

Metropolitan Transportation Commission Programming and Allocations Committee

September 14, 2011

Item Number 3c

Lifeline Transportation Program Evaluation

Subject: Lifeline Transportation Program Evaluation

Background: MTC's Lifeline Transportation Program funds projects that improve mobility for the region's low-income population, and is administered at the county level by the nine county congestion management agencies (CMAs), and in Santa Clara County via a joint arrangement between VTA and the County. Since 2005, two funding cycles have provided a mix of state and federal funds for both capital and operating purposes to enable flexibility in funding a wide variety of transportation solutions tailored to locally identified priorities, especially those identified in Community Based Transportation Plans (CBTPs). Funding is distributed by fund source (including federal Jobs Access Reverse Commute, state Proposition 1B Transit Capital, and State Transit Assistance funds) to counties by each county's share of the regional low-income population. In the first two funding cycles, \$74 million in Lifeline funding was programmed to 125 projects throughout the region.

In anticipation of a third funding cycle beginning FY2012, staff retained a consultant to conduct an independent evaluation of the Lifeline Program. The purpose of this evaluation was to:

- Research, summarize, and analyze first- and second-cycle project outcomes with respect to program goals.
- Identify factors that promote successful projects with respect to selected evaluation criteria.
- Analyze program goals with respect to first- and second-cycle program funding sources, and administration.
- Evaluate program outcomes with respect to their relationship to Community Based Transportation Plan findings.
- Develop recommendations for MTC to consider with respect to refining program goals, funding, administration, or project oversight.

MTC and consultant staff also engaged a project Technical Advisory Committee consisting of Lifeline Program Administrators from all nine counties, transit agency staff, and other service providers and stakeholders who work with low-income populations, to advise the project team on the evaluation methodology and review findings and recommendations. In addition, the draft evaluation findings and recommendations have been reviewed with MTC's Policy Advisory Council Equity & Access Subcommittee, the Partnership Technical Advisory Committee, and the Partnership Transit Finance Working Group.

The results of the Lifeline Program evaluation will be presented at your September 14th meeting for your information and to solicit your feedback on the findings and recommendations. Staff will return in October with draft Third Cycle Lifeline Program guidelines and fund estimate for your review and approval, including more information regarding how recommendations from the

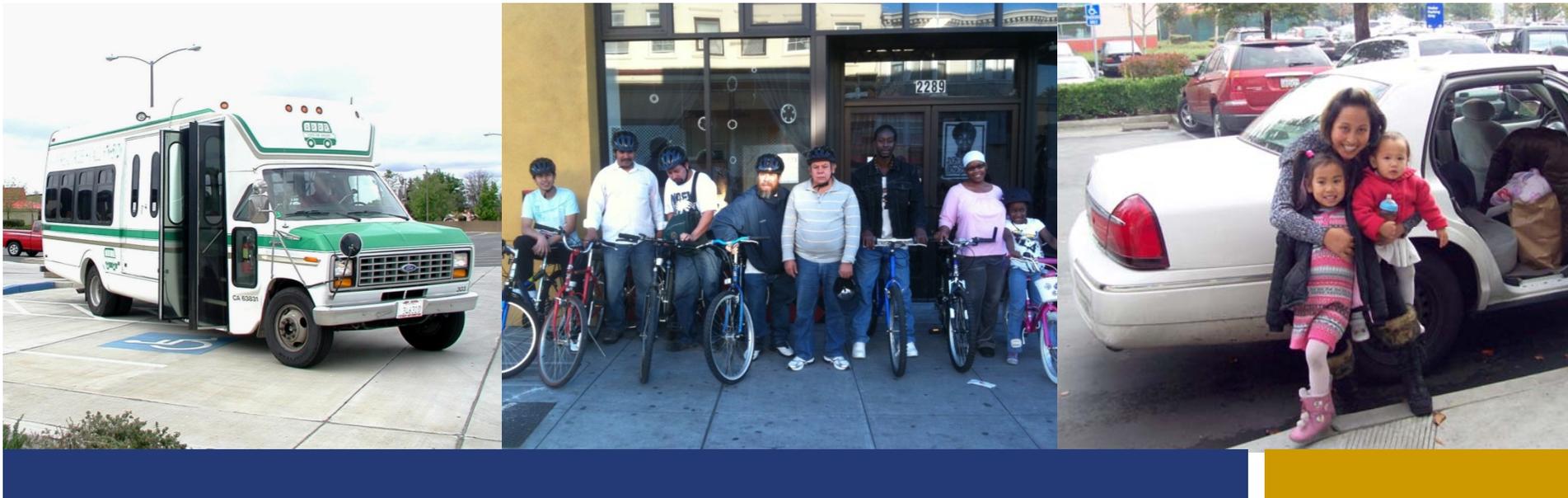
evaluation have been incorporated into the updated guidelines and the results of additional stakeholder outreach.

A PowerPoint presentation and summary of the evaluation's key findings and recommendations are attached. A full copy of the Draft Lifeline Evaluation Report is available at: <http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/lifeline/>.

Issues: None

Recommendation: Information. No action required.

Attachments: Attachment A: Summary of Evaluation Key Findings and Recommendations
PowerPoint Presentation



Lifeline Transportation Program Evaluation: Overview and Key Findings

MTC Programming and Allocations Committee

September 14, 2011



Lifeline Program Evaluation Overview

- Lifeline Program goals:
 - Improve transportation choices for low-income communities with a range of solutions
 - Address locally identified transportation gaps or barriers
 - Fund projects developed through local collaborative process (Community Based Transportation Planning)
- Two three-year funding cycles since 2005
 - Administered locally by county congestion management agencies
 - \$74 million programmed to 125 projects throughout region
 - Mix of capital and operating funds: federal Jobs Access Reverse Commute, State Transit Assistance, and State Proposition 1B Transit funds
- Evaluation intended to assess program performance and recommend changes prior to 3rd funding cycle

Lifeline Program Evaluation - Purpose

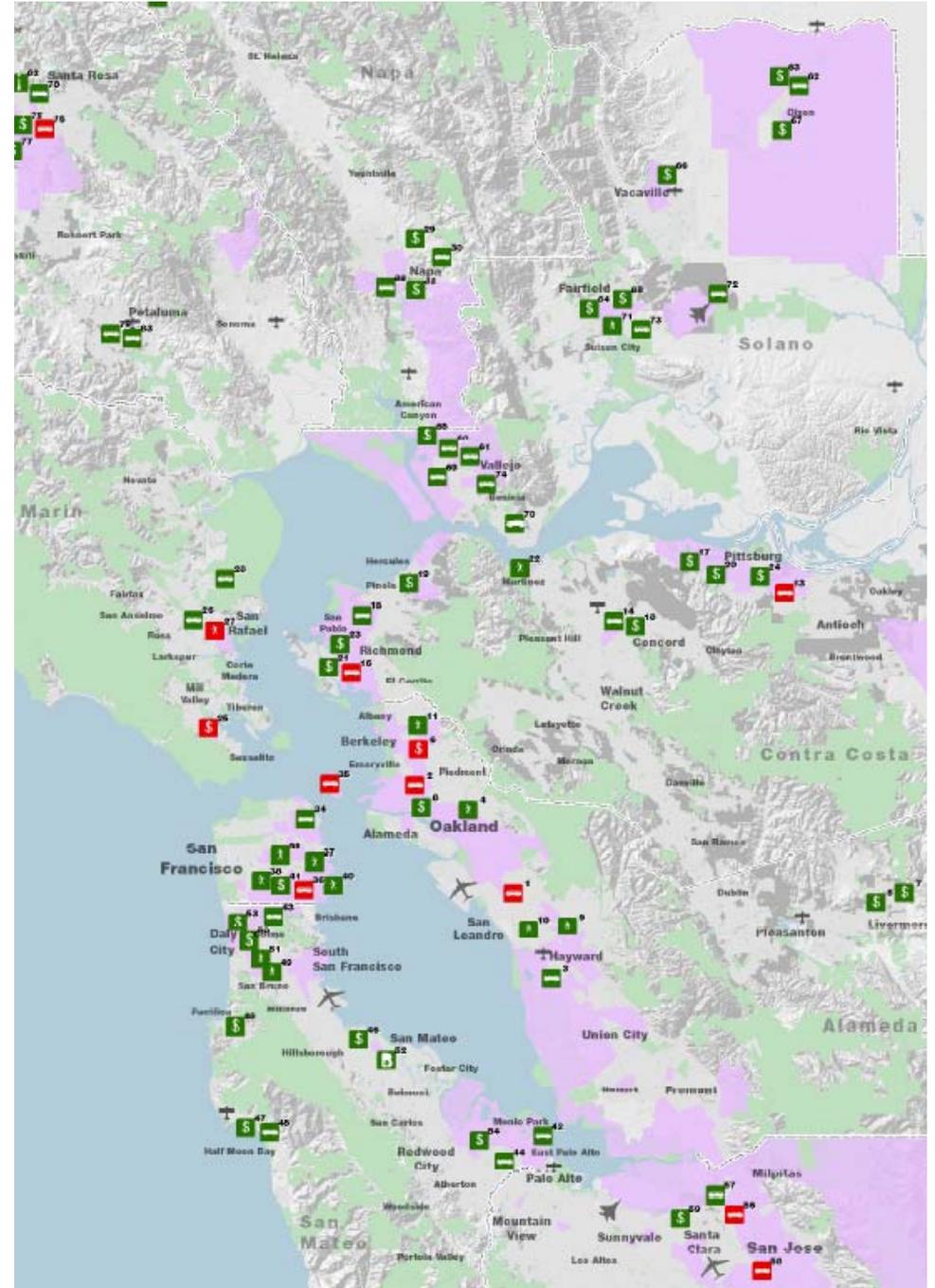
Independently evaluate MTC Lifeline Program goals, administration, and project outcomes.

- Did project outcomes meet program goals?
- What factors contribute to successful projects?
- Do the program goals align with the goals of the funding sources?
- How did the Community Based Transportation Plans (CBTPs) affect project outcomes?
- How can the program be improved?
 - Program goals
 - Administration
 - Funding sources
 - Project oversight

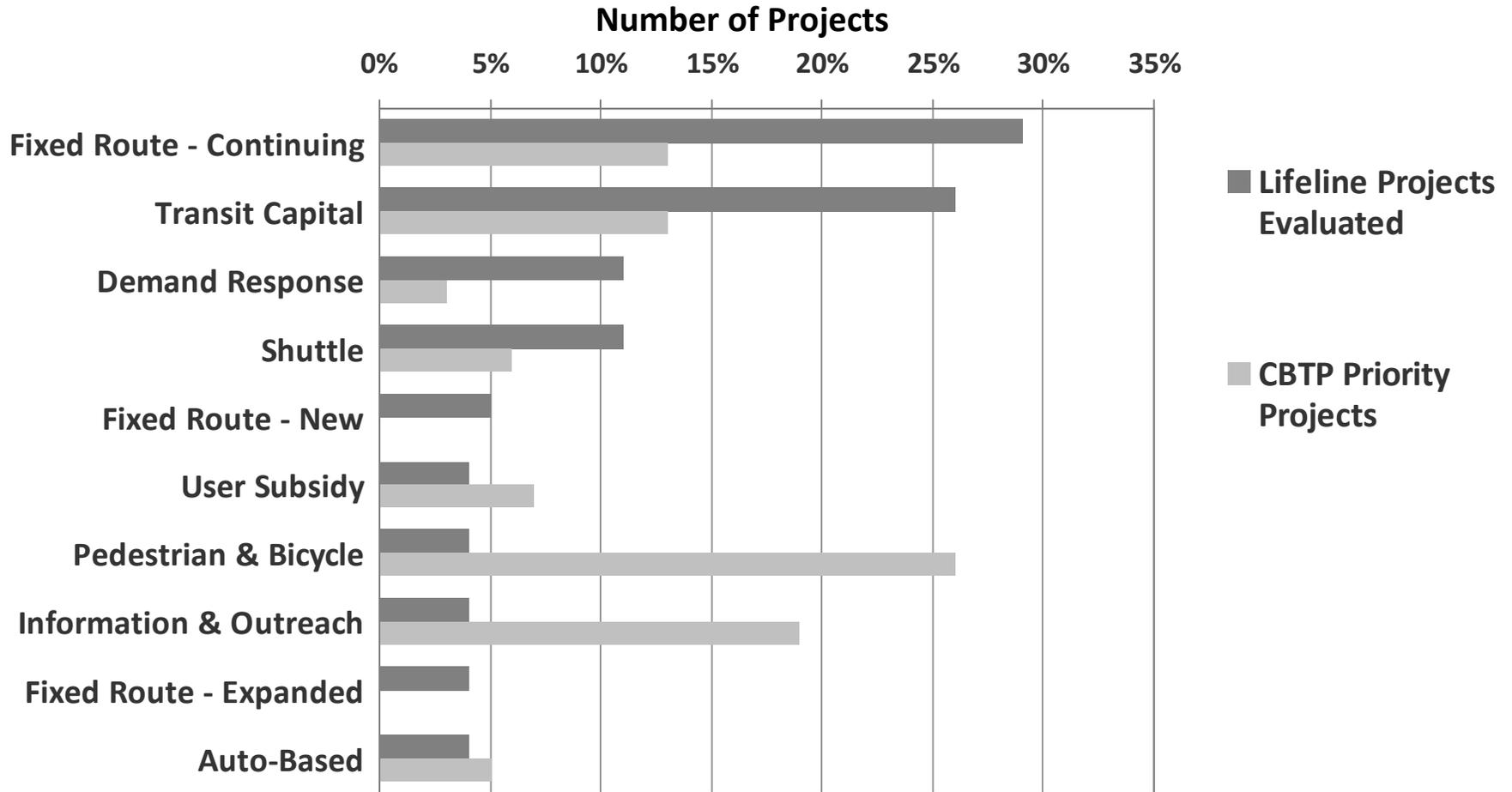


Methodology

1. Collect program documentation
2. Survey comparable programs nationwide
3. Review all CBTPs and Coordinated Plan
4. Collect data on projects to evaluate
5. Develop project evaluation criteria
6. Contact project sponsors: surveys, focus groups, site visits
7. Identify best practices among Lifeline projects
8. Develop recommendations



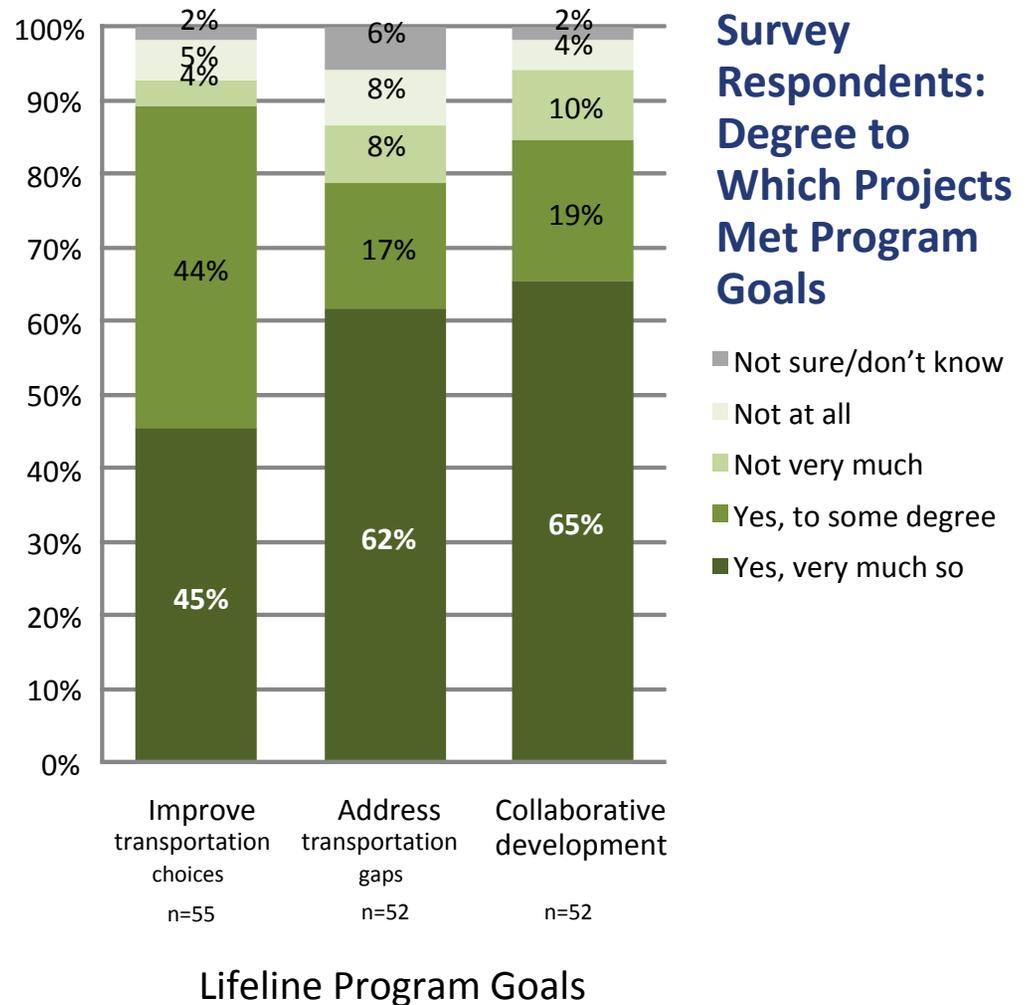
Projects Evaluated by Type



Note: CBTP Priority Projects do not total 100% due to exclusion of projects categorized as "other." As fixed-route CBTP projects were not further broken down by new/continuing, all are categorized under "continuing" for purposes of comparison to Lifeline projects evaluated.

Key Findings: Projects

- Almost all projects focused on enhancing access to jobs and essential services for low-income individuals
- Majority of projects met Lifeline Program Goals
- Half of operations projects mitigated potential service cuts
- One third improved access or connections to essential destinations (35%)
- One third expanded hours or days of fixed-route service (32%)



Key Findings: Lifeline Program

- Overall, program working well; vast majority of projects are achieving all three Lifeline Program goals
- Range of “non-traditional” services implemented
- Local county administration effective for developing and implementing projects
 - Opportunities to include a more diverse group of stakeholders, project applicants, and community partners
 - However, there is also need to enable multi-county or region-wide projects
- Program’s 3 funding sources provide flexibility, but create other issues
 - Inconsistent timing of when funds are available to sponsors
 - Varying reporting requirements, timelines, and processes make for complex administration
 - Funding “mix” doesn’t match full spectrum of needs & priorities in CBTPs

Key Findings: Lifeline Program

- Administrative burden for sponsors and CMAs
 - Variable and unpredictable timelines for calls for projects, project submission, approval, and contract execution
 - Unclear /overlapping roles and responsibilities among agencies
- A more robust and comprehensive mechanism for reporting, monitoring, and evaluation is needed
- Community Based Transportation Plans are at varying ages and stages
 - Several not yet started; others need updating
 - Confusion related to CBTPs and the MTC-designated Communities of Concern in establishing eligibility for Lifeline funding

Recommendations: Highlights

- Continue to support a mix of eligible project types
- Clarify and strengthen role of local program administrators
- Locate primary responsibility for project monitoring and evaluation with CMAs
- Seek other, more flexible fund sources for program



Questions and Discussion

Contact: Richard Weiner

Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates
116 New Montgomery St., Suite 500
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 284-1544
rweiner@nelsonnygaard.com
www.nelsonnygaard.com

Mobility Accessibility Sustainability



ATTACHMENT A

Summary of Key Lifeline Program Evaluation Findings and Recommendations

1. **Overall, the Lifeline Transportation Program appears to be working well, funding a range of projects and programs that have had success in improving mobility for low-income individuals and families.** While some of the projects evaluated as part of this study did not meet the project-specific goals established in their respective Lifeline applications, the vast majority are achieving all three Lifeline Program goals, according to information provided by project sponsors.
2. **A range of “nontraditional” services has been successfully implemented under the program,** with mobility-related outcomes that complement the mobility benefits provided by traditional fixed-route transit.
3. **Local control is an effective mechanism for developing and implementing projects that meet program goals.** Project sponsors and focus group participants highlighted the importance of local discretion in the programming of Lifeline funds, but noted that county-based programs and varying timelines for calls for projects can inhibit multi-county projects.
4. **The program’s three funding sources taken together provide desirable flexibility within the program, but create other issues,** such as delays or barriers to implementation based on the varied timing of when funds are available to sponsors, and administrative complexities related to varying reporting requirements, timelines, and processes. In addition, the present funding “mix” doesn’t match the full spectrum of needs and priorities identified in Community-Based Transportation Plans (CBTPs).
5. **The program is administratively very burdensome, requiring considerable staff time at many different agencies** (MTC, CMAs, transit operators) to implement, with roles and responsibilities that at times can be unclear or overlapping. On occasion, these administrative burdens have hampered project effectiveness.
6. **The variable and unpredictable timelines for calls for projects, project submission, approval, contract execution, and implementation** have been cited as a major contributor to the program’s administrative burden by project sponsors.
7. **There is a need for a more comprehensive and robust mechanism for reporting and oversight,** including project monitoring and evaluation.
8. **CBTPs are at an uncertain juncture – some are outdated, while some are not yet completed.** Three counties have outstanding CBTPs that have not yet begun; other counties have been finished for a number of years. Additionally, there is confusion related to the role of CBTPs and the MTC-designated Communities of Concern in establishing eligibility for Lifeline funding.
9. **Mobility management is being pursued and successfully implemented** as a strategy for improving the mobility of low-income individuals at the project or agency level, but much less so at the county or regional level.
10. **Project success is predicated on a variety of key factors,** including:
 - A collaborative process with community partners in advance of, and during, implementation
 - Building on and leveraging existing networks, infrastructure, and resources to achieve cost-effective implementation and avoid duplication of effort
 - Ongoing project monitoring, and the flexibility to “retool” and adapt to changing conditions
 - An effective means of promoting services in the community
 - Continuity of staff at implementing agencies
 - An accurate understanding of projects and a high level of support from key decision-makers, including elected officials and agency boards of directors
 - Adopting reasonable goals for project outcomes
 - Involving partners in “doing what they do best.”

Based on study findings and best practices identified by project sponsors, a range of recommendations for improvements to the effectiveness of the Lifeline Transportation Program have been developed across seven program areas, summarized as follows:

Program Area	Recommendation
A. Program Design and Guidelines	1. Clarify relationship of project inclusion in a CBTP, or location in an MTC-defined Community of Concern, to project eligibility.
	2. Retain current emphasis on projects derived from documented needs or priorities emerging from CBTPs, but continue to consider other relevant local planning efforts as well.
	3. Reassess the trade-offs involved with requiring non-profits to have public sponsors for some fund sources.
	4. Promote—and create a process to support—applications for regional projects.
	5. In developing its position related to reauthorization of the federal transportation funding bill, MTC should consider advocating for a reduced match requirement for JARC operating projects.
	6. Continue to support a mix of transit and non-transit related projects.
	7. Clarify and strengthen the role of local program administrators
B. Funding Sources	1. Seek to identify other, more flexible funds for use in the Lifeline Transportation Program.
C. Timelines	1. Establish a regular, predictable funding cycle and call for projects to solicit Lifeline projects.
	2. Ensure that a reasonable period of time is provided between the issuance of the county-level call for projects and the deadline for submission.
	3. Assess whether reporting timeframes can be better synchronized with reporting generated by project sponsors for other funders.
D. Oversight/ Monitoring/ Evaluation	1. Locate the primary responsibility for project monitoring and evaluation with the CMAs.
	2. Assess the feasibility of developing a regional web-based database for the Lifeline Program that would incorporate electronic applications, reporting by project sponsors, and report-generation.
	3. Require “continuation” projects to demonstrate or document their performance in a more systematic manner.
	4. Encourage CMAs to pay particular attention to project plans, timelines, and project management capacity when evaluating grant applications.
	5. Encourage sponsoring agencies to take steps to monitor the quality of service implementation, including meetings with advisory committees, neighborhood councils, major employers and bus drivers, as appropriate to the project.
E. Promotion of Program/ Calls for Projects	1. Ensure that potential applicants that are not traditionally involved with transit are included in the call for projects.
F. Project Selection	1. Address misunderstanding regarding the role of the CMAs in ranking and selecting projects.
	2. Encourage CMAs to include a diverse group of interested stakeholders in ranking project applications.
G. Collaboration and Outreach	1. Encourage applicants and sponsors to cast a wide net in search of potential collaborators, which might include social service agencies, transit and bicycle advocacy groups, and non-profit groups close to the target population.