

# Service Implementation FY 2026



**Metropolitan Transit System**



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# MTS Overview

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The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) operates in the central, southern, and eastern parts of San Diego County, with four light rail lines, 99 bus routes, and MTS Access paratransit service.

MTS has almost totally recovered from the COVID impacts, with ridership down about 5% from prior to COVID, which is one of the highest marks of any major transit agency in the country.

However, like many transit agencies throughout the country, MTS is entering a period of uncertainty regarding future funding and is preparing for this uncertain future.

Due to the questions about future funding, Post COVID travel patterns, and recent investments in transit over the last several years (Blue Line Mid-Coast extension, Rapid buses in South Bay, Copper Line in east county to name a few), MTS has initiated a Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) in FY 2025 to evaluate and restructure its bus, light rail, and paratransit services. The COA may result in significant restructuring of the transit network in the next several years and is discussed in more detail in the future outlook section.

This document will summarize the changes in transit service over the last fiscal year, forecast the changes in the next fiscal year, and look ahead to FY26 and beyond.

# FY 2025 Service Changes

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## *Background*

Service adjustments are guided by MTS Policy 42, Transit Service Evaluation and Adjustment. This policy, established by the Board of Directors, was last amended in 2016, to incorporate a vision that called for the development of services that are customer-focused, competitive with other travel options, integrated and sustainable.

Policy 42 establishes a hierarchy of service evaluation that includes system, operator, route category and route criteria. In developing service change proposals, staff assesses services based primarily on the route productivity measures of passengers per revenue hour (customer-focused and competitive criteria), farebox recovery ratio and subsidy per passenger (sustainability criteria); and on the service quality measures of passenger load factor and on-time performance (customer-focused and competitive criteria). The Board of Directors receive quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports of the key performance metrics and a more detailed analysis at the conclusion of each fiscal year.

Beyond Policy 42, Planning and Scheduling staff are constantly analyzing the existing service and analyzing options to improve transit within the operating budget constraints of the agency.

In FY25 the agency operated with a structural budget deficit that was bridged through the use of “one-time funding” such as the conversion of capital funds to operating funds (delayed capital projects), reserves, and COVID relief funding from the State of California. Consequently, the service changes implemented focused on increasing productivity and reliability, without increasing operating costs.

## *Service Changes*

MTS historically changes its service at three separate times throughout the year:

- Early September: fall service period
- Late January: spring service period
- Mid-June: summer service period

A summary of the changes that occurred during those service changes in FY25 are below:



## September 2024 Service Changes

The Copper Line made its debut, marking a major change for Trolley service in east county.

It consolidated the Green Line and Orange Line east of El Cajon, serving Arnele Avenue, Gillespie Field, and Santee (in addition to El Cajon). This change isolated the one-mile-long single-track segment between Gillespie Field and Santee, which has improved reliability throughout the system. The development of the Copper Line included construction of a third track at El Cajon, with the Green and Orange Lines providing level transfers with the Copper Line.

The Copper Line was implemented on September 29, 2024, which was four weeks after the bus service change. Normal seasonal service adjustments were made for coastal routes (8 and 9), as well as minor service changes in South Bay and east county.

*September 2024 Service Changes*

Route	Description of Changes
8	Seasonal reduction of Saturday frequency to every 20 minutes instead of every 15 minutes.
9	Seasonal weekend schedule adjustments.
30	Seasonal weekend schedule adjustments.
856	Schedule adjustments.
904	Coronado's "Free Summer Shuttle" service operates through Labor Day (September 2). Regular fares and schedule (with hourly service) resume on Tuesday, September 3.
905	Schedule adjustments.
906	The Route 906 stop at the Iris Avenue Transit Center is temporarily relocated onto 30th Street, just outside the transit center.
909	Schedule adjustments.
933	The Route 933 stop at the Iris Avenue Transit Center is temporarily relocated onto 30th Street, just outside the transit center.
936	Schedule adjustments.

## January 2025 Service Changes

There were two major changes in January 2025:

- 1) **Implementation of Route 910:** The first overnight service, serving several stops from San Ysidro to Downtown San Diego at 30-minute frequencies. The Blue Line cannot operate 24 hours, due to freight restrictions, so the implementation of Route 910 effectively provides 24-hour service along the corridor (the region's busiest).
- 2) **Frequency adjustments on all Trolley lines:** Implemented 15-minute service from the beginning of service in the morning until the end of service on all days. The one exception is the Orange Line at night, which will remain at 30-minute service to allow construction crews enough time on the tracks to complete the Orange Line Improvement Project over the next couple of years.

Several other routes had minor service adjustments.

January 2025 Service Changes

Route	Description of Changes
<b>UC San Diego Blue Line</b>	Added 15-minute service after 9:30 p.m. between America Plaza and UTC every day.
<b>Orange Line</b>	Weekend: Added 15-minute frequency in the AM hours. Discontinued the 12:18 a.m. trip from El Cajon to Downtown and added a new trip from El Cajon to Downtown at 4:48 a.m.
<b>Green Line</b>	Added 15-minute frequency between Downtown and El Cajon until 11:00 p.m. every day.
<b>Copper Line</b>	Added 15-minute frequency every day.
<b>3</b>	Schedule adjustments.
<b>44</b>	Schedule adjustments.
<b>105</b>	Weekday: Mid-day schedule adjustment.
<b>227</b>	Service reductions between Iris Avenue Transit Center and Imperial Beach.
<b>832</b>	Schedule adjustments to improve Copper Line and school bell connections.
<b>834</b>	Schedule adjustments to improve Copper Line and school bell connections.
<b>901</b>	Weekday & Saturday: Late night schedule adjustments. Sunday: Improved night frequency.
<b>905</b>	Resumes regular route via Siempre Viva and De La Fuente Business Park (effective Dec 5, 2024).
<b>906</b>	Weekday & Saturday: Discontinued service after 1:00 a.m. Service replaced by new Route 910. Improved night frequency from 60 to 30 minutes after 10:00 p.m. Other schedule adjustments.
<b>907</b>	Weekday & Saturday: Discontinued service after 1:00 a.m. Service replaced by new Route 910. Improved night frequency from 60 to 30 minutes after 10:00 p.m. Other schedule adjustments.
<b>910</b>	<b>New overnight express service with 30-minute frequency between downtown and San Ysidro Transit Center, servicing select transit centers. Operates 7 days a week.</b>
<b>929</b>	Weekday & Saturday: Late night and other schedule adjustments. Improved night frequency to 30 minutes from Downtown to Iris Transit Center. Sunday: Improved night frequency.
<b>992</b>	Added earlier AM service to San Diego International Airport. Other schedule adjustments.

## June 2025 Service Changes

June service changes were comprised of normal seasonal adjustments on coastal routes.

Other changes included adjustments to Route 88 (re-routed away from Fashion Valley Transit Center, but with implementation of Sunday service) and Route 115 (Saturday service discontinued to Grossmont College to align with Sunday service and eliminate long out-of-direction movement for riders).

Route 227 also had frequency reductions between Iris Avenue Transit Center and Imperial Beach due to low ridership.

*June 2025 Service Changes*

Route	Description of Changes
1	Minor schedule adjustments on all days.
6	Weekday service reduced from every 20 minutes to every 30 minutes between 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. One morning trip discontinued in each direction.
8	Saturday summer service increased to every 15 minutes. Minor schedule adjustments to all days.
9	Sunday trips extended to Pacific Beach. Minor schedule adjustments to all days.
11	Service restored to First Ave. and G St. Minor schedule adjustments all days.
30	Saturday and Sunday summer schedule adjustments.
60	Minor schedule adjustments all days.
88	<b>Service to Fashion Valley Transit Center discontinued.</b> Schedule adjustments to add Sunday Service.
115	<b>Saturday service to Grossmont College discontinued.</b> Minor Saturday schedule adjustments.
201/202	Minor schedule adjustments to Saturday and Sunday mornings.
204	Minor schedule adjustments.
227	Major schedule adjustments. Service reduced between Iris Avenue Transit Center and Imperial Beach on all days.
904	Additional summer service in Coronado beginning July 1, 2025.
910	Minor schedule adjustments on all days.
928	Major schedule adjustments on Saturday.
929	Minor schedule adjustments on all days.

## Outlook for FY26 (And Beyond)

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In the near-term, September 2025 service changes are anticipated to include:

- Adjustment of Route 9 service to Sea World
- Adjustment of Rapid Premium Express (Routes 280/290) stop in downtown San Diego Metropolitan Transit System
- Minor re-routing of Route 815 in El Cajon
- Later start time for Route 894 service, due to later opening hours of Tecate border crossing
- Adjustment to Route 992 service in conjunction with the opening of San Diego International Airport's new Terminal 1

Longer term, the outlook is a little less focused. MTS currently operates with a \$448 million budget and serves more than 75 million passengers annually, and that budget has partially been covered with “one-time funds” identified in the introduction.

However, a projected budget shortfall of over \$100 million (which will not be covered with one-time funds) is expected to occur as early as FY28 and necessitates a reevaluation of existing services to ensure continued alignment with the region's mobility needs and financial realities. To address this, MTS is exploring the feasibility of generating additional revenue through various sources, working with SANDAG and NCTD on possible fare adjustments, and completing the comprehensive operational analysis (COA).

The COA will include an evaluation of current system performance, a detailed review of existing conditions in the region (including changing travel patterns and demographics) and a review of projects that were recommended in the Elevate SD 2020 effort (potential sales tax measure in 2020).

The study is inclusive of all bus, light rail, and paratransit service within the MTS service area. To ensure regional coordination and consistency between services, NCTD services and facilities will be considered when developing the service concepts and proposed transit networks. Ultimately, two scenarios will be developed:

- **Scenario 1:** Funding for existing needs secured; plus additional funding for transit service improvements
- **Scenario 2:** No increase in regional transit funding secured (Budget shortfall of \$100-plus million annually)



An inclusion of feedback from MTS passengers and the general public will be essential to the success of the COA. MTS Marketing & Planning staff are currently heavily involved in a public participation effort – branded as “On Track” – to gather feedback from passengers and non-passengers on what the future of MTS service should look like.

Ultimately, the COA will serve as the strategic foundation for MTS's service planning efforts through the end of the decade. Under Scenario 1, MTS will aim to improve service frequencies, span, and network efficiency to meet current and projected regional travel demands. Enhancements will draw from prior planning initiatives such as Elevate SD 2020 and align with SANDAG's 2050 Regional Transportation Plan.

Should additional funding not be identified, MTS may need to implement significant service reductions. These reductions (Scenario 2) will be developed to minimize adverse impacts on mobility while maintaining core service coverage.

The project started in May 2025 and is scheduled to conclude by the end of 2026. By project completion, more clarity should be available regarding the future funding levels. The implementation of the recommended changes will begin as early as January 2027.

While the COA will be a major focus of MTS over the next couple fiscal years, many other service planning projects are underway:

- **Otay Mesa Transit Study:** MTS successfully applied for grant funding through the Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant Program for a study of Otay Mesa transit services. The project will include an in-depth analysis of current strengths, opportunities, and challenges of serving the quickly-expanding Otay Mesa community.
- **Transit Amenities Plan:** MTS is currently undergoing a stop inventory of its 4,000-plus bus stops. The inventory includes information about each bus stop, including amenities (such as benches, shelters, and signage), condition of those amenities, and the ability to add amenities based on the surrounding infrastructure. That information will be used to develop a Transit Amenities Plan (which would be adopted by the Board of Directors), to evaluate and recommend amenity placement and identify best practices by other transit agencies. The latter part of this effort is dependent on funding.
- **12<sup>th</sup> & Imperial and Kearny Mesa Transit Center redevelopment:** MTS is currently undergoing studies to enhance the transit centers at both 12<sup>th</sup> & Imperial and Kearny Mesa. Improvements at the transit centers will help improve passenger transfers as well as increase capacity at those key locations.

- **San Ysidro Mobility Hub:** MTS is currently working with SANDAG on enhancing the San Ysidro Transit Center. A third track would be provided to improve capacity. The tracks may also be elevated to improve the mobility of vehicles and pedestrians. The current effort will be to bring the project to 30% design.
- **SANDAG Studies:** Over the long term, MTS is collaborating with SANDAG on a variety of projects:
  - **Rapid NextGen:** five Rapid bus lines in MTS Service Area.
  - **South Bay Rail Study:** future study to evaluate and improve rail service between downtown and San Ysidro
  - **Downtown Layover:** Development of a full-block in downtown San Diego for a bus layover facility, which will remove idling buses from many downtown curb fronts
  - **On the Move:** Short-term improvements to Broadway to enhance bus service along the busiest corridor in MTS's service area
  - **Urban Core Connections:** Longer-term improvements in the urban core, which could include bus priority measures and the ability for four-car Trolleys to travel through the downtown core.
  - **Airport Transit Connection:** Evaluation of improving transit access to San Diego International Airport, which includes Trolley, bus, and automated people mover concepts.