

For Immediate Release

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METRO Launches New Watsonville Circulator Route

Grant-funded route features electric buses and offers free fares for one-year pilot program

September 1, 2021 — SANTA CRUZ, CA — Santa Cruz METRO announced that it has been awarded a \$489,213 grant from the California Department of Transportation’s Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) to launch a new “circulator” route that exclusively serves stops in Watsonville. A circulator route provides services in a loop format. The service will provide 16 daily round trips, seven days a week, 52 weeks out of the year. The route will be operated using zero emission buses purchased in the LCTOP previous cycles.

LCTOP funding is designated for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve transportation for disadvantaged and low-income communities. METRO will use the grant funds to deploy two new battery-electric buses in downtown Watsonville and offer free fares to the public to encourage ridership and promote public transportation through a one-year pilot program. The grant will be used to fund three bus operators for 12 months, providing regularly scheduled service for community members.

“The new Watsonville Circulator Route is designed to increase the number of transit passengers locally by providing more frequent service to desirable destinations in Watsonville between noon and 7:45 p.m. daily,” said METRO’s CEO and General Manager Alex Clifford. “The project will not only reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fueled buses, but it will serve one of the lowest income communities in METRO’s service area.”

The route will connect the downtown transit center with primary retail and medical destinations in Watsonville. It will operate a clockwise loop and a counterclockwise loop from Watsonville Transit Center, serving Main Street, Green Valley Road, Freedom Centre, Freedom Boulevard and Lincoln Street, connecting commuters with existing local and intercity Bus Lines 69A, 69W, 71, 72/72W, 74S, 75, 79 and 91X (map attached).

Envisioned to become a critical link for our community, service benefits include:

- Improved public health by removing cars off the road and providing passengers with a competitive alternative that will help reduce pollution from single-occupant vehicles.
- Creation of a more sustainable transportation system that reduces vehicles mile traveled, greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion.
- Development of a more integrated and active transportation system that serves the community’s vulnerable populations.

METRO is hosting a Watsonville Circulator Route Ribbon Cutting event on Tuesday, Sept. 7 from 11 a.m. – noon at the Watsonville Transit Center, 475 Rodriguez Street in Watsonville. The public is encouraged to attend and learn more about the route and its benefits. For more information on the Watsonville Circulator, visit scmttd.com/WC.

METRO is committed to enhancing mobility for disadvantaged communities as well as reducing its environmental footprint by transitioning to zero emission buses. The Watsonville Circulator Route will expand transit service to new residential and commercial areas in Watsonville. This important step will accelerate the use of advanced technologies in heavy-duty vehicles to meet air quality, climate and health goals.

About Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District:

Established in 1968, Santa Cruz METRO provides fixed-route and Highway 17 commuter service throughout Santa Cruz County, with limited service connecting to Monterey Salinas Transit at our Watsonville Transit Center and Santa Clara County, transporting more than 5 million passenger trips a year. METRO also operates ParaCruz paratransit service to Santa Cruz County, providing about 73,500 trips per year. METRO's operating budget in FY21 is almost \$55 million and is funded through a combination of farebox revenue, sales tax, and state and federal sources. Today it operates a fleet of 94 buses on at least 24 fixed-routes. For more information, visit www.scmted.com. Like METRO on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SantaCruzMETRO or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/SantaCruzMETRO.

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