

## **TOWN COUNCIL STAFF REPORT**

Title: Update on Transit Service.

Meeting Date: October 5, 2022

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Receive a presentation from Staff and ESTA regarding 2022 winter transit service and proposed route changes for 2023.

Provide direction to staff regarding further development of proposed routes.

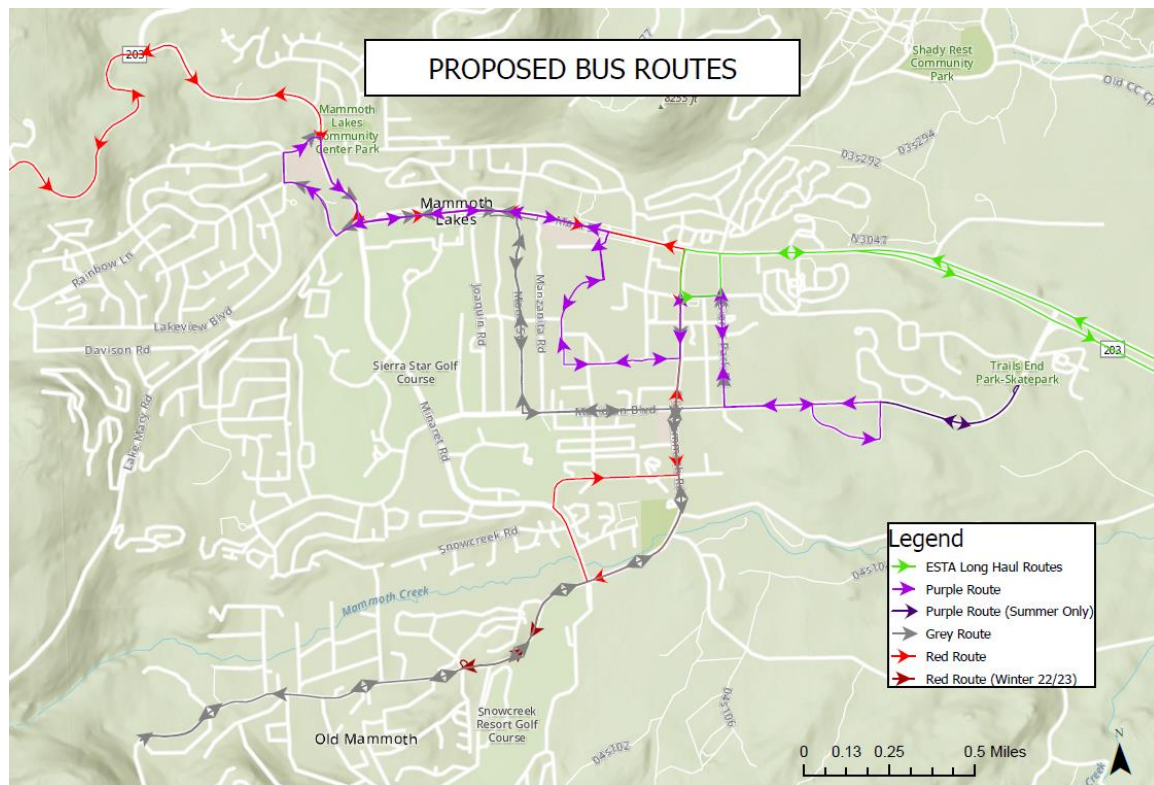
### **BACKGROUND:**

The Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) was established in November of 2006 as a Joint Powers Authority between the Counties of Inyo and Mono, the City of Bishop, and the Town of Mammoth Lakes. ESTA was created to meet the need for public transportation for the entire Eastern Sierra region. Locally, ESTA provides a number of services for the Town of Mammoth Lakes including the Lakes Basin Trolley, Purple Line, and Town Trolley. These services are provided to the Town through a contract with ESTA in which the Town pays an hourly rate for a prescribed number of hours. Contracting in this format provides the flexibility to extend service seasonally and as demand requires. The Town's transit needs are changing with the construction of "The Parcel", recent conversations regarding service to Old Mammoth, and the Community Recreation Center (CRC). These changes create new challenges and opportunities.

### **ANALYSIS:**

Staff representing the Town and ESTA have been meeting to discuss current routes and evaluate how each could be updated to better provide service to the community. Staff has tested a number of these routes making sure these proposals are feasible. During these tests and meetings, it was determined that an extensive overhaul of the existing town routes would be needed to meet the changing needs of the community and create more opportunities for connectivity. The major changes proposed include modification to the Red Line and splitting the Purple between routes Line into two lines. Overlapping these revised routes would create an opportunity to better connect external routes to Town including YARTS and the Lancaster Reno lines. The route updates would eliminate ESTA stopping in the Vons parking lot and move the stop to the shelter on Old Mammoth Road, which is an operation ESTA has long desired improve. Overlapping the routes near important destinations such as the hospital, schools, retail and commercial centers would provide easier and more convenient access for residents.

With exception to minor modifications to the Red Line for winter 22/23 the intent would be to evaluate the final alignments and stops over the winter and spring and implement next summer when residents begin to move into the Parcel. Changing an existing bus route more than 25% requires a public process. Implementing proposed changes in summer of 2023 will provide ample time to discuss the details of these proposed changes with the public. The routes below are diagrammatic, and the final alignments and stops would be finalized through a public process.

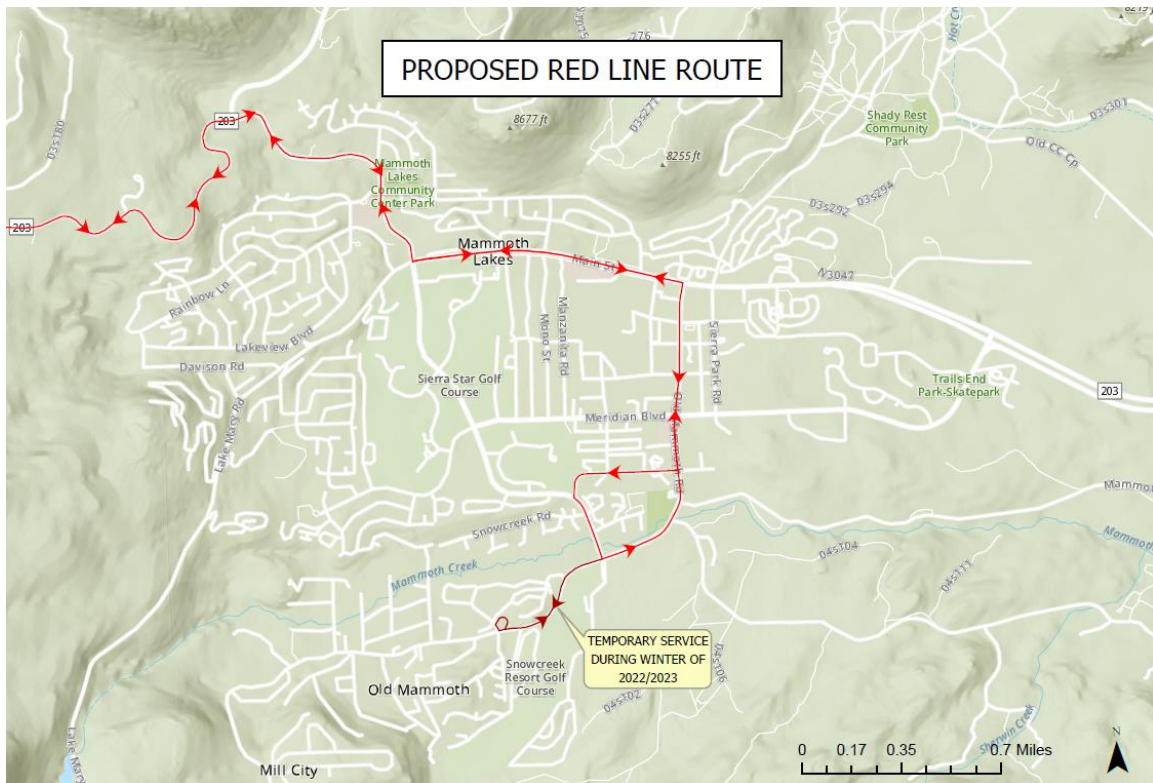


*Proposed Route Changes for 2023*

### Winter Red Line Service

Staff and Council have previously discussed the challenges associated with the winter Red Line including the loss of a staging site on Club Drive on Snowcreek VII property across from the Snowcreek Athletic Club. Staff has proposed alternatives to better serve the Old Mammoth Neighborhood; however, these options were met with strong opposition from members of the public. In the meantime, ESTA has used the Fire Station Parking Lot on the corner of Old Mammoth Road and Club Drive as a turn around. The bus is not permitted to stop nor are riders permitted to load in the Fire Station Parking lot. Riders are loading on the south side of Old Mammoth Road (between Ski Trail and Ranch Road) at Stop 2. This not the most desirable stop location as residents must cross the street and walk a longer distance to access the stop. Staff has come to an agreement with the Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District to continue to use the Fire Station as a turnaround for the 22/23 winter. The temporary turnaround will allow the Red Line to continue to serve portions of Old Mammoth until a better solution can be found.

The CRC mobility hub is envisioned to provide a transfer location for the Red and Grey Lines as well as provide a break location for the drivers. In support of the Mobility Hub and Recreation Center the facility was designed and constructed to include an ADA compliant bus turnout that can support two buses at one time as well as a transit shelter consistent with those throughout Town. The CRC parking lot can support transit circulation internally and has a second turnout within the parking lot. Beyond the 22/23 winter the CRC would act as a transfer location from the smaller purple and grey line buses to the larger buses that serve the Red Line.



*Red Line Service Winter 22/23*



*Red Line Service – MLFPD Turnaround and Old Mammoth Stop Winter 22/23*

#### Purple Line Service

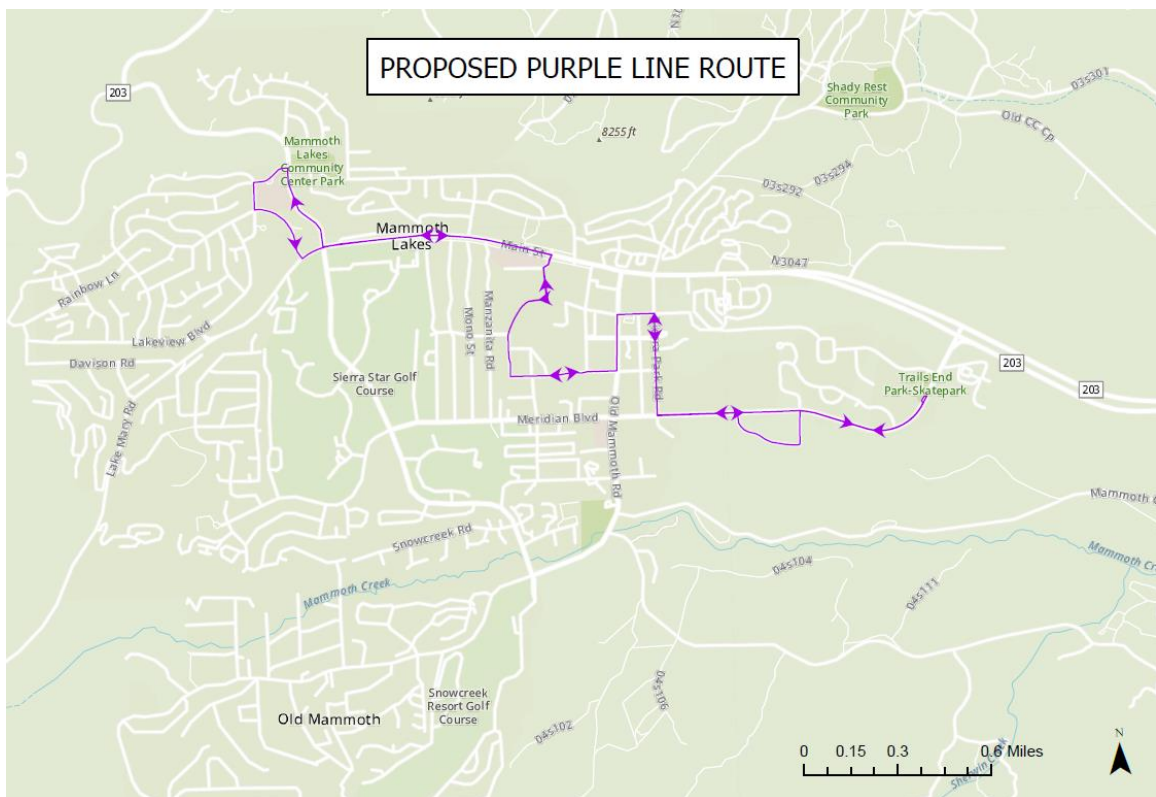
The Purple Line is generally considered a “locals” route. The line touches many of the higher density neighborhoods in Town and provides access to the commercial corridor, the hospital, schools, and parks and recreation amenities, but is long and difficult to understand. The current Purple Line is split in many locations with access on one side of the road in only one direction. The goal would be to create a route that is more linear with stops heading in both directions on opposite sides of the street. A shorter route would be less confusing and offer a shorter ride and headway. A proposed re-route in 2023 of the Purple Line accomplishes these goals and would provide access to The Parcel as shown below. Service to the Sierra Valley Sites neighborhood would be covered by the addition/re-introduction of an Old Mammoth Grey Line, discussed below. The Purple Line would overlap portions of the Red Line and Grey Line, allowing transfers between the lines to provide access to all destinations. As mentioned above a benefit of the re-route eliminates the stop over in the Vons parking lot resolving private property concerns and potential conflicts within the parking lot.

The Town of Mammoth Lakes and ESTA staff have been discussing how to best connect The Parcel to existing transit routes for the past year. These conversations have resulted in the proper placement of transit pull outs and shelters within The Parcel. The locations chosen and under contract for construction provide the flexibility for transit to provide quality access to and through The Parcel. The Town expects to provide transit services to The Parcel in summer/fall 2023 when residents move into the new development.





*Current Purple Line*

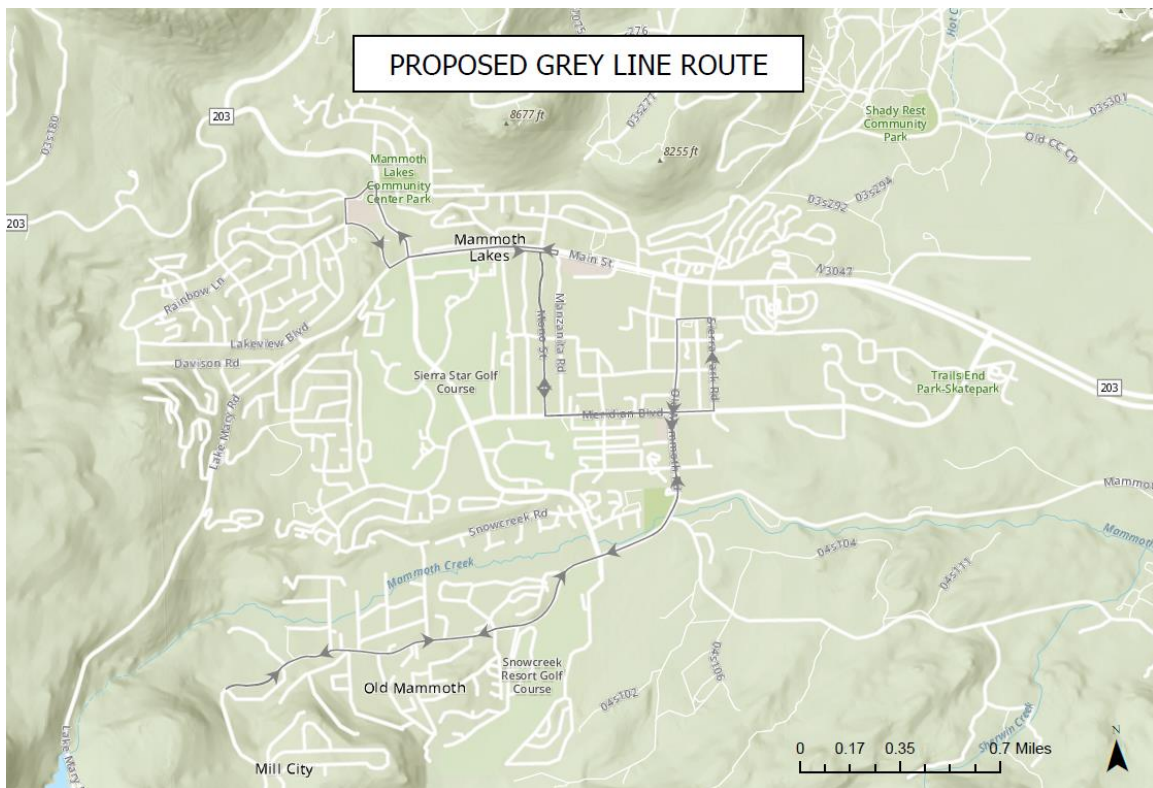


*Possible re-route of the Purple Line*

### Old Mammoth / Sierra Valley Sites Grey Line

A key aspect of developing these conceptual routes to improve service includes driving the routes and observing benefits and challenges to the various routes. Driving the routes and simulating stops process ensures the route is the right length to allow for the proper time

for people to board the busses and drivers to have adequate rest periods. Based on route testing, staff determined the Purple Line in its current alignment could not absorb the additional stops required to meet the needs of The Parcel. In order to provide the coverage desired it became clear the route would need to be split which provided an opportunity to revisit service in the Old Mammoth neighborhood. Staff has seen strong public opposition to a potential bus turn around at the corner of Old Mammoth Rd and Woodmen St; however, there is still a desire to provide some form of service to the Old Mammoth neighborhood. This could be done in a number of ways, using more focused service including different vehicles, more precise times, and scheduling service to meet seasonal needs. The challenges in providing service to the area include limited locations to turn around, icy conditions in the winter, and limited ridership. Opportunities include providing recreation access to the Mill City and Mammoth Rock Trail area, to the future Sherwin Trailhead, and providing access to an area of the town that has been traditionally underserved by transit (which may be the reason for the historic limited ridership). Revising the Grey Line could fill gaps created from the re-routing of the Purple Line (serving the Sierra Valley Sites neighborhood) and provide access to other areas of Town. Service along the proposed route is proposed to be provided by a shorter cutaway bus. There would be no need to bring the larger buses into the neighborhoods as there would be multiple transfer locations to the Red Line.



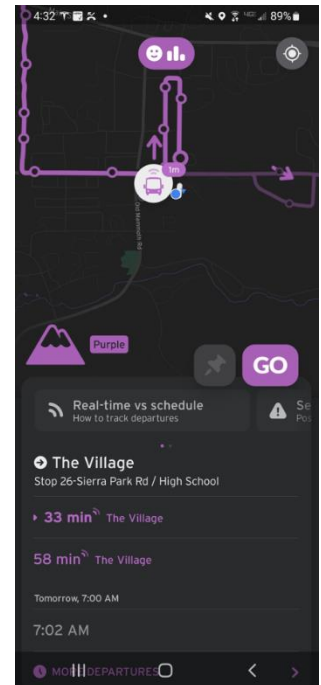
*Possible Old Mammoth SVS Grey Line Route*

### External Long Range & Express Service

Another aspect of route planning includes better coordination of external routes. Currently YARTS and long-haul and express ESTA routes are not well synchronized. YARTS is currently picking up and dropping off on Highway 203 near Starbucks. The ESTA express and longer 395 routes loop Old Mammoth Road and Sierra Park Road and existing Purple line use the private parking lot at Vons. As noted above the Vons parking lot is not a desirable stop and overlap of the proposed lines at the Park n' Ride lot provides a better alternative. As a Mobility Hub, the Park n' Ride stop on Tavern can accommodate multiple buses and provide easy access to all other Town routes. Staff is discussing installing real time transit information in this location as a pilot project which could include an electronic board to provide real time transit information which is available through the Transit App.

### Transit App

Another important update is that the ESTA buses are all equipped with GPS units. The real time location is being shared through Swiftly to the Transit App. The app is available on IOS and Android and can be used to find real-time transit information and route planning. The Town continues to look for opportunities to provide real time accurate information regarding transit routes. Staff believes that ridership would increase with the posting of information in the bus shelters. Staff is looking to provide such information in the Old Mammoth Road bus shelter as a pilot project.



### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

Changes to transit routes may have an impact to service hours, which would impact the budget. The full impact will be evaluated and presented once direction on changes are finalized and approved. In general, changing existing routes without reducing headways would not impact service hours, but adding routes and drivers would.