



DRAFT Morongo Basin Subarea Plan

San Bernardino County Long Range Multimodal
Transportation Plan

San Bernardino County, CA
December 6, 2024





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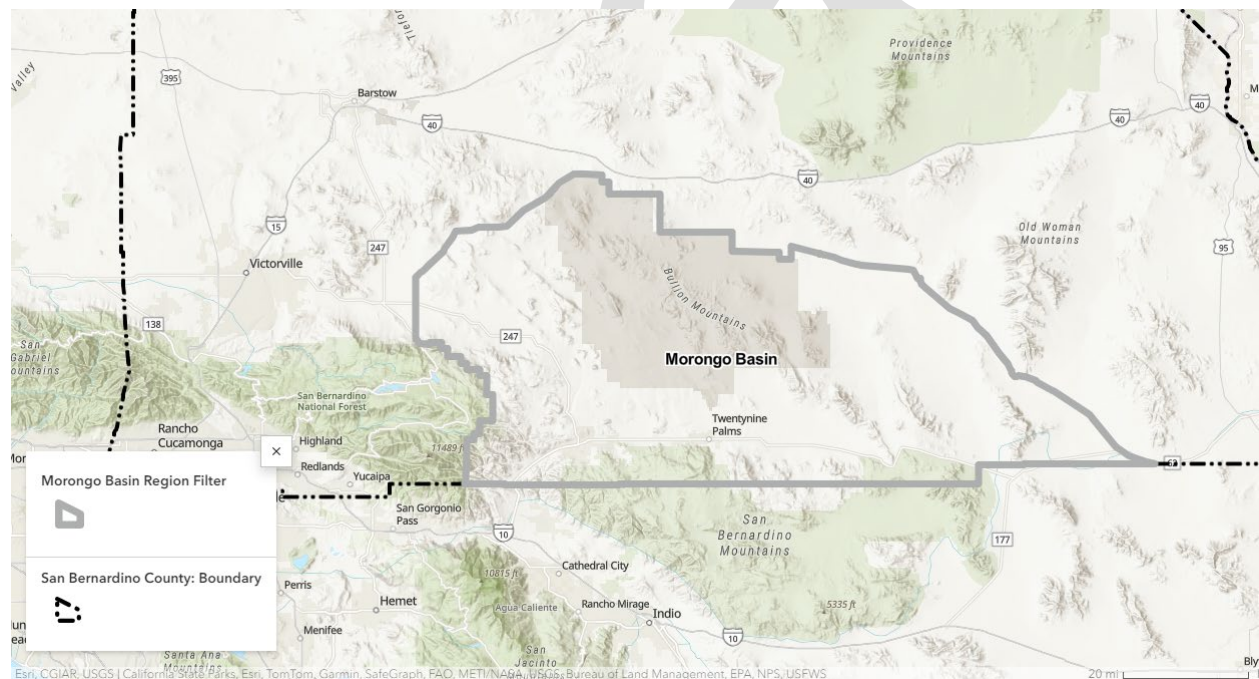
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1 Subarea Overview

As the largest county in the contiguous United States in land area, San Bernardino County is geographically diverse, and each subregion has unique needs. This is recognized in the county's half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements, Measure I, which allocates funding to six subareas. In developing the Long Range Multimodal Transportation Plan (LRMTP), the six subareas identified by Measure I were analyzed to ensure issues facing San Bernardino County's unique geographic areas are adequately addressed. This subarea plan focuses on the Morongo Basin subarea (Figure 1).

The Morongo Basin includes the City of Twentynine Palms, Town of Yucca Valley and communities of Joshua Tree, Pioneer Town, Landers and Wonder Valley. The Morongo Basin is the second fastest growing subarea in terms of percentage growth in households and employment in the county. The subarea had 26,527 households in 2019, which is projected to increase by 40 percent in 2050 (Southern California Association of Governments [SCAG] 2024). Additionally, the number of jobs in the Morongo Basin is expected to increase by 38 percent between 2019 and 2050 (SCAG 2024). Morongo Basin is mostly undeveloped with a share being preserved open space for environmental protection and recreational use. Housing is predominantly single-family and rural residential with large lot sizes and significant distances between residential and commercial areas.

Figure 1. Morongo Basin Subarea



Source: Existing Conditions StoryMap

2 Unique Challenges

The Morongo Basin Area Transportation Study (MBATS) provides an extensive overview of some of the transportation challenges in the Morongo Basin Subarea (San Bernardino Associated Governments [SANBAG] 2014). A comprehensive list of transportation challenges was identified, as well as potential solutions. State highways are the primary routes through the subarea, and it is SR-62 and SR-247 where the most significant congestion levels can occur. Although the MBATS is from 2014, the nature of the transportation challenges has not significantly changed during that period, and the report can be a source for needs and potential solutions. Unfortunately, funding for this subarea is limited, and Caltrans has limited budgets as well. Several of the projects included in the 10-Year Delivery Plan is shaped by concerns identified in the MBATS. Below is a summary of current challenges.

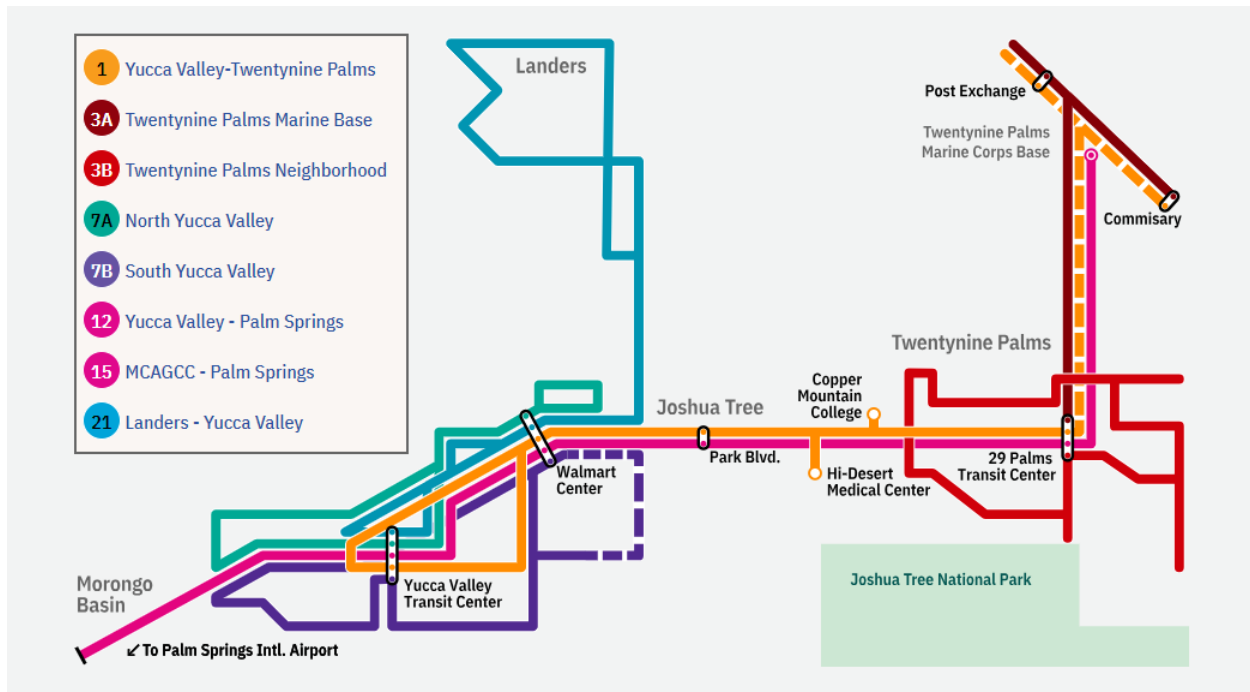
Dependence on Key Arteries: State Route 62 (SR-62), traveling east/west, and State Route 247 (SR-247), traveling north/south, are the two primary arterials connecting the developed areas in the basin to Lucerne Valley in San Bernardino and to Riverside County. Residential and commercial properties are concentrated near SR-62. Since Joshua Tree National Park and the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) limit north/south connections, local streets distribute traffic from the regional corridors to the more rural areas of the basin.

Long Travel Distances: The geographic location of communities in the Morongo Basin can be a challenge for residents traveling to other areas of San Bernardino County and Riverside County. Situated within the Mojave Desert, the Morongo Basin is east of the San Bernardino Mountains, and north of Joshua Tree National Park, which limits connectivity and necessitates longer driving routes.

Limited Transit Connections: Morongo Basin Transit Authority (MBTA) serves Yucca Valley, Joshua Tree, 29 Palms, Landers, Copper Mountain College and MCAGCC. Most routes operate on weekdays, and service is limited to destinations in the Morongo Basin subarea except for an intercity service to Palm Springs (Figure 2). There has been a need for transit service to connect Morongo Basin to the Valley subarea.

Freight Traffic: Interstate 10 (I-10) is a major freight highway to move goods from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to the warehouses in the Inland Empire. East of San Geronimo Pass, I-10 connects to SR-62, which parallels I-10, north of the Coachella Valley. SR-62 and SR-247 have experienced increased freight traffic due to periodic closures and congestion on I-10 and I-15.

Figure 2. MBTA Routes



Source: MBTA

3 Strategic Priorities

In developing the LRMT, five areas of concern were identified throughout the county: mobility, goods movement, climate adaptation and resiliency, disadvantaged communities, and funding. The areas of concern are related to the goals and objectives of the LRMT. This section describes how these areas relate to the Morongo Basin subarea.

Mobility: The primary mode of travel is by personal vehicle, with SR-62 serving as the main roadway for residents and accommodating through traffic. Local roads connect to residential neighborhoods, but commercial and retail spaces are generally along SR-62. The Morongo Basin subarea is sparsely developed and rural with larger lot sizes, limited sidewalks and bike lanes, minimal street crossings, which are challenges to improving connectivity for residents. SR-62 also divides communities in Yucca Valley and Twenty-nine Palms. Frontage roads exist on some portions of SR-62, and sidewalks are fragmented on both SR-62 and the frontage roads. The Morongo Basin is a pleasant environment for walking and cycling, but bike/ped route continuity is non-existent.

Goods Movement: SR-62 is designated as a terminal access route by Caltrans. Since the state route is the primary roadway for many communities in the Morongo Basin, increased truck volumes can impact the mobility of residents and visitors. There is a concern that truck volumes are increasing through the Morongo Basin. This is particularly true of times of major delays or closures on I-10 in the Banning Pass and I-15 in the Cajon Pass. The most direct impact is at the intersection of SR-62 and SR-247. When I-10 or I-15 sneeze, Yucca Valley catches a cold, from a congestion standpoint.

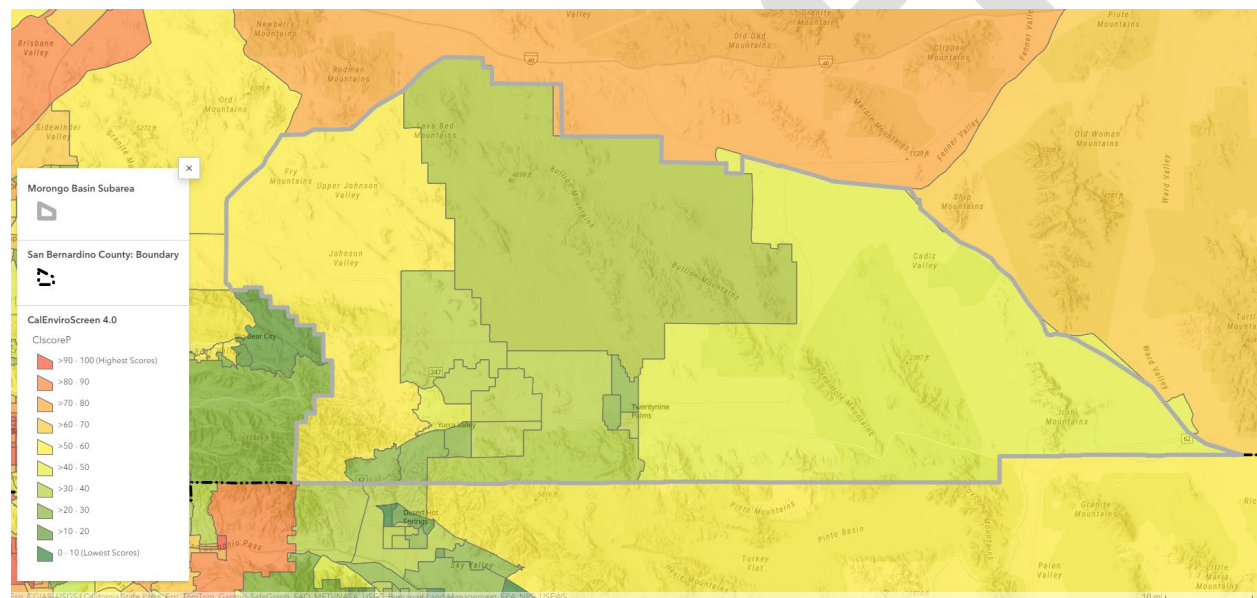
Climate Adaption and Resiliency: Weather conditions and natural events can affect roadway conditions and safety. The Morongo Basin is susceptible to wildfires, flash flooding, and earthquakes, which can cause road closure and impact pavement conditions. Twenty-nine Palms, Yucca Valley, and

other smaller communities are accessible by SR-62, thereby closures or disruptions limit access and connectivity for these communities.

Disadvantaged Communities: Census tracts in the Morongo Basin subarea have lower CalEnviroScreen scores compared to other subareas (Figure 3), suggesting a lower pollution burden and reduced vulnerability to pollution. However, sensitive populations in the area are at risk for asthma and cardiovascular disease.

Funding: Funding issues are not restricted to one geographic area, however, securing funding for transit operations and expanding active transportation facilities to connect communities across SR-62 are priorities for the Morongo Basin subarea. Further, addressing congestion issues at the SR-62/SR-247 intersection is a critical priority, both for commuting, seasonal traffic, and periodic traffic problems on I-10 and I-15.

Figure 3. CalEnviroScreen Percentile for the Morongo Basin Subarea



Source: CalEnviroScreen 4.0

4 Strategic Priorities Action Plan

The final LRMTTP report identifies the projects being considered for the forthcoming San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) 2025 10-Year Delivery Plan, and presents projects listed for the “Baseline Level” of investment and additional projects at the “Aggressive Level” that can be considered with additional revenue for all subareas. Table 1 lists highway projects being pursued by local jurisdictions in the Morongo Basin Subarea over the next 10 years. Additional details are available in the SBCTA 2025 10-Year Delivery Plan. It is notable that three of the five projects listed are for improvements on SR-62, which speaks to the importance of maintaining mobility on this state highway, the “main street” of the Morongo Basin. Basin Transit is in the process of updating its short-range transit plan. The most recent plan can be found at: [Basin Transit Short Range Transit Plan FY2020-2024](#).

Table 1. Morongo Basin Subarea - Major Local Highway Program Projects Through 2033/34

Morongo Basin Major Local Highway Program	Cost
1 Split Rock Avenue at Twentynine Palms Flood Control Channel	\$3,454
2 SR 62 Street Improvements from Encelia Avenue to Larrea Avenue, Phase 2B Widening	\$5,937
3 SR 62 Widening, Sage Avenue to Airway Avenue	\$41,500
4 Yucca Trail Widening from Palomar to La Contenta	\$6,567
5 SR 62 Street Improvements from Larrea Avenue to Star Dune, Phase 3	\$5,959
TOTAL:	\$63,417

Table 2 through Table 6 summarizes the strategic priority and key actions for each of the issues described in the previous section.

Table 2. Mobility Action Plan for the Morongo Basin Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Further develop the Core Transit Network	<p>Existing Morongo Basin Transit Authority services represent the backbone of transit mobility. Their current route coverage locally is good, and the ability to deliver these services needs to be maintained.</p> <p>Continue to manage and improve other alternate mode initiatives, including vanpool, carpool, and active transportation modes.</p> <p>Invest in the MBTA system based on priorities in the Short Range Transit Plan</p> <p>Position MBTA network improvements to be competitive for additional state and federal funding</p> <p>Pursue operating funds for increased service using strategies described in key issue 5</p>
Incremental transit enhancements in rural areas	<p>Identify unmet or underserved needs in rural communities</p> <p>Secure funding to implement new/enhanced service to meet rural travel needs</p>
Develop coordinated program of first/last mile improvements	<p>Build on the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan to define a cohesive active transportation priority list and advance project development to position for funding</p> <p>Deliver priority bicycle/pedestrian improvements to improve continuity on SR-62</p> <p>Develop design guidelines for a tiered mobility hub network that co-locates transit and active transportation amenities such as bike sharing</p>
Invest in multimodal connectivity and customer experience	<p>Continue to coordinate service planning between transit providers to schedule convenient connections between modes</p> <p>Actively promote fare integration and adoption of interoperable fare payment and trip planning technology across San Bernardino County and regional public transportation services and modes</p> <p>Invest in physical improvements at bus stops to improve rider safety and comfort, such as shelters, benches, and lighting</p>
Manage congestion on freeways and arterials	<p>Implement the Smart Intersection and Smart Corridor recommendations on SR-62 from the Smart County Master Plan. Coordinate with SR-62 roadway improvements</p> <p>Develop and construct priority roadway improvements in the 10-Year Delivery Plan</p>

Promote strong vanpool, carpool, and TDM initiatives

Continue and expand partnerships with large and medium-sized employers to promote multimodal alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle commutes, including telecommuting

Continue partnering with regional partners such as RCTC to share data and technology tools to support shared-ride opportunities for long-distance commuters

Review transit fare structures and carpool/vanpool programs to provide flexibility that encourages hybrid workers to use alternative modes on days they must travel to an office

Promote awareness of mobility alternatives and communicate the quality-of-life benefits of transit, vanpool, and carpool as alternatives to driving alone

Develop vehicle miles traveled (VMT) mitigation bank

Leverage existing plans and work on strategic priorities to identify multimodal projects that can reduce VMT

Implement the proposed “mode-choice based VMT mitigation bank” to incentivize commuters to reduce their VMT and make VMT credits available for purchase by proponents of highway and development projects.

Table 3. Goods Movement Action Plan for the Morongo Basin Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Develop plan for designated freight corridors	Assist jurisdictions with guidelines for implementation of AB 98, to include identification of corridors that may be designated as truck routes
	Identify improvements to improve safety and operational efficiency along these corridors
	Work with Caltrans and California Highway Patrol to enhance traffic management and monitoring systems to actively manage traffic along SR-62 and SR-247 during periods of heavy delays on I-10 or I-15 and potential diversion to SR-62/247.
Accelerate transition to clean trucks	Coordinate with local jurisdictions on a set of guidelines and plans to incorporate proposed truck routes into their circulation elements as required by AB98
	Partner with logistics and zero-emission (ZE) charging/fueling companies to accelerate the transition to ZE truck operations and supporting infrastructure needs
	Partner with the private sector to seek grant funding for ZE trucks and charging/fueling stations Continue to coordinate with local jurisdictions and regional partners to build on goods movement decarbonization efforts such as the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario MSA Priority Climate Action Plan

Table 4. Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Action Plan for the Morongo Basin Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Encourage redundancy across the transportation network and improve operational resiliency on major arterials	Implement recommendations from the forthcoming State Route 247/62 Emergency Bypass Study and the Emergency Evacuation Network Study (EENR)
Accelerate transition to clean vehicles	<p>Partner with zero-emission fueling/charging companies to accelerate the transition to zero-emission.</p> <p>Seek grant funding for ZE vehicle and transit</p>
Transition transit operations to zero-emissions	Implement transit zero-emission plans, taking advantage of lessons learned as agencies deploy new technologies, in particular regarding operating zero emission vehicles long distances and in hot conditions in the county's rural areas
Prioritize state-of-good-repair on highways and arterials	Collaborate with Caltrans and local jurisdictions on prioritizing maintenance of state highways, on which the Morongo Basin is dependent
Establish emergency procedures	<p>Complete the Emergency Evacuation Network Resilience Study in cooperation with WRCOG and partner to implement key recommendations of the study</p> <p>Aid transit agencies, where possible, during periods of emergencies due to extreme events such as fire and flooding, as they support evacuation of local residents (and their pets) to safe centers and evacuation shelters.</p> <p>Collaborate with local and state emergency service agencies to establish and maintain strong and clear communication pathways so that in times of emergency, San Bernardino County residents are knowledgeable about where to turn for immediate transportation-related information</p>

Table 5. Disadvantaged Communities Action Plan for the Morongo Basin Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Continue to operate the local bus and demand-responsive transit systems that particularly serve residents without access to cars	<p>Analyze potential impacts of major transit investments on transit service to disadvantaged communities.</p> <p>Provide adequate maintenance, security, schedule information and cleanliness at local bus stops.</p> <p>Consider needs of all users as electronic fare payment systems are further developed.</p>
Take advantage of available funding focused on disadvantaged communities	<p>Deliver transit priorities identified in the LRMTF that particularly benefit disadvantaged communities</p> <p>Ensure that transit and TDM programs are highlighted at employment sites where lower-wage workers tend to be employed</p> <p>Take advantage of equity-oriented programs like RAISE and the Reconnecting Communities Pilot</p> <p>Continue to leverage state GHG reduction fund sources such as TIRCP and SB 1 funds such as TCEP to accelerate the ZE transition</p>
Free and reduced fare programs	<p>Expand targeted programs to improve transit affordability for students, seniors, and low-income individuals</p> <p>Promote electronic fare payment options, particularly to support fare-capping, including for low-income individuals who otherwise pay more for successive trips than the cost of a monthly pass</p> <p>Communicate fare incentives to the public</p>
Prioritize multimodal improvements to improve mobility in disadvantaged communities	<p>Prioritize transit corridors that connect disadvantaged communities to key destinations</p> <p>Invest in high-comfort off-street active transportation corridors</p> <p>Build on the Non-Motorized Transportation plan to deliver improvements in disadvantaged communities</p>
Prioritize inclusive communications	<p>Translate promotional materials, trip planning information, and other information on SBCTA programs into the most common languages for the targeted audience</p> <p>Develop target-group focused communications strategies – such as to seniors, to rideshare commuters, to potential transit users – that can promote mobility choices.</p> <p>Use the Public & Specialized Transportation Advisory and Coordination Council (PASTACC) to coordinate delivery of services to disadvantaged communities.</p>

Table 6. Funding Action Plan for the Morongo Basin Subarea

Strategic Priority	Key Actions
Secure additional state and regional funding for transit operations	Increase availability and flexibility of future Measure I funding for use in transit operations Lobby for greater predictability of state and federal transportation revenue streams and flexibility to use new and existing state and federal transportation funding sources for operating expenses
Align future funding sales tax measures with the priorities of the LRMTF	Ensure that a potential Measure I renewal or additional tax measure would allow the key actions for the strategic priorities as eligible expenditures, including capital investments for all modes and ongoing operating costs for transit Ensure that a potential Measure I renewal provides flexibility in future allocations to allow SBCTA and its partners to adapt to the uncertain future and changing investment needs
Partner with community-based organizations (CBOs) and the business sector to build support for projects and promote alternatives	Maintain relationships with CBO leaders and business sector partners Leverage CBO and private sector contact networks to disseminate information in a targeted manner and collect feedback from communities and businesses affected by projects Leverage CBO and business sector networks to disseminate information about new and existing multimodal services and incentives available to the public
Support local agency grant pursuits	Monitor grant funding opportunities at federal, state, and regional levels and connect collaborate with local partners on grant pursuits Provide technical support for local grant applications

5 Conclusion and Next Steps

Priority projects to improve operations of the transportation network are identified in the 10-Year Delivery Plan and the Morongo Basin Area Transportation Study and projects to improve active transportation facilities are included in the Morongo Basin Active Transportation Plan, Non-Motorized Transportation Plan, Points of Interest Pedestrian Plan, and the Regional Safe Routes to School Plan.

The MBTA Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) for 2020–2024 establishes a five-year plan to support expansion of service days and frequencies for the Morongo Basin Transit Authority’s transit routes (MBTA 2020). The plan targets 30-minute headways on all segments of Route 1 on weekdays and Saturdays by fiscal year 2025. Further recommendations include replacing MBTA’s neighborhood local fixed routes with dynamically routed and scheduled personal mobility on-demand service offering primarily first/last mile” feeder connections between residential neighborhoods and key bus stops along SR-62. A phased five-year service plan is laid out in the SRTP to standardize routes and more frequent schedules to make transit travel more comparable to personal vehicle travel. The financial plan in the SRTP is projected through fiscal year 2025-26 to support implementation of the recommended service plan. The San Bernardino Countywide Zero-Emission Bus Study Master Plan includes recommendations for the technology and charging/fueling station location based on service needs and site configurations.

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