



CITY OF CORONADO

CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

November 21, 2023

{{section.number}}e

REPORT ON THE 2023 FREE SUMMER SHUTTLE PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive report.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Coronado has provided a free summer shuttle service annually since 2013, replacing the Metropolitan Transit Service (MTS) Route 904 between Memorial Day weekend and Labor Day. The shuttle provides free rides for all passengers and includes four beach-themed wrapped buses that operate on 15-minute intervals from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The City also provides a free holiday shuttle for Cays residents on the Fourth of July and offers free MTS PRONTO passes for Cays residents.

The summer shuttle was cancelled in 2020 and operated on an altered schedule in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The summer shuttle returned to a standard schedule in 2022.

ANALYSIS:

The 2023 summer shuttle was planned to operate consistent with prior non-pandemic years and was expected to experience a rebound in ridership as tourism and business activity recovered. Unfortunately, a bus drivers' strike delayed the start of the summer shuttle until June 26 resulting in an abbreviated service period. Ridership also markedly declined from 2022 and was the lowest recorded since the shuttle began in 2013.

The summer shuttle operated for 71 days in 2023 and provided rides for 34,248 passengers between June 26 – September 4. By comparison, the 2022 shuttle operated for 102 days and served 79,741 passengers. Although the abbreviated operating period in 2023 accounted for a significant decline in total ridership, the average number of passengers per trip also decreased from 7.7 in 2022 to 4.7 in 2023, indicating that fewer people used the shuttle this past year. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the shuttle generally served between 11-15 passengers per trip (see Table 1).

The 4th of July Cays Shuttle accommodated 814 passengers in 2023, with an average of 12.5 passengers per trip, which was slightly down from 2022 when 917 rides were provided. Due to a change in federal regulations, 2023 was also the first year that MTS provided free door-to-door ADA Access service in conjunction with the City's free summer shuttle. A total of 47 trips were provided, with all trips serving the same resident.

Ridership Analysis

There are a number of factors and anomalies to consider when evaluating the decline in ridership in 2023 as further described below:

Bus Drivers' Strike and Promotional Activities

The bus drivers' strike not only delayed the start of the summer shuttle by a month, it also compromised standard planning and promotional efforts because it was unknown when the strike would end and when service could begin. Consequently, the annual summer shuttle kickoff media event was cancelled and the City and MTS conducted very little promotional or advertising

activities compared to past years, which may have diminished public awareness and contributed to depressed ridership.

Accuracy of Ridership Data

Because the summer shuttle is fare-free, MTS cannot use their standard fare collection system to record the number of onboarding passengers and must instead rely on drivers to conduct manual counts. MTS reports these manual counts to the City and Federal Transportation Commission as the official ridership totals.

In past years, MTS provides training to all of its drivers prior to starting the summer shuttle. The importance of collecting accurate manual counts is emphasized in driver trainings; however, due to the drivers’ strike, no training was offered in 2023.

In addition to manual passenger counts, MTS also uses an Automatic Passenger Counter (APC) system to record the number of people boarding their busses. The automated APC system is not used for official counts, however, and is known to overcount passengers because it can erroneously capture large dogs and objects such as baby strollers and surfboards. Nonetheless, the automated system provides another data point that can be referenced to compare the 2023 passenger totals to prior years.

According to MTS, the variance between the manual counts and APC data was substantially greater in 2023 than in past years and may be indicative of an approximately 30% undercount of actual passengers. Based on their analysis, MTS believes actual ridership is closer to 50,469 passengers, or 7 passengers per trip as opposed to the official manual counts of 34,248 and 4.7 riders per trip. However, this would still represent an 37% decline in overall ridership from 2022.

Table 1. Summer Shuttle Performance Summary

Year	Dates	Days of Service	City Cost ¹	Total Ridership	Change from Previous Year ²	Riders/Day	Riders/Trip	Cost/Ride
2013	7/5-9/30	88	\$49,800	55,397	+506%	630	Data unavailable	\$0.99
2014	6/8-9/14	99	\$57,500	78,612	+42%	794	Data unavailable	\$0.73
2015	6/7-9/13	99	\$92,500	116,499	+48%	1,177	15.5	\$0.79
2016	5/27-9/25	122	\$160,948	138,584	+19%	1,136	11.3	\$1.16
2017	5/27-9/4	101	\$135,000	149,975	+8%	1,485	14.8	\$0.90
2018	5/25-9/3	102	\$135,000	123,846	-17%	1,214	12.1	\$1.09
2019	5/24-9/2	102	\$149,480	154,026	+24%	1,510	15.0	\$0.97
2020	Cancelled due to COVID-19 Pandemic							
2021	6/6-9/6	93	\$157,940	54,223	-65%	583	6.0	\$2.91
2022	5/27 – 9/5	102	\$189,513	79,741	+47%	731	7.7	\$2.38
2023	6/26 – 9/4	71	\$146,586 ³	34,248	-57%	482	4.7	\$4.28

¹Includes direct costs paid to MTS only

²Represents change in total ridership, does not account for difference in the number of service days

³Total cost was lower in 2023 due to abbreviated operating schedule caused by drivers’ strike

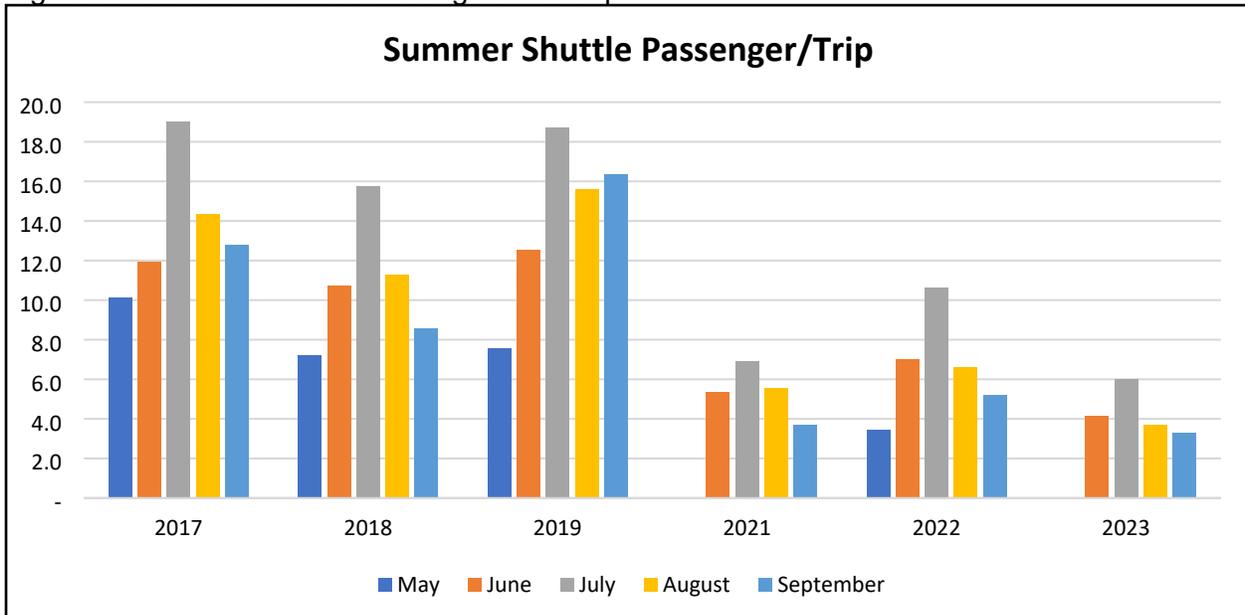
Table 2. Summer Shuttle Monthly Passengers

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
May	5,031	5,075	6,106	-	-	1,731	-
June	35,934	32,366	37,745	-	13,379	21,001	2,057
July	59,368	48,811	58,375	-	22,344	33,900	19,226
August	44,429	35,002	48,593	-	17,160	20,482	11,591
September	5,213	2,592	3,207	-	2,220	2,627	1,374
TOTAL	149,975	123,846	154,026	-	55,103	79,741	34,248

Table 3. Summer Shuttle Passengers Per Trip

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
May	10.1	7.2	7.6	-	-	3.4	-
June	11.9	10.7	12.5	-	5.4	7.0	4.1
July	19.0	15.7	18.7	-	6.9	10.6	6.0
August	14.3	11.3	15.6	-	5.5	6.6	3.7
September	12.8	8.6	16.4	-	3.7	5.2	3.3

Figure 1. Summer Shuttle Passengers Per Trip



FISCAL IMPACT:

The City’s spent \$146,585 on the 2023 Summer Shuttle contract with MTS and purchased an additional \$700 Pronto passes for Cays residents.

ALTERNATIVE:

The City Council may decline to receive the report.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT:

This activity is exempt from environmental review because it is not considered a project as defined by CEQA.

PUBLIC NOTICE:
No notice required.

ATTACHMENTS:
None.

Submitted By: Community Development Department / Jasmine Bridges