

### 3. Existing Transit Services

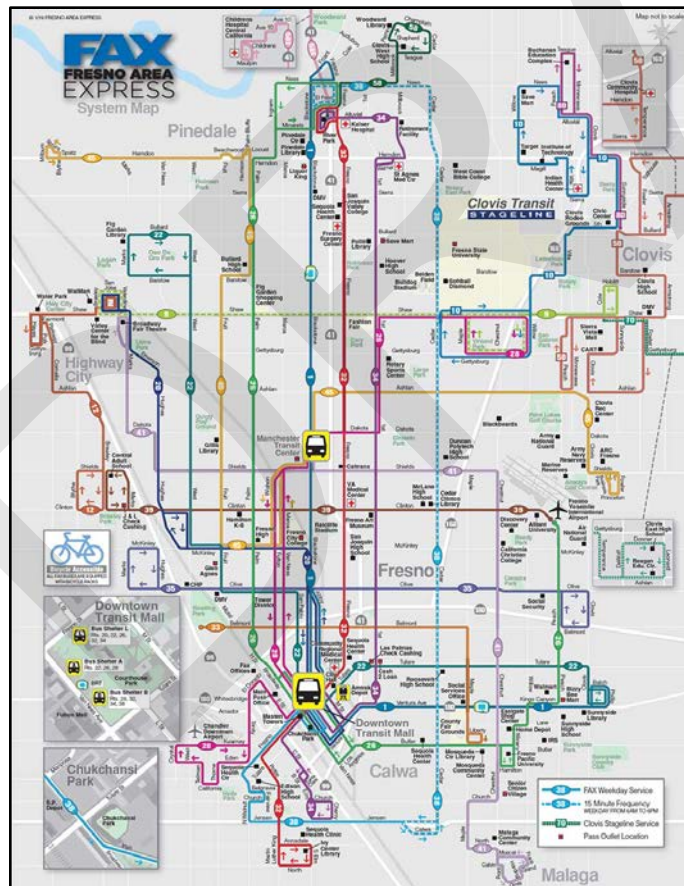
#### History

Starting in 1889, Fresno's public transportation system consisted of a horse car line. In 1901 the Fresno City Railway Company was established; it later was replaced by the Fresno Traction Company that converted the streetcar lines into electricity. As reported in *Wikipedia*, the electric streetcars (shown to the right) operated on approximately 42 miles of track by the mid-twenties. The electric streetcars were used until 1939, when the transit company replaced them with buses. Since then, Fresno City Lines, Inc., operated until 1961, when the City of Fresno took over municipal bus service. From 1961 to 1969, the name of the transportation service was Fresno Municipal Lines and then as Fresno Transit until 1989, where it became known as Fresno Area Express or FAX.



#### FAX

FAX is the largest provider of transit services in the region, with 9,750,800 annual boardings in FY 2018,



and an annual operating budget of approximately \$46 million (2015). FAX service consists of 17 fixed routes in the City of Fresno with three major hubs: the downtown transit mall, the Manchester transit station along Blackstone Avenue north of downtown, and a transfer point at the River Park shopping center in north Fresno. The standard adult fare is \$1.25; this is below market compared to other cities this size. Children under age 6 ride free (children – maximum of 4 – must be accompanied by a fare paying family member), and seniors and the disabled pay just \$.60. FAX accepts 6 different types of passes, including:

- 31-day pass
- 31-day reduced fare pass
- 10 ride card
- 10 ride card (reduced fare)
- 1 ride card
- 1 ride card (reduced fare)

Service frequencies vary from 15 minutes to 60 minutes with a many routes operating at



30-minute headways. Regular service stops at 10:00 pm on most routes on weekdays, with extended service until 1:00 am on the most heavily travelled sections of certain routes. The service operates until approximately 7:00 pm on weekends. The extended night service is relatively new and was developed to address the limited viability of transit for many workers, students and low-income people who need public transportation outside of current operating hours. Service frequency on the weekends is at 30 minutes for all routes excluding the four lowest performing routes.

### **FAX Q**

Q provides faster, more convenient and more reliable service than a traditional bus line. Funded by federal and state funds, Q vehicles are modern and comfortable with off-board fare payment-all at the same fare as a regular FAX bus. Ten-minute frequencies at peak time make for a short wait. Fewer stops mean reduced travel time. Bus priority traffic signals also help speed up the trip. Plus, enhanced stations make for a more pleasant wait.<sup>1</sup>



Q's initial route spans 15.7 miles on Blackstone Avenue, from North Fresno Street to downtown, then out Ventura Avenue/Kings Canyon Road to Clovis Avenue. The project includes 51 station pairs (or 48 one-way stations), two terminal stations, and one transit center with a shared platform station. Q serves major shopping centers, hospitals, and other significant destinations. In future years, additional Q routes could be added to further improve the FAX System.

Q is an adaptable and cost-effective choice in building for the region's growing transit needs. Less expensive and more flexible than light rail, Q can adapt to the emerging needs and opportunities-such as a downtown high-speed rail station- while providing fast, frequent, and reliable service for Fresno today.

### **Handy Ride**

Handy Ride is a demand-responsive program oriented toward providing a high level of service to elderly and disabled persons who, because of physical or mental disabilities, are unable to ride the fixed-route system. This dial-a-ride service conforms with ADA requirements for these types of service. FAX began operating Handy Ride service In April 1977.

### **Short Range Transit Plan**

The Fresno Area Express (FAX) Short-Range Transit Plan (SRTP), FY 2018-2022, is the biennial update to the operating plan and the capital program. The purpose of SRTP is to promote a comprehensive, coordinated and continuous planning process for transit service in the Fresno-Clovis Metropolitan Area (FCMA) over a five-year planning horizon. The SRTP proposes specific recommendations for implementing the long-range objectives of Fresno County's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and will guide the provision of transit services in the FCMA over the next five years.

The SRTP is also used to develop transit capital programming documents that are the basis for state and federal funding decisions. The SRTP provides both the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Fresno COG with the detailed planning justification for awarding operating and capital grants to FAX. The SRTP

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fresno.gov/transportation/fax/fax-q/>

was developed through an analysis of existing needs and available services, and provides an evaluation of projected needs and funding availability for the next five years.

This SRTP outlined past trends in Fresno County, including:

- Very little traffic congestion makes driving an automobile very attractive for those who can afford them.
- Low density development is occurring on Fresno's urban fringe where transit services don't exist now and will likely not exist in the future, ensuring automobile dependency.
- Development encroachment on farmland is an ongoing concern due to the high demand for agricultural products from this region.
- The San Joaquin Valley faces significant air quality challenges. The entire Valley is designated as non-attainment for both the national and California air quality standards for ozone and particulate matter.
- 79%<sup>2</sup> of FAX riders take the bus because they either do not drive or cannot afford a car. This rate is roughly double the transit dependency rate found in other cities of a similar size.
- Due to a number of factors, the demand for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is lower in Fresno than other US cities of similar size, making it a challenge to build, finance and market these projects.



Fresno Bee Photo

According to documentation provided in the SRTP, most of Fresno's travel market has its origins and destinations in metropolitan Fresno. 92% of Fresno residents work in Fresno County, and only 8% commute to destinations outside the county. Of the total commute trips in Fresno County, 77% drive alone, 20% carpool or vanpool, and 1% take transit, walk and work from home.<sup>3</sup> Due to heavy rural to rural commute patterns of farm workers, prison guards and teachers in the San Joaquin Valley, carpools and vanpools represent the largest mode share after the single-occupant automobile. Transportation issues in Fresno exemplify the type of challenge that many cities in California face. The passage of SB 375 calls all metropolitan planning areas (e.g., Fresno COG) in the state for a commitment to sustainable solutions.

Building a transportation system solely with the automobile in mind based on a level of service "C or D" for the peak 15 minute demand is one of the most expensive transportation systems to build and maintain. Fresno City and County need a new approach or thought process for determining what is needed to attain an alternative future that provides transportation alternatives to the car for a majority of the population. Fresno's metro region is a top five leader in the nation with the least amount of commute congestion and travel time and travel speeds of all major metropolitan regions. In fact, the Fresno COG Regional Travel Demand Forecast model suggests that in the next 20-30 years



<sup>2</sup> Based upon 2014 FAX rider survey.

<sup>3</sup> SJV Express Study by Nelson Nygaard, 2009.





the travel speeds of our region will only decrease by one or two miles per hour, whereas in the same timeframe, the Sacramento metro region's travel speeds will nearly be cut in half.

Thus, a fundamental shift in thinking has occurred in the greater Fresno metropolitan area and at FAX. The SRTP indicates that serving the transit needs of a growing population has as more to do with the support of land use regulators and developers to bring the population growth to where the bus service currently exists than it does with trying to ever-expand the bus service to meet the demands of people.

Those who choose to live on the urban fringe where these services currently exist cannot be provided for in a financially sustainable way. In a sense, the responsibility has shifted from the transit providers to the community development departments and private developers to make the transit system work and to clean up Fresno's air quality. FAX Administration questions the ability to expand service to meet the transit needs of an ever-outward expanding low-density suburban population.

Given that auto and truck travel account for about one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, Fresno County and its cities must consider implementing more-efficient, high-capacity modes of transportation that provide attractive options to the auto. Such transportation modes must provide suitable alternative travel options to parts of the population who have limited mobility, with a focus on higher density and mixed-use corridors where large numbers of households and businesses can be served by transit investments. Currently the majority of Fresno's transit riders use the system out of necessity, rather than choice. To maximize transit ridership and reduce congestion in the future, it will be important to continue to serve and attract ridership among households that need transit, as well as those who might choose to take transit though they can afford to drive.

#### FAX Fleet

FAX has a number of types and variations of vehicles to provide transit services. For example, FAX has a combination of compressed natural gas (CNG), hybrid (gasoline/electric) and electric vehicles of varying sizes. Most buses in the FAX fleet are 30 to 40 feet in length (over 100 in service). Handy Ride, FAX's demand responsive service, is composed of nearly 50 wheelchair lift equipped mini buses and nearly a dozen sedans.

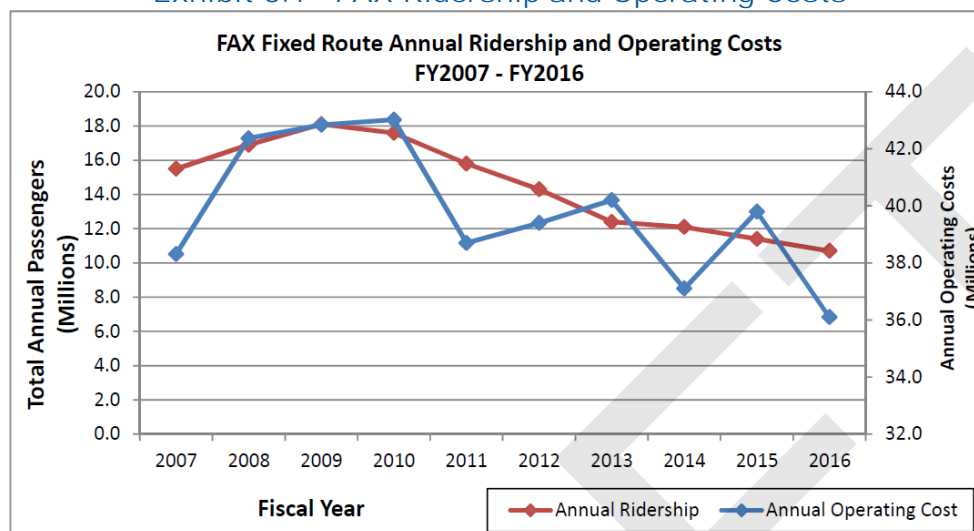
#### Ridership Summary

FAX ridership peaked in 2008/2009 with close to 18 million riders as shown in Exhibit 3.1 (red line). High ridership during this period can be explained by high gasoline prices and a struggling U.S. economy amidst the Great Recession<sup>4</sup>. Since 2008/2009, transit ridership has steadily declined through 2016, where it was reported that over 11 million riders utilized FAX services.

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<sup>4</sup> The Great Recession is a term that represents the sharp decline in economic activities, officially lasting from December 2007 to June 2009. ([Investopedia.com/terms/g/great-recession.asp](http://Investopedia.com/terms/g/great-recession.asp)).

Exhibit 3.1 - FAX Ridership and Operating Costs



Source: Figure 3.12: Comparison of Ridership vs Operation Cost (City of Fresno SRTF – June 29, 2017)

According to *Trends in Public Transportation Ridership: Implication for Federal Policy*,<sup>5</sup> the two factors that most affect public transportation ridership are competitive factors and the supply of transit service. Several competitive factors, notably the drop in the price of gasoline over the past few years and the growing popularity of bike-share and ridesourcing services (e.g., Uber, Lyft, ect.), appear to have adversely affected transit ridership. The amount of transit service supplied has generally grown over time, but average fares have risen faster than inflation, possibly deterring riders.

The future of public transportation ridership in the short to medium term is likely to depend on population growth; the public funding commitment to supplying transit; and factors that make driving more or less attractive, such as the price of parking, the extent of highway congestion, and the implementation of fuel taxes, tolls, and mileage-based user fees. Over the long term, ridership is also likely to depend on the introduction of autonomous vehicle technology, although its timing is uncertain. Fleets of driverless taxis that can be hailed with a smartphone, a plausible scenario, promise to be much cheaper than taxis and ridesourcing today. Widespread deployment of driverless taxis could reduce transit ridership, unless restrictions or fees make them an expensive alternative in some areas.

<sup>5</sup> William J. Mallett, Congressional Research Service (March 26, 2018).

## 4. Fresno County Rural Transit Agency

### History

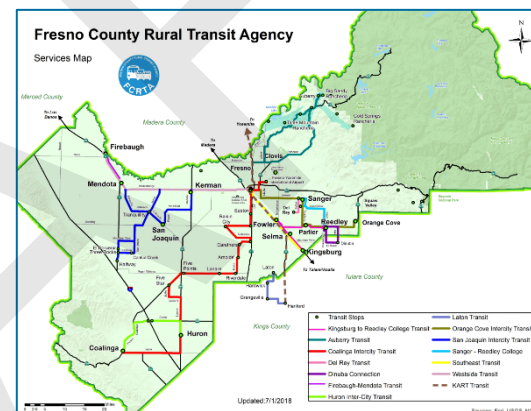
According to the Fresno County Rural Transit Agency (FCRTA) website, FCRTA provides local and regional transit service to rural cities within Fresno County. FCRTA allows passengers to travel conveniently, within their community and throughout Fresno County, by providing both inner-city service to residents of communities within our service area, as well as intercity service from the outlying communities. FCRTA also offers demand responsive service for individuals requiring curb-to-curb transportation.

In 1979, FCRTA began operation with 20 vehicles and 13 subsystems. Today, the service has grown to 25 subsystems with 80 vehicles serving communities from Firebaugh to Coalinga, Kingsburg to Orange Cove, and everything in between. FCRTA serves the transit needs of the disadvantaged: the elderly, disabled, low income, youth, as well as the public.

### FCRTA

FCRTA provides regular fixed routes as well as reservation based services. **Regular routes** consist of designated routes and schedules. Riders can access via website (<https://www.ruraltransit.org/route-schedules>) fixed route schedule and map guides to determine the closest bus stops, appropriate routes and transfers and pick-up/drop-off times. Route schedule guides include:

- ⇒ Coalinga Route Guide
- ⇒ Huron Route Guide
- ⇒ Kingsburg-Reedley Guide
- ⇒ Orange Cove Route Guide
- ⇒ Sanger Express Route Guide
- ⇒ Southeast Route Guide
- ⇒ Westside Route Guide



FCRTA website

Additionally, riders can also call the local phone number for transit provider in their area for information on fixed routes, maps and schedules.

**Demand reservation base services** are demand responsive services that offer curb to curb transportation. Riders call their local transit provider, identify their location, desired destination and departure time. A driver is then picked-up and transports the patron. Demand services is limited to within the rural transit service area during regular service hours.

FCRTA has relationships with a number of local, regional and statewide transit providers. The following are the area transportation providers:

- ⇒ Fresno Area Express (FAX) scheduled, fixed route service with connections to Valley Children's Hospital in Madera County
- ⇒ FAX Handy Ride ADA demand responsive services

- ⇒ Clovis Transit Stageline schedule, fixed route service
- ⇒ Clovis Transit's Round-Up's demand responsive ADA services
- ⇒ Kings Area Rural Transit (KART) schedule, fixed route services to Fresno and Hanford
- ⇒ Dinuba Connection schedule fixed route travels from Dinuba to Reedley with transfers Cutler-Orosi, Orange Cove, Parlier, Sanger and Fresno



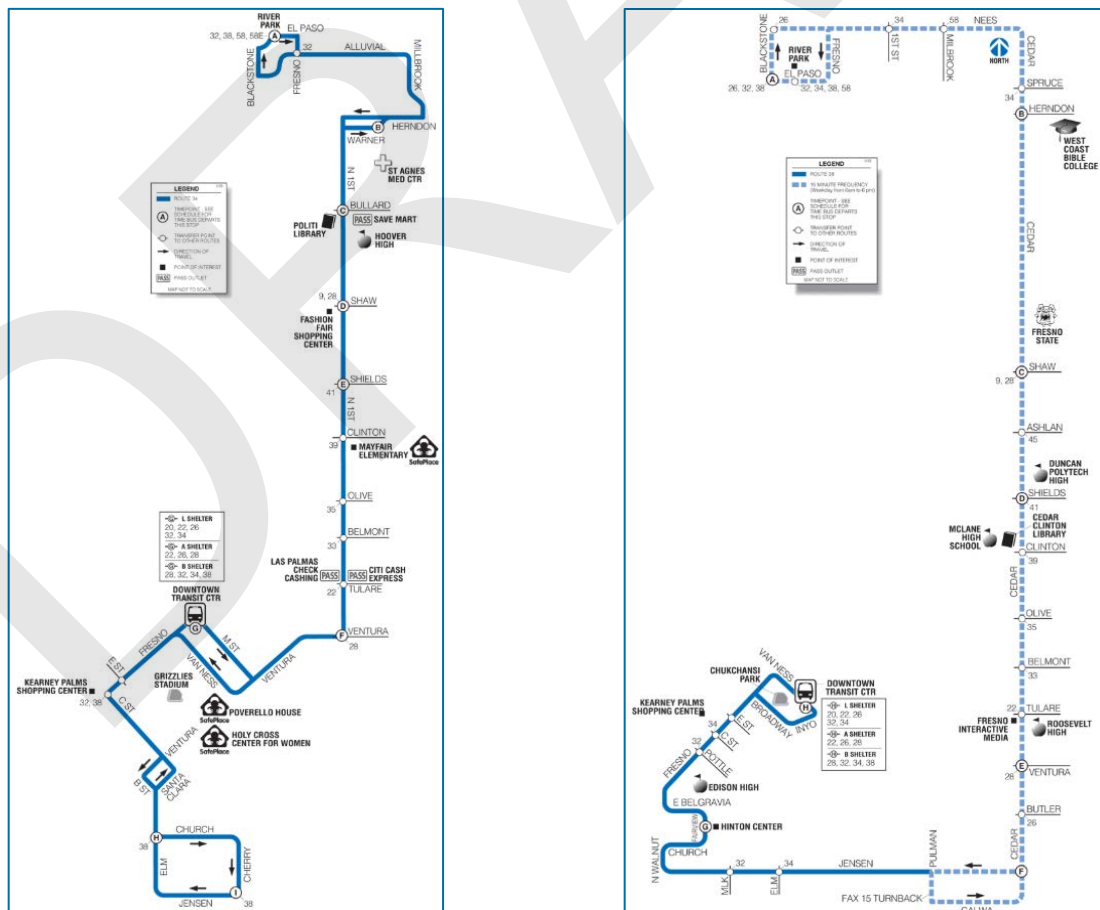
Cropped photo: FCRTA website

One-way fares for service within a community range from 35 cents for the elderly and children accompanied by an adult, to 75 cents for the general public. Senior citizens and disabled individuals ride for free on intra-city buses.

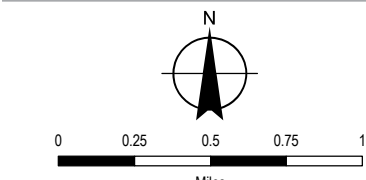
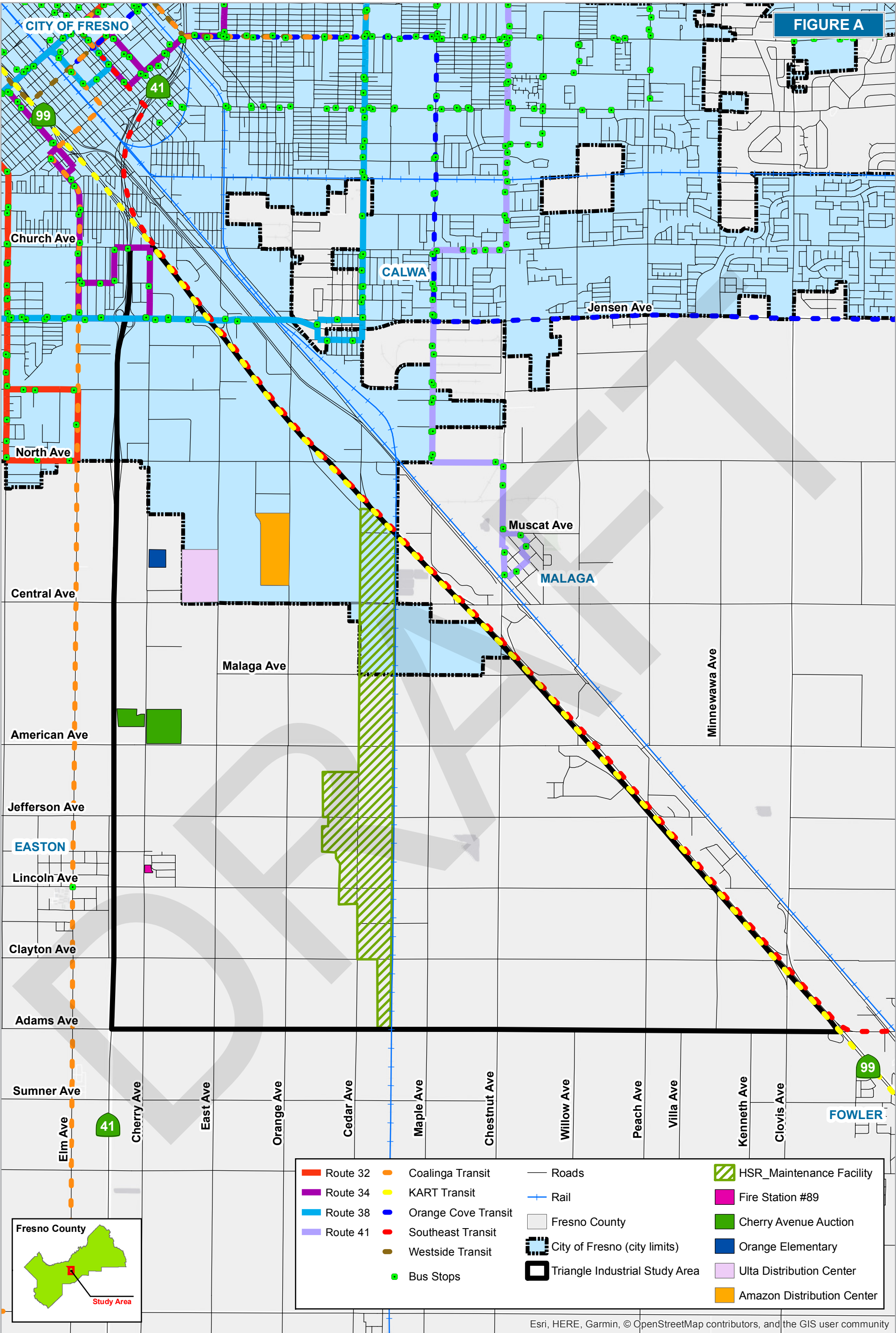
Fares for intercity service are generally half the price of fares granted to common carriers by the California Public Utilities Commission. They range from 75 cents to \$6.00 per one-way trip, depending on distance traveled. Fares may be subject to change.

## Project Area

Figure 3.1 identifies FAX and FCRTA routes in or near the project area. As identified, there are four FAX routes, which include: Routes 32, 34, 38 and 41. Route 34 (Jensen Avenue) and 38 (Cherry Avenue) travel through the project area that include approximately 15 bus stops locations combined. FCRTA routes in or near the project area are; Coalinga Transit, Kart Transit and Southeast Transit.







## Bus Routes and Bus Stops

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