

Local

Transit board approves increased bus fares

By JOHN BESSA
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SANTA CRUZ — The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District board on Friday passed a resolution that would raise rates for nearly all bus users.

The new plan will strike "a good compromise" between needed revenue and excessive financial burdens to disabled or elderly bus riders, said representatives for disabled riders.

"For people on a limited income it's not the best decision, but it's a good decision," said Bruce Gabriel, chairman of the Metro Accessible Services Task Force, a group representing disabled riders.

The final plan incorporated suggested fare rates from MASTF and rates recommended by the district's staff to fill a gap of \$150,000.

This year's \$21.2 million budget has a deficit of \$525,000. When the budget was approved in June, the board planned on raising about \$150,000 from fare increases to help cover the shortfall.

The bad economy has forced down revenue the district normally gets from the half-cent of the 8.25 percent sales tax slated for them.

Come Oct. 1, the basic rate remains at \$1 for the non-discounted fare. The day pass, however, has been increased a dollar, to \$3.

Discount fares, the new name for the disabled and senior rates, will have a basic, one-way fare of 40 cents, and a day pass rate of \$1.10.

Annual passes have been cut, as part of the plan, and five-day and monthly passes have been raised.

The new five-day prices are \$15, up from \$10, for adult users, and \$5, up from \$3, for the disabled and

seniors.

Monthly prices are \$40 for the adult rate, and \$14 for the disabled and seniors.

As part of the resolution, a plan to drop student-rate monthly passes was scrapped. Students will be able to ride for \$30.

As far as the \$445,000 deficit goes, staff and the Policy and Finance Committee will be searching for places to save and have a report prepared for the boards next public meeting, scheduled for Sept. 18, said Mark Dorfman, assistant general manager.

"It will be a top-to-bottom look at the budget," Dorfman said.

"We have a range of very undesirable options, and I don't think it's limited to service cuts," said Fred Keeley, board director of policy and finance, at Fri-

day's meeting.

The board will have to look at the trade-offs of cut backs in different areas, and decide which option is the least painful, said General Manager Scott Gallo-way at the meeting.

"In the end, what we have to do is preserve the system the best we can," said board member and Santa Cruz Mayor Don Lane.

Transit district staff will meet with Santa Clara County transit officials to discuss a fare increase for the Highway 17 Express bus service between the two counties.

Revenue from the joint operation is split between the districts, so Santa Cruz Metro would only see half of any added revenue.

The goal would be to keep the fares with the Highway 17 service and county service "equitable."