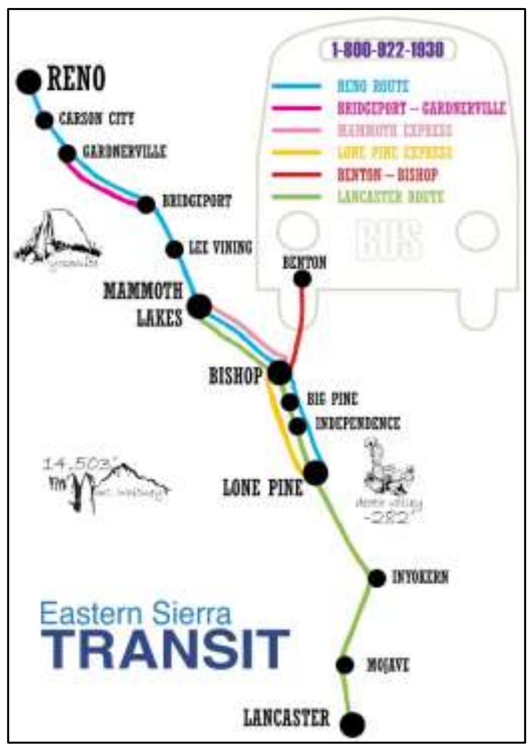
Chapter 7 | Functional Review

A functional review of the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority's public transit program is intended to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the operator. Following a general summary of the ESTA's transit services, this chapter addresses seven functional areas. The list, taken from Section III of the *Performance Audit Guidebook* published by Caltrans, reflects those transit services provided by ESTA through its transit program:

- General management and organization;
- Service planning;
- Administration;
- Marketing and public information;
- Scheduling, dispatch, and operations;
- Personnel management and training; and
- Maintenance.

Service Overview

The Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) provides a variety of bus services, including deviated fixed routes, local in-town dial-a-ride services, multiple town-to-town services throughout the Highway 395 and Highway 6 corridors, and interregional service (CREST) extending from Reno, Nevada, to Lancaster, California, with connections to the Los Angeles area. ESTA operates four routes along Highway 395 and three community routes. Some stops are on-call stops that require 24-hour advance notice. In partnership with the Town of Mammoth Lakes, ESTA operates free year-round bus service throughout Mammoth Lakes (Purple Route and Teal Route). Both lines operates daily from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.



Additionally, ESTA offers multiple seasonal routes. In the summer, ESTA operates two trolleys and a shuttle service in the Mammoth Lakes area. In the winter, additional fixed routes and two night trolleys are operated.

Transit fares are distance-based and vary significantly by route and destination. Discounted fares are available to customers age 60 and up, persons with disabilities, and youth under age 16. Children under age five ride free with a fare-paying adult. All other riders pay the base Adult fare. Fare details are provided in Exhibit 7.1.

ESTA also offers multi-ride non-cash fare media which can be purchased onboard from drivers, at the Bishop and Mammoth Lakes offices, by phone, and online.

Exhibit 7.1 ESTA routes/services and fares

Route	Service Days	Service Span	Adult fare range	Discounted fare range
Hwy 395 Routes				
Lone Pine – Reno (Hwy 395 North)	Monday – Friday	NB: 6:10 a.m. – 12:10 p.m. SB: 1:30 p.m. – 7:40 p.m.	\$2.00 - \$59.00	\$1.75 - \$53.00
Mammoth Lakes – Lancaster (Hwy 395 South)	Monday – Friday	SB: 7:50 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. NB: 2:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.	\$2.00 - \$39.00	\$2.00 - \$36.00
Lone Pine Express	Monday - Friday	NB: 6:10 a.m. – 6:20 p.m. SB: 6:50 a.m. – 7:40 p.m.	\$3.50 - \$7.25	\$3.00 – \$6.50
Mammoth Express	Monday – Friday	NB: 6:35 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. SB: 7:50 a.m. – 8:05 p.m.	\$2.00 - \$7.00	\$1.75 - \$6.00
Community Routes				
Walker to Mammoth Lakes	Daily (June – September)	AM: 8:30 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.	\$5.50 - \$14.00	\$4.50 - \$12.00
Benton – Bishop	Tuesday & Friday	SB: 8:35 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. NB: 2:30 p.m. – 3:35 p.m.	\$3.00 - \$6.00	\$2.25 - \$5.25
Bridgeport – Gardnerville/Carson City	Wednesday	NB: Departs 9:30 a.m. on request only	\$5.50 - \$13.00	\$4.50 - \$11.00
Mammoth Routes				
Year-round				
Purple Route	Daily	6:55 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.	Free	
Teal Line	Daily	6:55 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.	Free	
Evening Trolley	Daily	5:30 p.m. – 10:30 p.m.	Free	
Winter only				
Red Line	Daily (November – May)	7:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.	Free	
Blue Line	Daily (December - April)	7:05 a.m. – 5:20 p.m.	Free	
Yellow Line	Daily (December - April)	7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.	Free	
Green Line	Daily (December - April)	7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.	Free	
Orange Line	Daily (December – April)	7:30 a.m. – 5:15 p.m.	Free	
Mammoth Lakes Late Night Trolley	Daily (December – April)	10:30 p.m. – 2:00 a.m.	Free	
Summer only				
Mammoth Town Trolley	Daily (May – November)	7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Free	
Lakes Basin Trolley	Daily (May – September)	9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Free	
Reds Meadow Shuttle	Friday - Sunday (June – September) Thursday (limited service)	7:30 a.m. – 6:15 p.m.	\$15.00	\$7.00

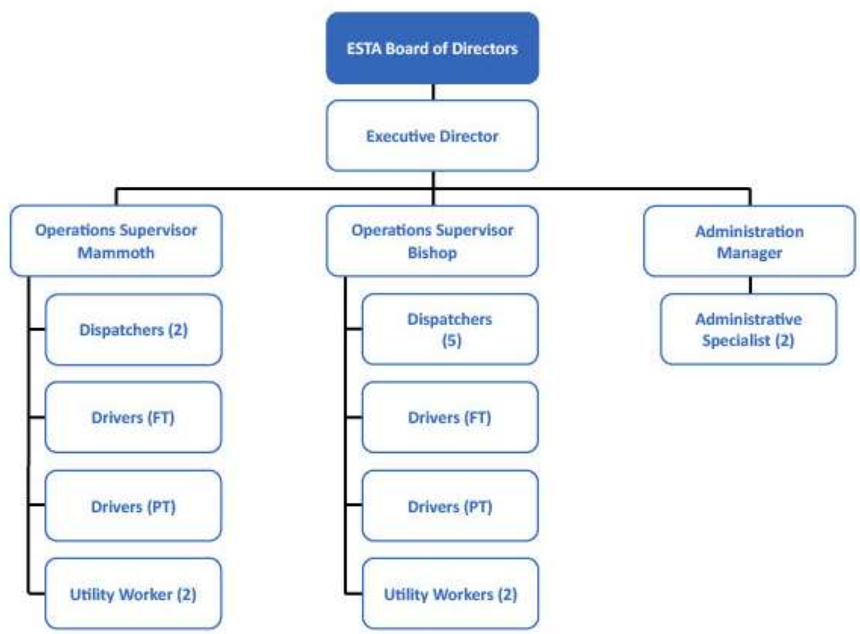
Route	Service Days	Service Span	Adult fare range	Discounted fare range
Dial-A-Ride				
Bishop Dial-A-Ride (general public)	Monday – Thursday Friday – Saturday Sunday	7:00 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. 7:00 a.m. – 2:00 a.m. 7:00 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.	$3.00 - $5.00	
Lone Pine Dial-A-Ride (general public)	Monday – Friday Wednesday (to/from Keeler)	7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.	$3.00 - $5.00	
Mammoth Lakes Dial-A-Ride (general public)	Monday – Friday	8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	$3.00 - $5.00	
Walker Area Dial-A-Ride (general public)	Monday – Friday	8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.	$3.00 - $5.00	

General Management and Organization

The Eastern Sierra Transit Authority's programs are monitored on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. Individuals throughout the organization involved in program management and reporting, including safety, training and maintenance programs. Spare software is used to monitor on-demand routes. The Executive Director solicits reports and monitors activities, including the safety program that requires quarterly meetings with staff.

Programs are organized and monitored by the Executive Director with roles and lines of reporting clearly defined. However, the Executive Director, prior to his retirement in April 2026, indicated that the organizational structure of ESTA needed to be revised to plan for growth. His envisioned changes include elevating the Operations Supervisors to Operations Manager, with another Supervisor level below them. This would enable greater oversight of the drivers; the supervisors currently have too many drivers reporting to each of them. He also cited a need for Road Supervisors. Some progress has already been made with the hiring of an Assistant Supervisor in Mammoth (not reflected in the organizational chart shown in Exhibit 7.2). However, finalization of the updated organizational chart will be reserved until after a new Executive Director is hired so that it can be reflective of the new individual's vision.

Exhibit 7.2 Organizational Chart (January 2026)



Service changes occurring during and subsequent to the audit period include:

- Added Saturday service on the 395 Reno route and Sunday service on the Mammoth Express in July 2023.
- Discontinued Bishop Creek service in Summer 2023.
- Added new Teal Line service to Mammoth and modified the Purple Line to complement that new route in November 2023.

- Added Saturday service on the 395 Lancaster route and Sunday service on the 395 Reno route in July 2024.
- Added Sunday service on the 395 Lancaster route and Lone Pine Express and additional weekend run times on the Mammoth Express in July 2025.
- Increased Mammoth Express weekend run times beginning in July 2025.
- Extended Bishop Dial-A-Ride operating hours, including later weekday evening service and expanded weekend hours in January 2022, September 2025, and October 2025.

ESTA is proud that it now offers service on the 395 routes seven days a week and on several holidays (only closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas). Doing so helps to maintain mobility along this important corridor.

Ridership trends, farebox performance, and driver availability were measured and considered as part of the recent service changes. Expanded and extended services were monitored through monthly ridership data and existing performance standards, with no new key performance indicators developed. Passenger feedback was also reviewed, particularly regarding the addition of weekend service on the U.S. 395 routes and expanded Dial-A-Ride (DART) hours. The Purple and Teal Line modifications in Mammoth required a short adjustment period for riders, but performance improved over time. Service expansions along the U.S. 395 corridor, especially the Reno route, exceeded expectations. While some hikers expressed disappointment regarding the discontinuation of the Bishop Creek service, ridership on that route had been low, and little community feedback was received. Overall, results were generally as expected or better than anticipated.

Other improvements during the audit period have been related to technology. ESTA implemented a new real-time reservation system (BetterRes) for the U.S. 395 routes, which enables riders to book and pay for their ride online. The back-end of the system enables ESTA to create routes and change the number of seats available on an as-needed basis. It also reduces the need for drivers to handle as much cash. ESTA has also implemented the Spare app and dispatch software for its demand-response service. At the time of the site visit, the app had been launched for the Bishop and Mammoth demand-response services, with an average of 10 to 15 percent of trips booked through the app. The Spare platform has created efficiencies with drivers and a more positive experience for customers.

ESTA partners with two RTPAs: the Inyo County and Mono County Local Transportation Commissions (LTCs). The Executive Director attends both Commission meetings monthly and serves as an *ex officio* member of both. ESTA also enjoys a positive and effective relationship with its peers, Caltrans, and the FTA. It coordinates with YARTS, Washoe RTC, Kern Transit, RidgeRunner (City of Ridgecrest), Antelope Valley Transit Authority, and many others through the California Association for Coordinated Transportation (CalACT). ESTA shares and requests information from peers, the RTPAs, Caltrans, and the FTA. The Executive Director also participates in regional programs and information-sharing activities.

The Eastern Sierra Transit Authority is governed by an eight-member Board of Directors. Two representatives each are appointed from the respective governing bodies of Inyo County, Mono County, the City of Bishop, and the Town of Mammoth Lakes. The Board meets monthly, with the location alternating between Bishop and Mammoth Lakes and a remote link frequently provided in the other location.

During the audit period, ESTA's Board expressed interest in expanding transit services in remote areas of North Mono County and addressing challenges associated with the agency's aging fleet. In response, staff utilized existing resources to develop a summer transportation program that improved access for Mono County residents to Health and Human Services programs and services. Staff also pursued fleet replacement and modernization efforts, including the successful award of $9 million in competitive grant funding for 14 replacement buses in Mammoth. In addition, the Executive Director secured smaller, more reliable vehicles for demand-response services and smaller community routes, helping to improve service reliability while reducing maintenance and fuel costs. During the audit period, ESTA also secured $3.5 million in funding for a new administration building.

Service Planning

The ESTA's goals and objectives are clearly laid out in its two-year Strategic Business Plans. The Director updates the Board regarding goals and relevance on a quarterly basis as part of the Executive Director's Report. The Short Range Transit Plan is updated every five years, with the most recent update having been completed in June 2022 as part of a joint Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan and Short Range Transit Plan. Many of the recommendations from that plan have been implemented, including service increases for the Mammoth Express and 395 Reno and Lancaster routes. An update of the plan is scheduled to be conducted in 2027. Ongoing planning occurs annually through budget planning, Overall Work Plan development, and Regional Transportation Improvement Plan development.

Transit needs are identified annually through separate unmet transit needs processes held by the Inyo County and Mono County Local Transportation Commissions. Public meetings are also held throughout the region annually to solicit feedback. Other public requests are received throughout the year. All feedback is evaluated through the various planning departments invested in transit.

The Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) ensures the needs of special populations and riders are effectively represented. Comments and requests are researched and evaluated for potential implementation. The entire ESTA fleet is wheelchair-accessible. Lifeline routes are maintained to ensure remote and low-demand areas remain connected to critical services within the region, despite often low productivity.

ESTA has identified hydrogen as its preferred zero-emission technology, despite having yet to begin implementing its transition to zero-emission. Battery-electric vehicles take a long time to fuel and many do not have the range needed for ESTA's routes. ESTA is developing a hydrogen transition strategy to support a practical and efficient path toward zero-emission operations. Current efforts include evaluating fueling infrastructure, identifying long-term fuel supply solutions, and building regional stakeholder support. ESTA is also coordinating with vehicle manufacturers regarding mechanic training, warranty support, and technical assistance. The agency continues to monitor nearby hydrogen infrastructure developments, including facilities planned in Lancaster and Nevada, that may support future fueling opportunities.

Public participation activities are generally conducted to support major service changes and fare changes, as well as part of planning efforts. All efforts are consistent with ESTA's Title VI Plan, and notices are made available in Spanish. Meetings are held in locations throughout Inyo and Mono counties. Advisory committees are organized in over half a dozen communities throughout the region, including June Lake, Long Valley, Bridgeport, Mono Basin, the Antelope Valley, Mammoth Lakes, and Bishop.

The most recent rider survey was conducted in October 2025 as part of in-house efforts to collect feedback on desired routes and schedules.

Administration

The Executive Director is responsible for developing revenue projections, an operating budget, and a capital budget on an annual basis for submittal to the Board. The Administrative Manager assists with research and makes recommendations to the Director. The Board of Directors is involved in updates and final approval. ESTA's fiscal management practices reflect a conservative budgeting approach, establish the level of cost recovery required from the provision of various services, review the cost of services annually, and plan and budget for future capital needs, as well as maintenance and operation of existing assets. New services, employee growth, and upcoming projects are considered and tracked throughout the year to ensure future needs are anticipated and planned for.

Comparisons of budgeted and actual revenues and expenses occurs at least monthly, with financial reports presented at ESTA Board meetings. Oversight is conducted more frequently as any object codes approach 100 percent of their budget. These reports include year-to-date actual expenses, trends, and forecasts for the balance of the fiscal year. The Executive Director is authorized to move funds under $5,000 or 20 percent (whichever is greater) between budget items. Anything greater requires Board approval.

Financial data is managed using Inyo County's OneSource software platform. Invoices are entered by ESTA administrative staff and approved by the Administrative Manager.

The Administrative Manager is responsible for overseeing "expected" grant processes and timelines. The Executive Director and the Administrative Manager work together on planning grants. Current, pending, and closed grants are tracked on a spreadsheet by the Administrative Manager. ESTA applies for all grants that offer operating support to transit. Another primary focus has been securing capital resources to replace diesel buses in the Mammoth area, where vehicle performance requirements on steep mountain routes necessitate reliable diesel-powered equipment. As a result, there have been some no-carbon vehicle grant opportunities that have not been pursued.

Accident and injury events are reported and investigated. Policies are written to prevent similar events. Insurance claims are pursued as needed. The reporting procedure starts with an employee reporting an incident, followed by tracking, investigating, and reporting. ESTA is a member of the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority (CJPIA), through which it maintains workers' compensation and liability insurance.

Regular tracking and reporting enables ESTA to effectively monitor its safety programs. Quarterly safety meetings with leadership and employees serve as an opportunity to review safety practices. ESTA collaborates with other essential community agencies and resources in the Disaster Preparedness Response Program. This includes the Access and Functional Needs program, which focuses on identifying and assisting at-risk individuals who may need additional support in response to emergency events.

Contracts with Mammoth Mountain Ski Area and the Town of Mammoth Lakes are maintained annually. The Town of Mammoth Lakes reimburses ESTA for revenue hours and invoices for maintenance services provided. The Mammoth Mountain Ski Area reimburses the ESTA for revenue service hours. Contracts are managed through billing processes and effective communication.

Employees complete their own timesheets and submit them to their supervisor for review and approval. Administrative Specialists audit timesheets and compiles files for submittal to ADP. The files are reviewed and approved by the Administration Manager prior to submittal. Direct deposit is offered and utilized by more than 90 percent of employees. Both physical and digital employee records are securely stored with limited access.

The Administrative Specialist verifies and codes all invoices. Once invoices are approved by the Administration Manager or Executive Director, they are entered into Inyo County's OneSource software. Original invoices are sent to Inyo County's auditors for review and payment. Receipt of goods and services is verified prior to paying invoices, either through a verified packing list or sign-off from those who have first-hand knowledge of services provided and can verify they were completed.

ESTA maintains a procurement handbook and policy, which dictates purchasing activities. Procurement practices conform to FTA requirements. Competitive procurements are used when the procurement policy dictates. Requests for Proposals and quotes are used when the purchase meets the qualifying standards in the policy. The Executive Director can approve purchase under $100,000; anything higher must be approved by the Board. Whenever possible, ESTA obtains three quotes for purchases over $3,000. However, due to the remote area, there are limited options for vendors, especially for fuel. This challenge was noted in the most recent Short Range Transit Plan. ESTA purchases vehicles through the CalACT bid or through a competitive bid process.

While ESTA does not have an internal audit function, Inyo County's Auditor-Controller provides quality control for ESTA's accounts payable, which are handled by the County.

Marketing and Public Information

Marketing responsibilities are currently handled in-house. ESTA maintains the transit websites and provides service brochures that are updated seasonally. The ESTA utilizes local radio marketing, social media, newspapers, direct mail, and bus signage to advertise its services. Printed brochures are available in local offices, visitor centers, colleges and lodging locations. ESTA staff check in with community partners quarterly to ensure they have a healthy supply of brochures on hand. Brochures are also available on the ESTA website.

During the audit period, ESTA engaged a local graphic designer to refresh its brand identity and improve consistency and overall appeal of marketing materials. A key component of outreach includes the agency mascot, "ESTY," who participates in school visits, community events, and parades to promote public transit awareness. ESTY is also featured in a children's coloring book as part of a youth engagement program designed to introduce transit concepts early and encourage long-term ridership. The youth engagement program targets children ages five to seven through visits to daycares, schools, and camps. ESTA staff take a transit vehicle accompanied by ESTY, give youth a ride on the bus, and provide backpacks with transit information, giveaways, and passes. Additional outreach includes participation in events such as Earth Day, where ESTA showcases services and promotes

sustainability using an electric vehicle. ESTY has become an invaluable part of community outreach, and is a great way to introduce transit to families.
In Mammoth, marketing efforts place particular emphasis on introducing transit to new riders who may be unfamiliar with bus systems, with the goal of reducing barriers to use and encouraging adoption among both residents and families.

ESTA provides service information through the Swiftly platform, the ESTA website, and the ESTA DART app. In addition to real-time service information, the ESTA DART app supports DART ride scheduling and the BetterRes system allows passengers to make and pay for reservations on U.S. 395 route services.

Public perception of the ESTA is generally positive, with good service options for a rural area and friendly drivers. Part of this is due to increase community outreach, especially with employers and schools.

The ESTA does not document all phone calls, only valid customer complaints and requests for new services. Complaints that can be resolved by the dispatcher are addressed and logged. Complaints that cannot be handled by the dispatcher are forwarded to leadership and the problem and resolution documented. The operations supervisor tracks all complaints on a spreadsheet. Follow up with the complainant occurs within one business day, though resolution times vary depending on the nature of the complaint.

Scheduling, Dispatch, and Operations

The ESTA service is operated in house. Operations personnel are represented by the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority Employees Association, while supervisors and confidential employees are represented by the Management & Confidential Employees Association (MCEA). At the time of the site visit, there were 33 full time drivers and 30 part-time drivers. Most part-time drivers are part-time out of personal preference. However, there are a few new part-time drivers who will likely move to full-time when positions become available.

There is an open position for a part-time driver in the remote area of Walker, California. The position has been open for some time and is the only position for which the ESTA is actively recruiting. A full-time driver is currently assigned to Walker; when that driver is off, someone must be sent out from another location. The absence of a part-time driver does not impact service, but it does represent a logistical issue.

As a remote, tourism-driven region with seasonal fluctuations in demand, part-time drivers play an essential role in ESTA's operations. Many part-time drivers cover regular shifts two to three days per week, while others are assigned specific shifts such as lunch coverage or fill-in work during absences and peak service periods. During higher-demand seasons, part-time staff may work increased hours, while some drivers work full-time hours on a seasonal basis, either in winter or summer depending on service needs. ESTA works closely with part-time drivers to develop flexible schedules that align with both operational requirements and driver availability, ensuring service continuity while supporting a sustainable and desirable work environment.

Rather than a formal bid, drivers submit a shift preference request to their location Supervisors who prepare the schedule. Driver preference is taken into account as much as possible, though all staff understand that not all requests can be met based on business need. Vacation requests are typically accommodated using part-time staff. Unscheduled absences use extra board or other available drivers. Drivers calling out for early morning shifts are requested to call out the night before.

Vehicles are primarily route-specific and are assigned at least one day in advance. This enables Dispatch or Operations Supervisors to schedule cleaning or maintenance and ensure mileage is accrued evenly across the fleet. Keys to all available vehicles are ready for drivers to take when they arrive to work. Keys to vehicles that are scheduled for maintenance or are unsafe to operate are withheld. Mammoth uses a board showing whether a vehicle is available for service (green) or unavailable for service (red). In Bishop, each vehicle is tagged, and if the tag is red, it is unavailable for service.

Drivers must have air brake and passenger endorsements to operate specific routes. Some drivers in Bishop who were hired more than a decade ago do not have their air brake endorsement and are not eligible to drive the 395 Reno/Lancaster routes or several of the Mammoth Lakes routes. This does not have a significant effect on scheduling, as all newer drivers are being trained for their air brake endorsement, and those scheduling the vehicles ensure that all drivers have the appropriate credentials for the vehicle they are assigned.

ESTA uses different fare collection methods depending on the type of service. Routes that collect larger amounts of cash use locked fareboxes, while Dial-A-Ride (DART) services use secured money bags due to the low amount of cash collected. On the U.S. 395 routes, most payments are now made by credit card through the reservation system, which has reduced cash transactions by about 90 percent. Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) also sells tickets for the Reds Meadow Shuttle through retail locations, further limiting cash handling.

Fare collection is handled by the Operations Supervisor and Administrative Specialist. Drivers place fares into secured lock boxes, which are then counted in a secure, camera-monitored area by the Administrative Specialist. Funds are stored in a safe with restricted access and are reconciled against driver manifests, with additional review by Inyo County Auditors to confirm deposits match records. All revenue is then entered into the Inyo County OneSource system for proper accounting. Cash is transported in sealed bags by the Administrative Specialist, with different timing and handling procedures used to maintain security.

Passes may be purchased online using a credit card, with in-person cash sales available through Dispatch, the Administrative Specialist, or drivers. Passes are assigned to Dispatch, the Administrative Specialist, and drivers via an Access database, and all unassigned passes are securely stored. Credit card payments through the ESTA website are directly deposited into the agency's account. System reports and automated credit card receipts are used to track budget codes.

Personnel Management and Training

Driver scheduling often involves long driving shifts (up to 10.5 hours), which, combined with commute times from Bishop, presents ongoing considerations related to fatigue and operational safety. ESTA supports commuting drivers through carpool arrangements and a vehicle shuttle between Bishop and Mammoth, and no drivers living in Bishop are scheduled on late evening shifts in Mammoth. Staffing ESTA services in Mammoth is one of the biggest challenges, due primarily to the high cost of living and lack of affordable housing in the resort community. A complicating factor is the seasonal nature of the service in Mammoth, as only some routes are operated year-round.

ESTA is also planning additional recruitment this year, including multiple training classes to meet peak demand and support its anticipated new airport service, while continuing to evaluate scheduling practices to ensure safe and sustainable operations. Recruitment tactics have included the following:

- "Media blitzes" (bilingual radio and newspaper advertisements);
- Radio interviews;
- Refer a Friend program with the drivers;
- $1,000 sign-on program in Mammoth (the Town pays the premiums for this incentive);
- Social media;
- ESTA web page;
- Online job boards such as In Demand and Chamber websites;
- Contacting former employees to advise about wage increases;
- Offering creative benefits like the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) Ski Passes;
- Having booths at community events;
- Notifying employment partners such as colleges, California EDD, and the Paiute Tribe Training Centers about opportunities;
- Posting flyers at coffee shops, community centers, and other locations; and
- Speaking at schools and to community groups.

The ESTA has found that radio and newspapers advertisements receive the most feedback, with Indeed and Facebook posts picking up traction as well. It has had success with an updated application that can be completed on a mobile device.

ESTA offers a sign-on bonus of $1,000 to drivers in Mammoth, paid in two stages: $250 once the driver is licensed and operating independently, and $750 upon completion of their first full summer or winter season. Mammoth drivers also earn an additional $2.00 per hour premium wage. Employee motivation is supported through recognition programs and informal incentives, including gift cards and thank-you notes for positive feedback from coworkers or the public. ESTA also has an Employee of the Quarter program, which includes a plaque, recognition at a Board meeting, and a $100 gift card. Additional appreciation efforts include providing snacks, BBQs, and seasonal holiday gifts for staff.

The agency also has a bonus program outlined in the bargaining agreement, which is tied to the organization's financial performance and accident prevention metrics.

Turnover in ESTA's transit program is primarily concentrated in the Mammoth hub. The most common reason employees, particularly drivers, leave is the high cost and limited availability of housing, which often leads staff to relocate out of the area. Severe winter conditions can also contribute to attrition in some years. In addition, ESTA employs a number of post-retirement age drivers who typically work for a few years before fully retiring, which contributes to natural turnover over time.

Overall, ESTA has seen improvements in recruitment efforts during this audit period; however, driver staffing continues to be an ongoing challenge. Factors such as the high cost of housing, harsh winter conditions, and seasonal workforce fluctuations make recruitment and retention difficult. To address these challenges, ESTA has focused on becoming an employer of choice by enhancing employee benefits and emphasizing long-term career opportunities rather than temporary jobs. During this audit period, additional dispatch positions were added to provide greater operational support for drivers and to extend operating hours. Despite these efforts, the agency continues to experience a need for additional drivers.

The overall labor pool is limited due to the remote mountain location, and recruitment often relies on attracting employees from outside the area, sometimes with housing support. Management has also noted the challenges associated with commuting demands and seasonal workload fluctuations. There is interest in improving how turnover is tracked, including potentially establishing it as a key performance indicator to better monitor trends and support retention strategies. Consideration has also been given to additional recruitment supports, including expanded outreach for housing assistance to help attract and retain staff.

Administrative staff, Dispatchers, and Operations Supervisors received annual evaluations. Drivers receive ride-alongs at least quarterly, or more frequently as warranted.

At the time of the site visit, ESTA had four certified trainers, with another in the process of being certified. ESTA offers a comprehensive four- to six-week training program for new employees as well as annual VTT training, safety training, injury and illness prevention, staff administrative training, and post-accident training. New recruits are required to have at least a commercial drivers license (CDL) permit prior to beginning their training. Driver trainers are certified through the Transportation Safety Institute (TSI), and some hold additional certifications through TSI and CJPIA.

ESTA contracts with a private DMV examiner for commercial license testing and the California DMV for written testing. All training meets state requirements. Vehicles are appropriately equipped with safety equipment.

ESTA has a unique attendance policy incorporated into its Memoranda of Understanding. It cites that excessive tardiness or absenteeism is a reason for discipline, but it does not define what is considered excessive. This informal approach enables ESTA to notify personnel when tardiness or absenteeism is an issue, usually via letter. Historically, that notification is sufficient to mitigate the problem. If it does not, a warning may be issued. While informal, ESTA feels the policy fits the size of the organization and works with Human Resources regarding enforcement.

Both MOUs and the personnel rules can be accessed on the employee portal. Training for new hires on where to find this information is provided by Human Resources. A paper copy of the personnel rules is provided to all new hires. Additionally, the Executive Director sends out Transportation Bulletins with information about policies and updates.

Both full- and part-time employees receive holiday premium pay, CalPERS 457 option, access to the Employee Assistance Program, free travel for themselves and family members, retirement bonus, education reimbursement, holiday premium pay, MMSA passes (for Mammoth employees), and a bonus program. Full-time employees also receive medical, dental, vision, and hearing insurance; holiday pay and two floating holidays; paid time off; life insurance; CalPERS retirement benefits; and maternity leave through FMLA. Benefits are communicated through the offer letter to benefitted employees and highlighted during orientation. Formal letters are provided for changes in benefits.

Maintenance

Most maintenance for the Mammoth service is provided under contract to the Town of Mammoth Lakes, and ESTA relies on local repair shops for services in Bishop. The maintenance program is tracked using an Access database. ESTA's preventive maintenance program includes periodic inspections based on mileage and exceeds manufacturer specifications. Compliance with the preventive maintenance schedule can be tracked through the PMI log. Warranty work is tracked and provided in a timely manner.

ESTA does not have a dedicated maintenance facility. The maintenance contract with the Town of Mammoth has been a successful solution. Town mechanic hours are tracked and invoiced to ESTA. Maintenance is more problematic in Bishop, which features only a single diesel mechanic. ESTA started doing some of its own small maintenance during the audit period, and expects to add air conditioning repairs in the current year. The master plan for Bishop is the construction of an administration and maintenance facility that could handle repairs on-site. This would facilitate more dependable maintenance, rather than having to wait for the availability of a local vendor.

The most significant challenge during this audit period has been maintaining an aging fleet, particularly in the Mammoth area. ESTA was recently awarded Sections 5339(b) and 5339(a) grant funding, which will support the purchase of 14 replacement buses for the agency's largest vehicles operating in Mammoth. The procurement process began recently, with delivery of the vehicles expected within approximately 18 to 24 months. Additionally, ESTA's remote location in limits the availability of local bus repair services. As a result, buses occasionally must be transported out of the area for repairs, or repair turnaround times are delayed due to limited local capacity. These factors have compounded the operational challenges associated with an aging fleet.

Current records are kept in a locked office, while archived records are locked in a storage container in the Bishop yard. While parts are generally ordered as needed, any parts stocked in the inventory are secured. All parts are tracked through invoices and software.

Regular California Highway Patrol (CHP) and daily driver inspections ensure vehicles can be operated safely. Maintenance is notified promptly of vehicle breakdowns and safety issues. Lock out/tag out procedures in both locations are used to keep unsafe vehicles and shop equipment from being used.

The average age of the transit vehicles is 10 years, with an average mileage of 160,000 miles. There is a vehicle replacement program in effect, with most replacements funded through a mix of grants and local funds. The current revenue fleet is detailed in Exhibit 7.3.

Exhibit 7.3 ESTA Transit Fleet

Quantity	Year	Make/Model	Pass + WC	Fuel	Location	Mode	Route
1	2005	Ford Escape	5	Gas	Mammoth	Non-revenue	
1	2012	Toyota RAV4	5	Gas	Bishop	Non-revenue	
8	2012	El Dorado Axess bus	37+2	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	MMSA/Reds
2	2012	El Dorado EZ Rider II bus	37+2	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	MMSA/Reds
1	2012	El Dorado EZ Rider II bus	37+2	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Trolley routes
1	2013	Ford F150	3	Gas	Bishop	Non-revenue	
1	2013	Ford E-449 cutaway	20/16+2	Gas	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Purple
1	2013	El Dorado Axess bus	37+2	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	MMSA/Reds
1	2014	Ford F150	3	Gas	Mammoth	Non-revenue	
1	2015	Ford E-450 cutaway	16/12+2	Gas	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Purple
1	2016	Ford E-450 cutaway	16/12+2	Gas	Bishop	Dial-A-Ride	
1	2016	Hometown Trolley Villager bus	26+2	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Trolley routes
1	2017	Hometown Trolley Villager bus	26+2	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Trolley routes
1	2018	Hometown Trolley Villager bus	26+3	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Trolley routes
1	2019	Freightliner Defender cutaway	33/27+2	Diesel	Bishop	Fixed-route	395 Reno/Lancaster
1	2020	Freightliner Defender cutaway	33/29+2	Diesel	Bishop	Fixed-route	
1	2020	Hometown Trolley Villager bus	26+4	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Trolley routes
3	2022	Chrysler Voyager minivan	5	Gas	Bishop	Non-revenue	
1	2022	Chrysler Voyager minivan	5	Gas	Mammoth	Dial-A-Ride	
1	2022	Chrysler Voyager minivan	5	Gas	Walker	Dial-A-Ride	
1	2022	Ford Transit 350EL van	7	Electric	Bishop	Dial-A-Ride	
1	2022	Ford E-450 cutaway	16/12+2	Gas	Bishop	Dial-A-Ride	
1	2022	Ford E-450 cutaway	16/12+2	Gas	Bishop	Fixed-route	
1	2022	Ford E-450 cutaway	16/12+2	Gas	Mammoth	Fixed-route	
1	2022	Hometown Trolley Villager bus	26+4	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Trolley routes
1	2022	Hometown Trolley Villager bus	26+5	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Trolley routes
2	2023	Toyota RAV4	5	Gas	Bishop	Non-revenue	
1	2023	Freightliner FRGTliner cutaway	25/21+2	Diesel	Bishop	Fixed-route	
4	2023	Freightliner FRGTliner cutaway	33/29+2	Diesel	Bishop	Fixed-route	
1	2023	Freightliner FRGTliner cutaway	33/29+2	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	
1	2023	Hometown Trolley Villager bus	26+2	Diesel	Mammoth	Fixed-route	Trolley routes
2	2024	Toyota Sequoia	7	Gas	Mammoth	Non-revenue	
8	2024	Dodge Promaster van		Gas			
1	2024	Freightliner Legacy cutaway	25/19+2	Gas	Mammoth	Fixed-route	
1	2025	Freightliner Legacy cutaway	25/19+2	Gas	Bishop	Fixed-route	395 Reno/Lancaster

Chapter 8 | Findings and Recommendations

Conclusions

The ESTA is found to be in compliance with the Transportation Development Act (TDA). Four recommendations intended to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the transit operator are detailed below.

Findings

Based on discussions with ESTA staff, analysis of program performance, and an audit of program compliance and function, the audit team presents no findings related to compliance with the TDA.

Program Recommendations

Recommendations are intended to assist in bringing the operator into compliance with the requirements and standards of the TDA as well as address non-compliance-related issues, challenges, or opportunities observed during the site visit and functional review. The following recommendations are presented for the ESTA.

Recommendation 1: Evaluate driver shifts to accommodate those who cannot or do not want to work 10- to 12-hour shifts.

Discussion: Long shifts, including those that span 10 to 12 hours, were implemented in FY 2017/18 when the ESTA program was significantly understaffed. The shifts were designed so that the service could be operated by fewer drivers. The shifts generally include up to 10.5 hours driving time, with up to two hours for the commute. While some drivers prefer the long shifts, others do not or cannot work those schedules.

Contributing Factor(s): Current schedules are difficult from a safety perspective because they include the maximum amount of driving time. If a driver is out of Bishop, they have nearly an hour commute each way, which raises concerns about safety. Many drivers choose to carpool, but it is still a long day. Drivers from Bishop are not assigned for the late shift due to the extended commute. This restriction is an issue because it makes fewer drivers available. In addition, the lack of a driver bid means that supervisors may need to schedule a driver counter to their preferences.

Recommended Action: ESTA should review its driver scheduling practices to determine if keeping such long shifts is preferable now that there is greater staffing, or if maintaining these long shifts is detrimental to safety. It should also consider whether implementation of a driver bid system would enable those who prefer long shifts to keep them and others to bid on shorter shifts.

Timeline: FY 2026/27.

Anticipated Cost: Modest.

Recommendation 2: Begin tracking the driver attrition rate as part of the annual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Discussion: Given the extremely high turnover among drivers, tracking the attrition rate can provide more solid data regarding why drivers leave, what motivates them to stay, and ultimately what impact the turnover has on the transit program. While this is monitored informally, it is not a metric that is documented with hard data and reported to the Board.

Contributing Factor(s): While ESTA may not wish to set a performance target for driver attrition, at least initially, documenting this information can help the agency clearly see what kind of economic impact it is having on its transit program. Since ESTA is willing to train drivers to get their commercial drivers license, developing an understanding of how many of those drivers remain with the program is important information about ESTA's investment in its workforce.

Recommended Action: ESTA should begin documenting as much data around driver attrition as possible, including but not limited to date of hire, work location, date of departure, reason for leaving, and whether the driver was hired with a CDL or obtained it as a result of training through the agency. ESTA may also wish to track seasonal drivers to identify how many return for multiple seasons or quit after one or two seasons. Over time, ESTA can use this information to further target some of the causes of attrition in its recruitment efforts.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Anticipated Cost: Modest.

Recommendation 3: Work toward strengthening ESTA's maintenance program in Bishop.

Discussion: ESTA has not historically provided maintenance services using in-house staff. During the audit period, minor repairs and maintenance began being conducted in-house as staff had the capacity to provide them, due in part of the lack of maintenance vendors (especially those who could work on diesel vehicles) in Bishop. That situation was threatened further when a fire in 2025 nearly burned down the vendor and endangered several ESTA vehicles parked in the vendor's lot.

Contributing Factor(s): ESTA is currently planning and securing funding for a new administration building at its current location in Bishop. Ideally the site plan would also include a maintenance facility that could handle many of the maintenance tasks in-house. This would not only ensure access to qualified mechanics but also eliminate the need to "get in line" for repairs when using an outside maintenance vendor.

Recommended Action: While the preferred solution is access to an in-house mechanic, and ESTA has been making efforts to bring some of the minor work in-house, growing the in-house program may not be a quick solution. ESTA may also wish to consider an interim solution like the one it successfully uses in Mammoth; namely, contracting with an entity that provides maintenance to its own fleets. Exploring how other fleets operating in and around Bishop (such as waste management, fire trucks, school bus, road equipment, etc.) are maintained could provide additional opportunities for ESTA to secure dependable maintenance services while it works toward having an in-house maintenance department.

Timeline: Ongoing.

Anticipated Cost: Unknown.

Recommendation 4: Consider restructuring the organizational chart to better accommodate growth and provide better support for supervisors and drivers.

Discussion: The Executive Director, prior to his retirement in April 2026, indicated that the organizational structure of ESTA needed to be revised to plan for growth. His envisioned changes include elevating the Operations Supervisors to Operations Manager, with another Supervisor level below them. This would enable greater oversight of the drivers; the supervisors currently have too many drivers reporting to each of them. He also cited a need for Road Supervisors.

Contributing Factor(s): Some progress has already been made with the hiring of an Assistant Supervisor in Mammoth. However, the Executive Director felt that finalization of the updated organizational chart would need to be reserved until after a new Executive Director is hired so that it can be reflective of the new individual's vision for the agency's growth.

Recommended Action: The new Executive Director should meet with agency leadership to consider proposed structural changes to the organization. Once the new organizational structure is finalized, ESTA can then move forward with recruitment to begin filling the positions.

Timeline: FY 2026/27.

Anticipated Cost: Modest cost to develop the updated organization structure; cost of new positions will depend on the salary and compensation identified for each.

Exhibit 8.1 Audit Recommendations

Recommendations		Importance	Timeline
1	Evaluate driver shifts to accommodate those who cannot or do not want to work 10- to 12-hour shifts.	Medium	FY 2026/27
2	Begin tracking the driver attrition rate as part of the annual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).	Medium	Ongoing
3	Work toward strengthening ESTA's maintenance program in Bishop.	Medium	Ongoing
4	Consider restructuring the organizational chart to better accommodate growth and provide better support for supervisors and drivers.	High	FY 2026/27

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