

City Council
Mayor Patrick Slayter
Vice Mayor Neysa Hinton
Michael Carnacchi
Una Glass
Sarah Glade Gurney



City Manager
Larry McLaughlin
lmcLaughlin@cityofsebastopol.org
Assistant City Manager/City Clerk, MMC
Mary Gourley
mgourley@cityofsebastopol.org

City of Sebastopol

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CONTACT: Holly Hansen
Community Outreach Coordinator
outreach@cityofsebastopol.org
(707) 526-6677

Sebastopol Local Bus Route 24 Launches New “Fare-Free” Rides and Extended Hours *Community Input and City Council Subsidy Drive Changes to Sebastopol Shuttle*



SEBASTOPOL, Calif., June 13, 2018 – For the next year, Sebastopol residents now have a free transportation option for getting around the city. On June 4, 2018, Sonoma County Transit launched significant changes to Route 24 (the Sebastopol Shuttle) after the Sebastopol City Council voted unanimously on May 15 to subsidize free rides for all riders through June 30, 2019. The “Fare-Free” program is intended to increase ridership and provide improved mobility options for Sebastopol residents by removing barriers to bus ridership and incentivizing convenient, cost-free, environmentally friendly transit options for all members of the community.

With its new expanded schedule, Route 24 now operates until 6:37 p.m. on weekdays, serves two new stops on McKinley Street, and provides improved access to retail, grocery shopping, dining, and entertainment venues. The route was reconfigured to traverse The Barlow and provide closer access to the movie theater, especially for senior and disabled riders with mobility impairments. The new afternoon schedule maximizes connections between local Route 24 and Routes 20, 22, 26 and 52 to Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati, and Cotati’s SMART station, providing more options for those travelling outside of Sebastopol.

Sonoma County Transit has reported that during the first week of the “Fare-Free” program, average weekday ridership increased to 43 passenger trips versus 27 in April.

Earlier this spring, the City of Sebastopol, Cittaslow Sebastopol, and the Sebastopol Area Senior Center sponsored two focus groups and a Community Survey to assess rider requests for improved service and to address barriers/needs among non-bus riders. Councilmember Sarah Gurney stated, "The Fare-Free Program is a big win for all of us! Community members expressed their needs - the Council and Sonoma County Transit responded with improved service that is now fare-free to our riders. We hope more people will use the Local Shuttle with ease."

Economic benefits of the year-long subsidy include relief for low-income riders and convenience for car-free shoppers. Among the numerous social benefits of the program are increased mobility for seniors, reduced parking congestion, and a stress-free travel option to and from downtown to shop, eat, and socialize. Community leaders are also optimistic that parents of teens will encourage their children to leverage free public transportation to travel to and from after-school and summer activities.

Cittaslow Sebastopol co-chair Tasha Beauchamp stated, "Many people want to do their part for the environment and take the bus now and then, but concerns about having exact change gets in the way. Now people can hop on and hop off, no problem. By removing that barrier about the fare, we're hoping more people will try the bus and find out the ways that it can work for them, even just for casual trips."

The projected subsidy to Sonoma County Transit of \$10,000-\$11,481 presumes a 20 percent increase in ridership on Route 24. If ridership is below the projected increase, the City's contribution will be less than the maximum amount. If ridership exceeds the \$11,481 maximum cap, Sonoma County Transit will cover the additional cost.

The Fare-Free program supports stated Council environmental goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality, and program supporters hope that residents will take advantage of the free bus to try taking the bus for light errands, medical appointments, and downtown social outings. Later this summer, the Route 24 will circulate using Sonoma County's first and only electric bus, providing yet another incentive for residents to try something new.

For more information and the new Route 24 map and schedule, visit <http://sctransit.com/maps-schedules/route-24/>.