



Service Implementation Plan

FY2027

Presented June 2026

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Introduction

Background

The Service Implementation Plan (SIP) outlines North County Transit District, operating as North County Transit – San Diego Railroad (NCTD) plans to provide multimodal transit services over the next five (5) years. The SIP is a requirement under the Master Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and is used to inform NCTD’s annual operating budget.

The SIP development process consists of the compilation and review of historic service levels, ridership, and studies that outline capital and operating investments for the District. Planning coordinates with Finance, Bus Operations, and Rail Operations to review and develop the assumptions. Finance staff calculates the costs associated with the proposed services. The costs are then included in the proposed NCTD annual operating budget for Board approval.

Key Assumptions

NCTD uses conservative estimates to forecast ridership. The conservative projection is consistent with Board Policy No. 17 - Budget Development, which requires staff to conservatively estimate revenues and expenses. The conservative forecast allows NCTD to stress test and confirm that the budget for the upcoming fiscal year will be balanced under the assumed worst-case scenario.

Ridership estimates for the FY2027 SIP are based on observed mode-specific ridership trends. Both year-over-year (YOY) ridership changes and anticipated service levels for each mode factor into projections. Miles and hours projections are based primarily on scheduled daily service, while service statistics for on-demand modes, such as LIFT and NCTD+, are based on projected ridership. Absolute work windows, holidays, and special events are also considered in both service and ridership projections. Other factors—such as uncertain funding projections, changing travel patterns, station redevelopment efforts, and evolving land use and development patterns—influence the phasing of proposed service changes.



Strategic Priorities

Uncertain funding projections at all levels of government, coupled with decreasing sales tax revenues, pose significant challenges in projecting future service levels. Should the current forecast continue without the introduction of a new funding source, NCTD will likely need to reduce service levels in future years. This service reduction may impact all NCTD modes. With this uncertainty in mind, the FY2027 Service Implementation Plan has been developed to support strategic investments that can be implemented over a five-year period. These strategic investments aim to increase ridership and address capital priority needs while being mindful of the constrained resource environment. Key strategic service priorities that are relevant to the five-year horizon of the Service Implementation Plan include:

- **Maintain existing service levels across all modes during the FY2027 - FY2031 planning horizon**
- **Continue monitoring system performance and evaluating opportunities for service adjustments that improve customer experience and system efficiency in a cost-effective manner.**
- **Implement future NCTD+ zones contingent upon operational conditions and available funding**
- **Complete the planned Convention Center COASTER Station in FY2029 without increasing total daily COASTER trips**



FY2026 Service Statistics & Ridership



System Summary

Service statistics and ridership projections are reviewed each budget cycle to reflect actual performance and assess the accuracy of previous forecasts. The FY2026 SIP, developed in spring 2025, projected a 4.9% increase in systemwide ridership driven by the transition to in-house bus operations, continued benefits from the Youth Opportunity Pass program and special event service, and planned service initiatives, including the implementation of the Fallbrook-Pala NCTD+ zone. As shown in **Figure 1**, systemwide ridership throughout FY2026 has generally remained below budgeted projections, and total FY2026 ridership is currently estimated to be approximately 5.3% lower than originally budgeted for the year. While ridership continued to recover in FY2026, growth was lower than initially projected, with systemwide ridership currently estimated to increase approximately 0.1% over FY2025 levels.

During FY2026, NCTD implemented several service adjustments to improve system efficiency and align service levels with demand, including the discontinuation of FLEX Routes 471, 472, and 478, as well as BREEZE Route 323 due to low performance. In addition, implementation of the Fallbrook-Pala NCTD+ zone was deferred due to operational capacity constraints and fiscal considerations and remains contingent upon receipt of external funding through SANDAG's Flexible Fleets program. FY2027 service levels and ridership forecasts by mode are summarized in **Table 1**.

For FY2027, NCTD anticipates systemwide ridership growth to stabilize, with a projected increase of approximately 1.5%.

Figure 1. Systemwide Monthly Ridership, FY2026

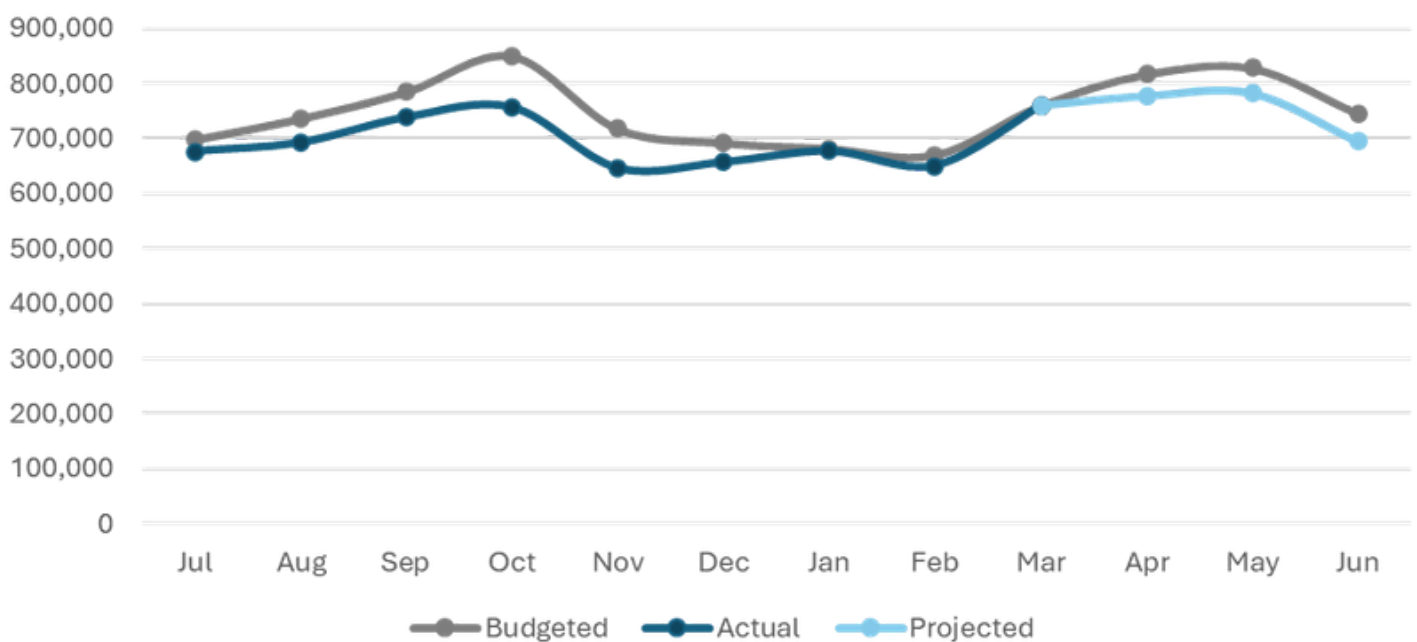


Table 1. Projected Ridership & Operating Statistics, FY2027

Mode/Metric	Ridership	Revenue Miles	Total Miles	Revenue Hours	Total Hours
BREEZE	5,603,693	4,875,785	5,755,046	421,175	457,592
SPRINTER	1,671,683	518,926	521,147	23,588	23,742
COASTER	1,080,628	407,220	424,586	12,737	13,645
LIFT	115,147	871,853	939,038	49,558	54,044
FLEX	111,682	344,416	441,931	20,104	24,023
NCTD+	46,897	134,527	180,977	12,695	16,628
System Total	8,629,730	7,152,727	8,262,725	539,857	589,674

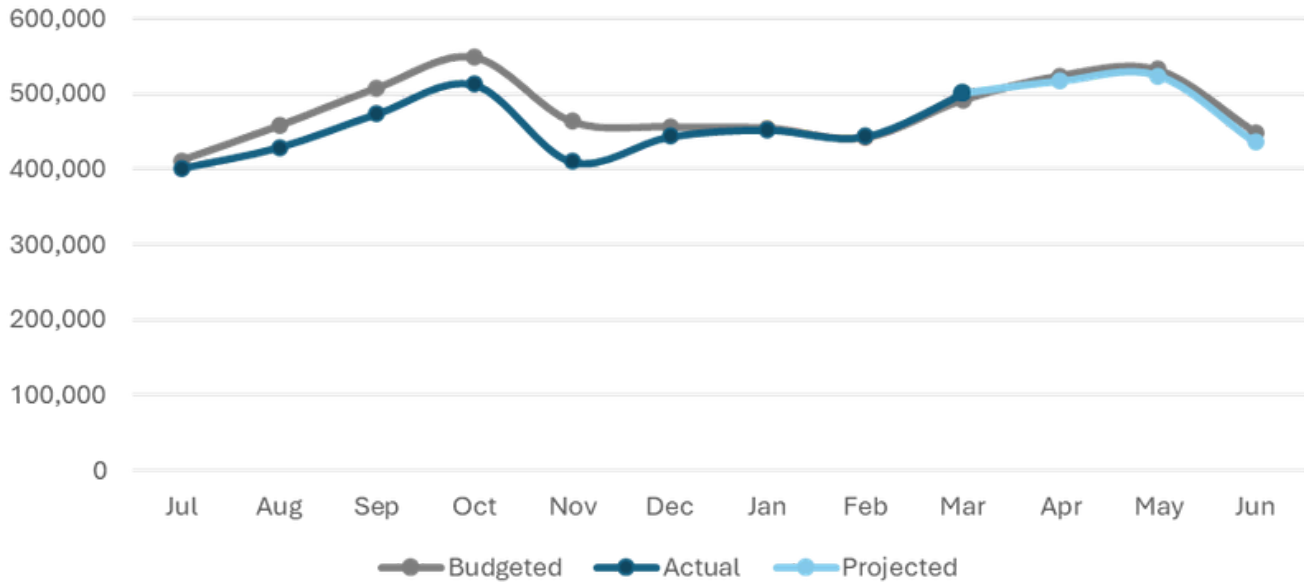
BREEZE

BREEZE service changes outlined in the FY2026 SIP included the planned reintroduction of BREEZE 408 special event service and continued ridership growth associated with customer-focused service improvements. The FY2026 SIP projected a 4.4% increase in ridership, from approximately 5.5 million boardings in FY2025 to 5.7 million boardings in FY2026.



However, the reintroduction of BREEZE 408 was deferred due to operational and fiscal constraints. At the end of FY2025, NCTD discontinued BREEZE Routes 334 and 444 due to low performance and replaced Route 334 with NCTD+ service in Vista. During FY2026, NCTD also discontinued BREEZE Route 323 and rerouted BREEZE Routes 311, 313, and 325 to serve portions of the former Route 323 corridor and provide new connections within the region. As shown in **Figure 2**, actual FY2026 ridership growth has been lower than originally anticipated, with the FY2026 ridership projected to be 3.3% below the budgeted ridership for the year. Given ongoing fiscal uncertainty, no major BREEZE service expansions are currently planned for FY2027.

Figure 2. BREEZE Monthly Ridership, FY2026



As detailed in **Table 2** and shown in **Figure 3**, FY2027 ridership is projected to increase modestly by approximately 1.1% to 5.6 million boardings, reflecting stabilized service levels and anticipated year-over-year transit ridership growth trends.

Figure 3. BREEZE Actual & Projected Ridership, FY25-FY27

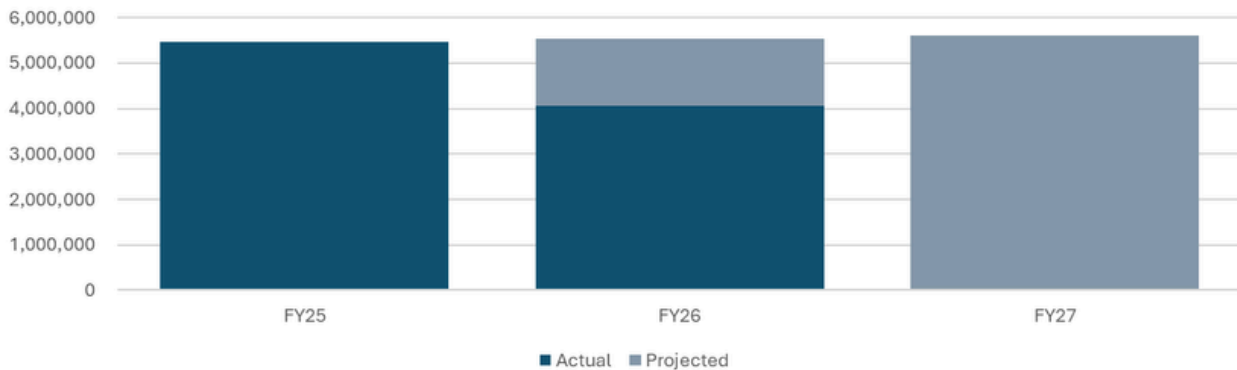


Table 2. BREEZE Ridership & Operating Statistics, FY25-FY27

BREEZE	FY25 Actuals	FY26 Actuals & Projected	FY27 Proposed	Change from FY25 to FY27	Change from FY26 to FY27
Total Ridership	5,458,166	5,543,623	5,603,693	2.7%	1.1%
Total Revenue Miles	5,050,027	5,009,050	4,875,785	-3.5%	-2.7%
Total Miles	5,866,238	5,812,044	5,755,046	-1.9%	-1.0%
Total Revenue Hours	430,969	428,537	421,175	-2.3%	-1.7%
Total Hours	465,290	460,445	457,592	-1.7%	-0.6%

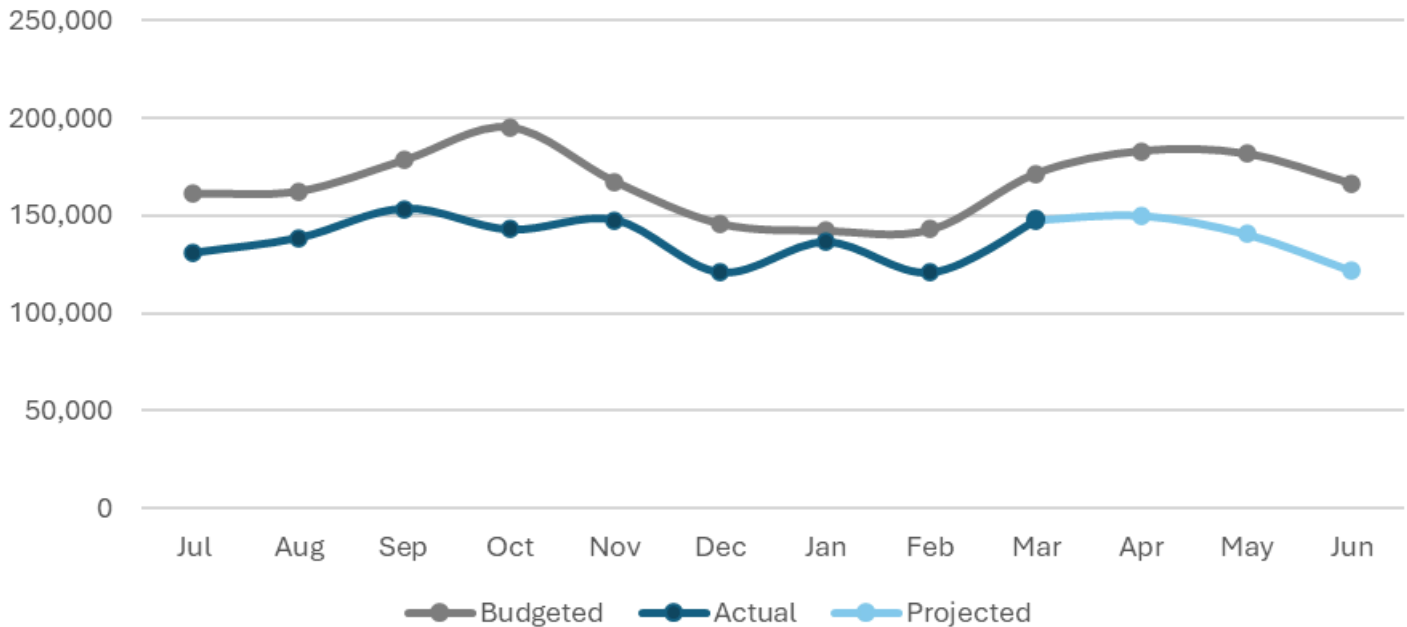
SPRINTER

The FY2026 SIP projected continued ridership growth on SPRINTER, with ridership anticipated to increase by approximately 4% in FY2026. However, beginning in FY2026, NCTD implemented updates to its ridership reporting methodology, resulting in a one-time reduction in reported ridership compared to both FY2025 actual ridership and the ridership projections originally budgeted for FY2026, which did not anticipate the methodology change.



As a result of this change, and as evidenced in **Figure 4**, monthly FY2026 ridership has remained below budgeted projections. However, FY2026 ridership will serve as the new baseline for future reporting.

Figure 4. SPRINTER Monthly Ridership, FY2026



No major SPRINTER service changes were implemented during FY2026, and service levels are expected to remain consistent moving forward. FY2027 ridership projections are, therefore, based on the revised reporting methodology established in FY2026. As illustrated in **Figure 5** and detailed in **Table 3**, SPRINTER ridership is projected to increase modestly by approximately 1.2% in FY2027 compared to projected FY2026 levels.

Figure 5. SPRINTER Actual & Projected Ridership, FY25-FY27

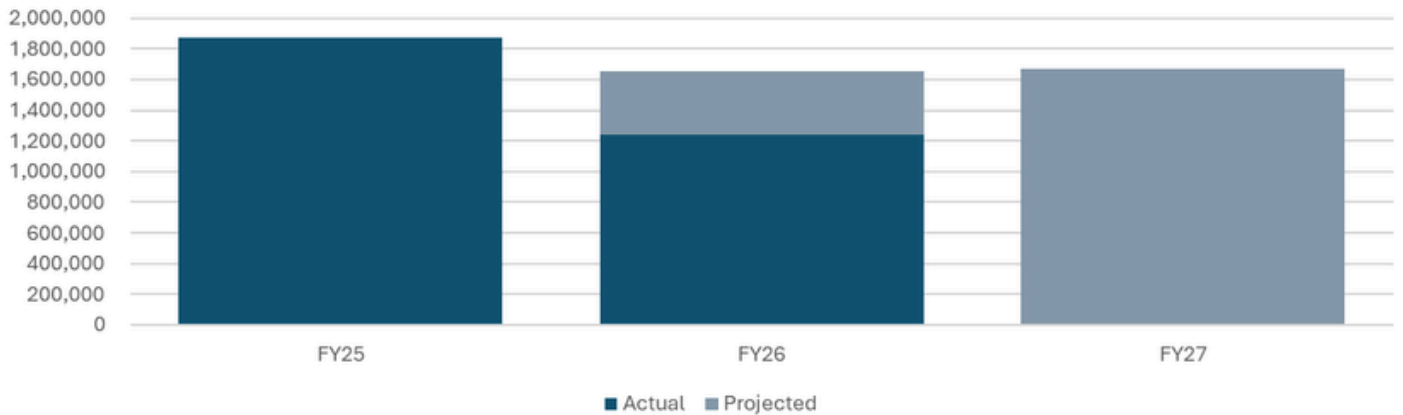


Table 3. SPRINTER Ridership & Operating Statistics, FY25-FY27

SPRINTER	FY25 Actuals	FY26 Actuals & Projected	FY27 Proposed	Change from FY25 to FY27	Change from FY26 to FY27
Total Ridership	1,876,403	1,652,666	1,671,683	-10.9%	1.2%
Total Revenue Miles	501,642	518,835	518,926	3.4%	0.0%
Total Miles	504,792	514,299	521,147	3.2%	1.3%
Total Revenue Hours	22,808	23,308	23,588	3.4%	1.2%
Total Hours	22,984	23,461	23,742	3.3%	1.2%

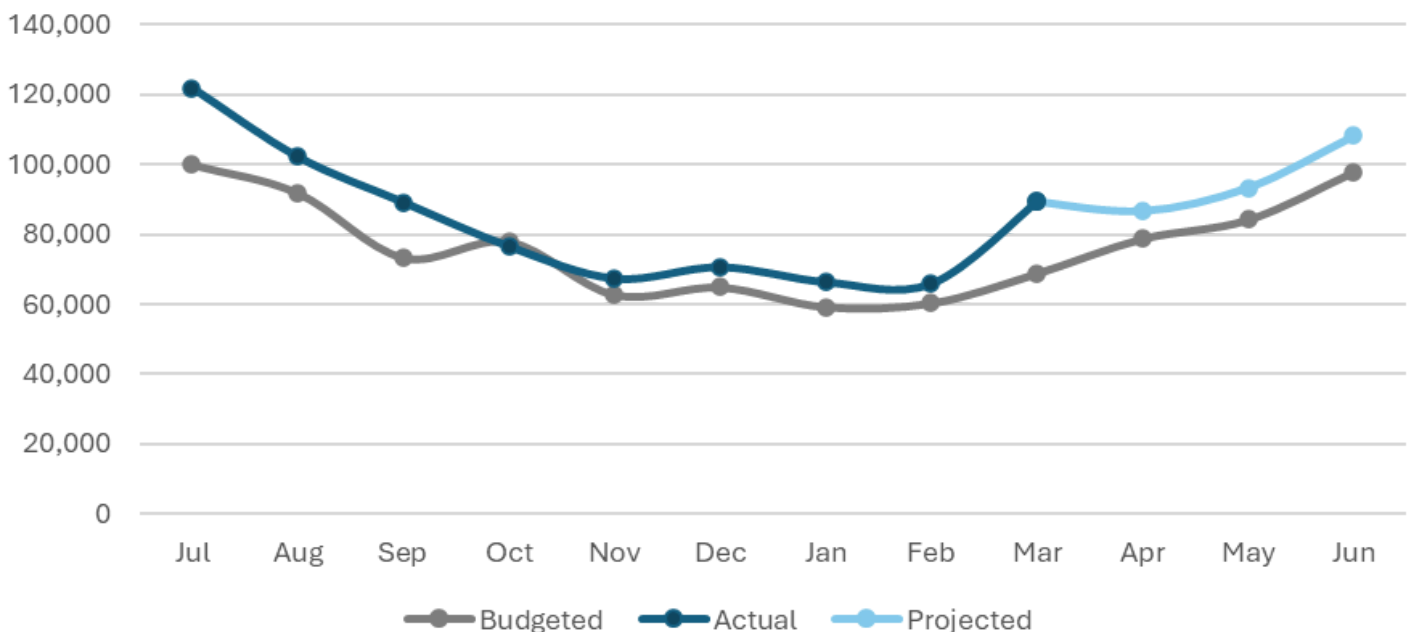
COASTER

Year-to-date ridership on COASTER has increased significantly compared to the previous fiscal year, exceeding the growth projected in the FY2026 SIP. The FY2026 SIP projected over 900,000 boardings in FY2026; however, current estimates indicate ridership will exceed 1 million boardings, representing an approximately 11.9% increase compared to FY2025.



As shown in **Figure 6**, monthly COASTER ridership has generally exceeded budgeted goals throughout FY2026, with the exception of October, which may be partially attributed to an additional Absolute Work Window (AWW) day compared to the previous year. Continued demand associated with Padres games and other regional events has also contributed to increased ridership. In October 2025, NCTD implemented a COASTER schedule adjustment that redistributed trips throughout the day to better align service with evolving travel demand patterns while maintaining the same overall number of trips operated.

Figure 6. COASTER Monthly Ridership, FY2026



As illustrated in **Figure 7** and detailed in **Table 4**, COASTER ridership is projected to continue increasing in FY2027, from a projected 1.03 million boardings in FY2026 to a projected 1.08 million boardings in FY2027, representing an estimated increase of approximately 4.1%. Due to ongoing fiscal uncertainty, no major COASTER service expansions are currently planned for FY2027.

Figure 7. COASTER Actual & Projected Ridership, FY25-FY27

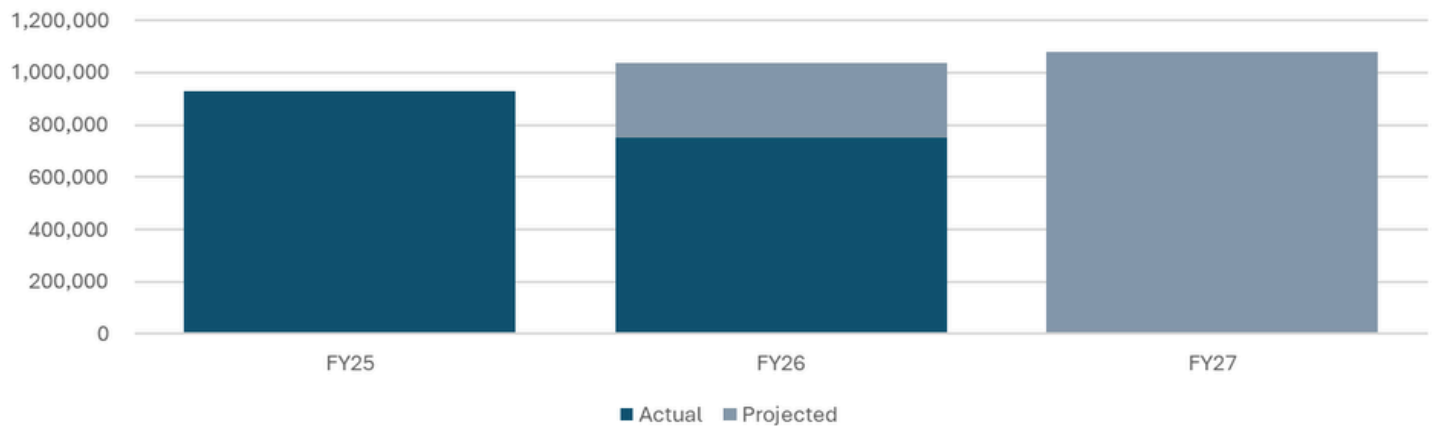


Table 4. COASTER Ridership & Operating Statistics, FY25-FY27

COASTER	FY25 Actuals	FY26 Actuals & Projected	FY27 Proposed	Change from FY25 to FY27	Change from FY26 to FY27
Total Ridership	927,557	1,037,616	1,080,628	16.5%	4.1%
Total Revenue Miles	397,260	403,087	407,220	2.5%	1.0%
Total Miles	422,669	422,056	424,586	0.5%	0.6%
Total Revenue Hours	12,199	12,577	12,737	4.4%	1.3%
Total Hours	13,588	13,579	13,645	0.4%	0.5%

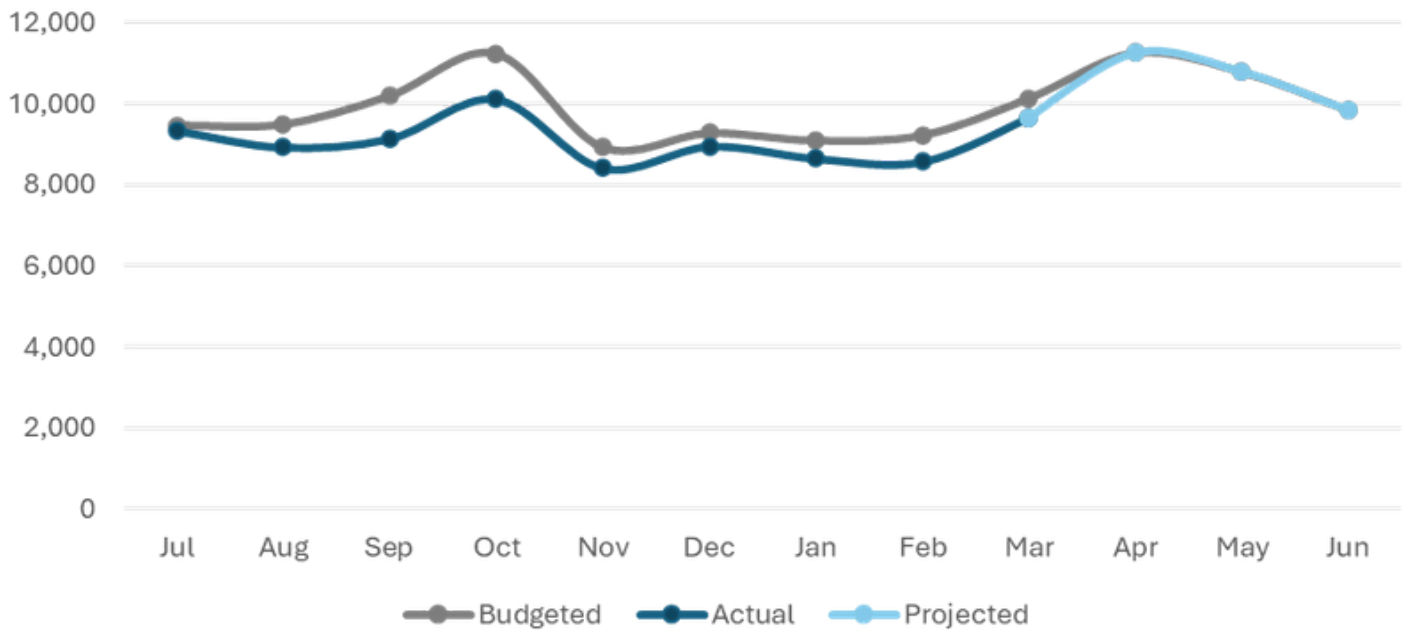
LIFT

The FY2026 SIP projected a 2.7% increase in LIFT ridership based on the significant ridership growth experienced between FY2024 and FY2025, during which ridership increased approximately 9.9% year-over-year. As shown in **Figure 8**, actual FY2026 ridership growth has been lower than originally anticipated, and monthly ridership has generally remained below budgeted goals throughout the year.



FY2026 ridership is currently projected to increase approximately 2.2% over FY2025 levels, reaching an estimated 113,000 boardings.

Figure 8. LIFT Monthly Ridership, FY2026



As illustrated in **Figure 9** and detailed in **Table 5**, LIFT ridership growth is expected to stabilize in FY2027, with boardings projected to increase approximately 1.4%, from a projected 113,000 boardings in FY2026 to 115,000 boardings in FY2027.

Figure 9. LIFT Actual & Projected Ridership, FY25-FY27

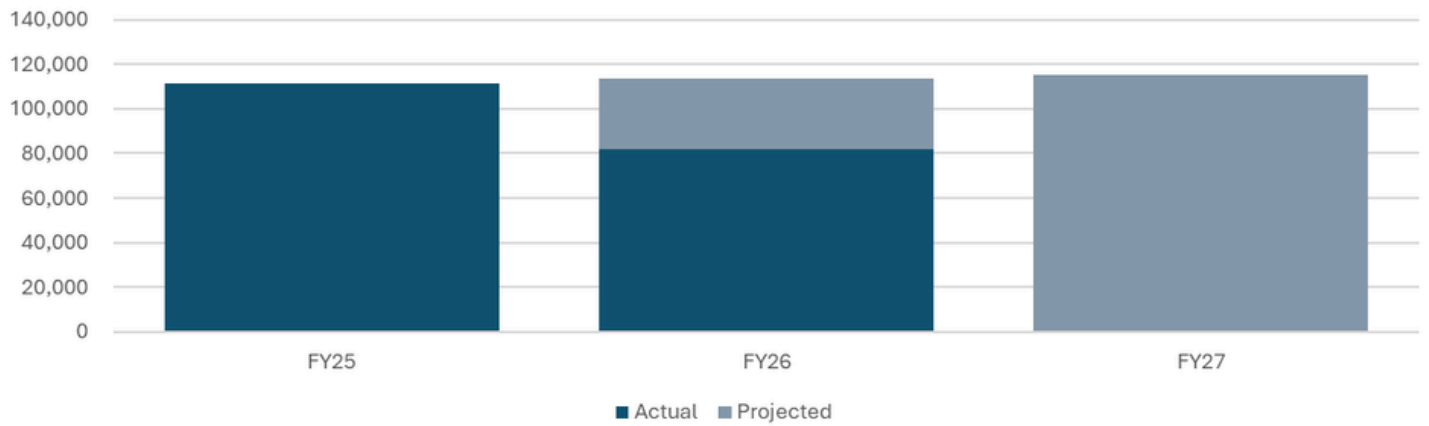


Table 5. LIFT Ridership & Operating Statistics, FY25-FY27

LIFT	FY25 Actuals	FY26 Actuals & Projected	FY27 Proposed	Change from FY25 to FY27	Change from FY26 to FY27
Total Ridership	111,204	113,610	115,147	3.5%	1.4%
Total Revenue Miles	938,401	826,398	871,853	-7.1%	5.5%
Total Miles	1,019,494	890,147	939,038	-7.9%	5.5%
Total Revenue Hours	54,739	46,971	49,558	-9.5%	5.5%
Total Hours	61,558	51,225	54,044	-12.2%	5.5%

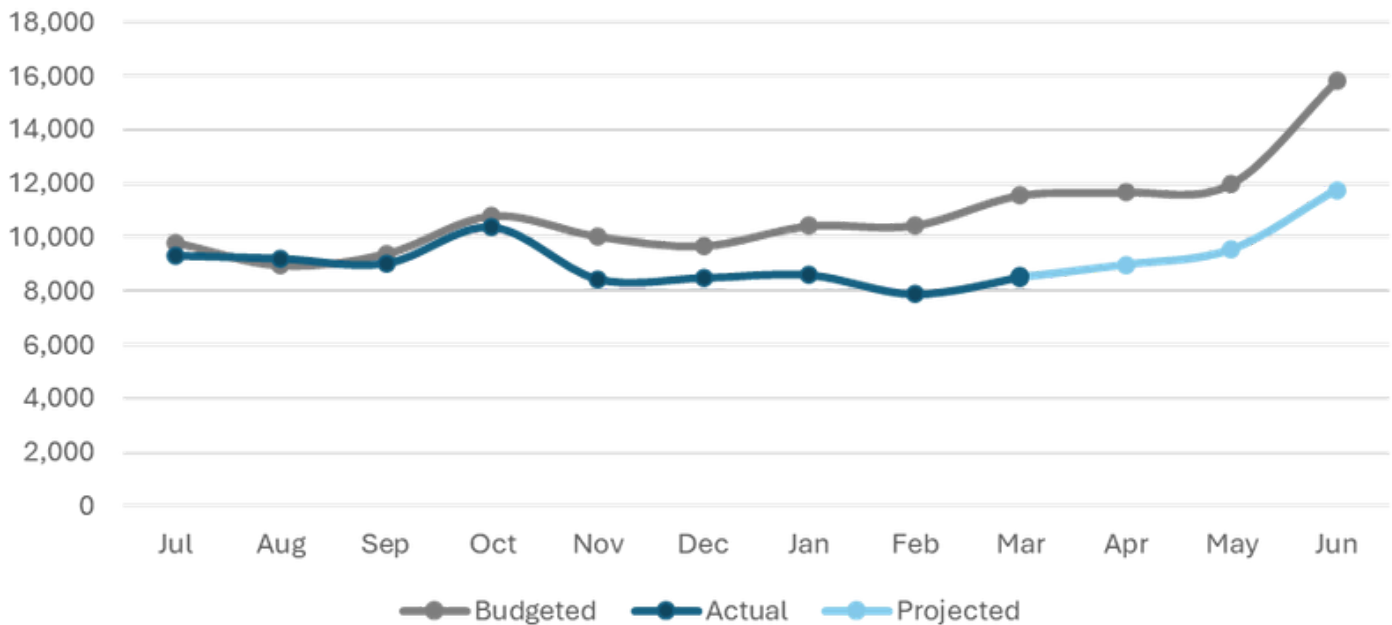
FLEX

The FY2026 SIP projected continued strong growth in FLEX ridership, including a projected 29.4% increase in FY2026 associated with the inclusion of COASTER and FLEX services in University of California, San Diego’s (UCSD) U-Pass Program and continued demand for COASTER Connection services. As shown in **Figure 10**, actual FY2026 ridership growth has been lower than originally anticipated, and monthly ridership has generally remained below budgeted goals throughout the year.



FLEX ridership is currently projected to increase approximately 9.7% compared to actual FY2025 ridership. In February 2026, NCTD discontinued FLEX Routes 471, 472, and 478 due to low performance. While these service changes are expected to slow future ridership growth, overall FLEX ridership is still projected to increase.

Figure 10. FLEX Monthly Ridership, FY2026



Due to ongoing fiscal uncertainty, no major FLEX service expansions are currently planned for FY2027. As illustrated in **Figure 11** and detailed in **Table 6**, FY2027 ridership is projected to increase approximately 1.5%, from just over 110,000 boardings in FY2026 to nearly 112,000 boardings in FY2027.

Figure 11. FLEX Actual & Projected Ridership, FY25-FY27

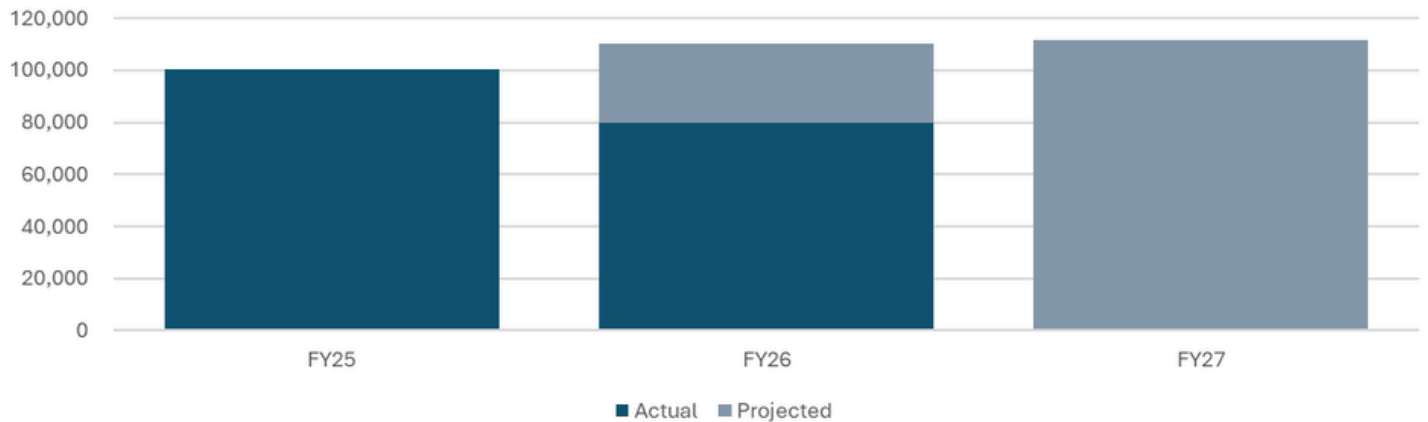


Table 6. FLEX Ridership & Operating Statistics, FY25-FY27

FLEX	FY25 Actuals	FY26 Actuals & Projected	FY27 Proposed	Change from FY25 to FY27	Change from FY26 to FY27
Total Ridership	100,309	110,017	111,682	11.3%	1.5%
Total Revenue Miles	381,383	362,496	344,416	-9.7%	-5.0%
Total Miles	473,179	454,565	441,931	-6.6%	-2.8%
Total Revenue Hours	26,562	24,207	20,104	-24.3%	-16.9%
Total Hours	30,750	28,359	24,023	-21.9%	-15.3%

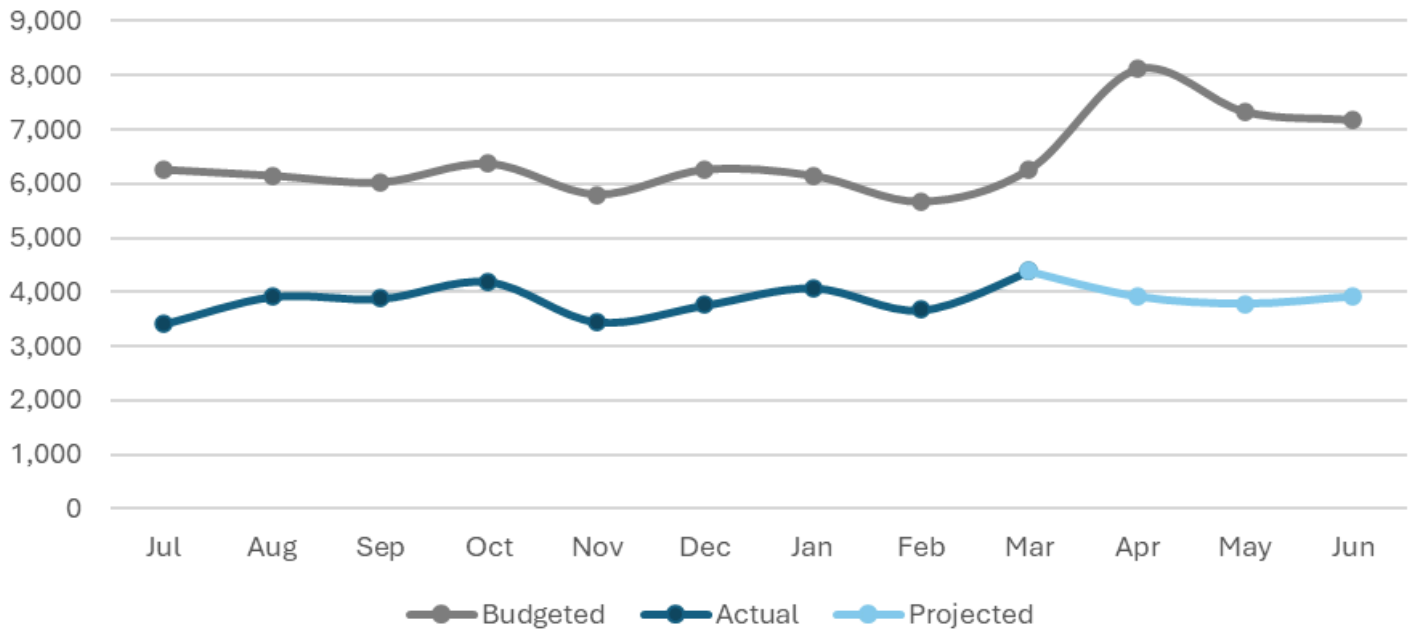
NCTD+

In late FY2024, NCTD introduced its on-demand microtransit service, NCTD+, as a pilot in San Marcos, followed by the implementation of the Vista pilot zone in FY2025. The FY2026 SIP projected significant ridership growth for NCTD+, including the anticipated implementation of a third pilot zone in Fallbrook and Pala supported through SANDAG Flexible Fleets funding.



As shown in **Figure 12**, FY2026 ridership has remained below budgeted projections largely because the Fallbrook-Pala zone was not implemented as originally anticipated. Due to fiscal and operational uncertainty, implementation of the Fallbrook-Pala NCTD+ zone has been deferred to FY2028 and remains contingent upon receipt of SANDAG Flexible Fleets funding.

Figure 12. NCTD+ Monthly Ridership, FY2026



Ridership in the existing San Marcos and Vista zones has remained steady throughout FY2026. As illustrated in **Figure 13** and detailed in **Table 7**, NCTD+ ridership is projected to increase modestly by approximately 1.2% from FY2026 to FY2027, reflecting continued operation of the existing service zones without further expansion.

Figure 13. NCTD+ Actual & Projected Ridership, FY25-FY27

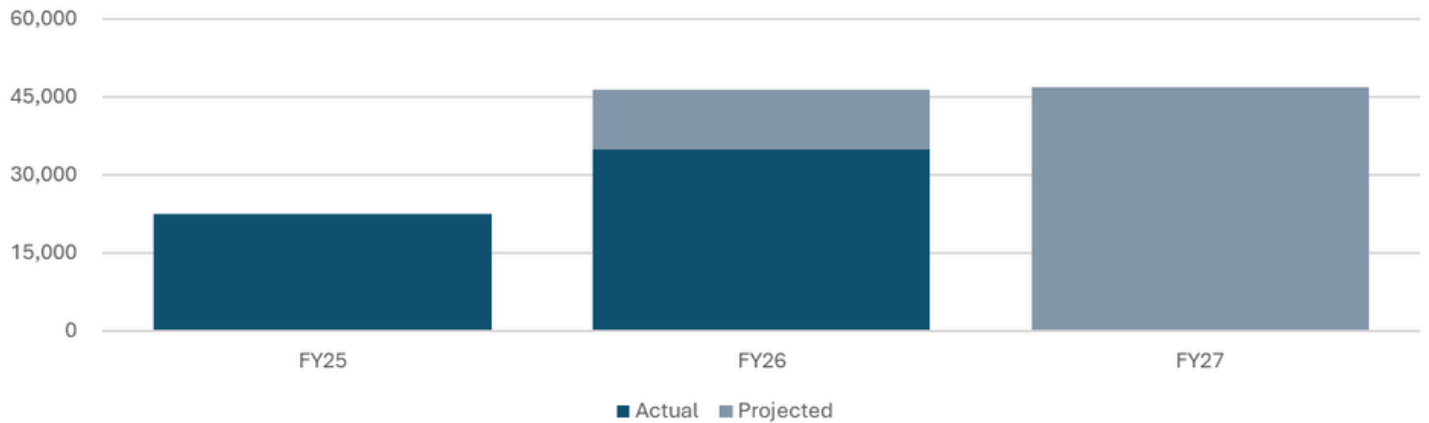


Table 7. NCTD+ Ridership & Operating Statistics, FY25-FY27

NCTD+	FY25 Actuals	FY26 Actuals & Projected	FY27 Proposed	Change from FY25 to FY27	Change from FY26 to FY27
Total Ridership	22,459	46,360	46,897	108.8%	1.2%
Total Revenue Miles	79,177	133,277	134,527	69.9%	0.9%
Total Miles	121,163	178,983	180,977	49.4%	1.1%
Total Revenue Hours	7,221	12,553	12,695	75.8%	1.1%
Total Hours	11,025	16,446	16,628	50.8%	1.1%

Five-Year Outlook



The Service Implementation Plan includes a five-year outlook that is updated annually with each budget cycle. This planning horizon allows the District to align major capital and operations projects with future operating projections. The FY2027 Service Implementation Plan was developed within the context of continued fiscal uncertainty and constrained operating resources. As a result, the District’s focus over the five-year planning horizon is on maintaining existing service levels, monitoring system performance, and identifying cost-effective service adjustments that improve customer access and better align the network with evolving travel patterns. **Figure 14** outlines the key objectives of the FY2027 SIP.

Figure 14. *SIP Objectives*



Figure 15 charts current and projected ridership and service levels from FY2025 through FY2031. Because no major service expansions are currently planned, ridership growth over the five-year outlook is projected to remain modest and generally align with typical year-over-year transit growth trends. The only potential service expansion currently identified is the implementation of the Fallbrook-Pala NCTD+ zone in FY2028, which remains contingent upon receipt of SANDAG Flexible Fleets funding.

In addition, NCTD anticipates completion of the COASTER Convention Center Platform in FY2029, which is expected to result in modest increases in ridership and operating mileage without increasing the total number of scheduled COASTER trips. For demand-responsive services such as LIFT and NCTD+, projected operating statistics fluctuate in proportion to ridership demand due to the nature of those service models. **Tables 8 through 13** detail projected modal ridership and operating statistics from FY2027 through FY2031.

Figure 15. Systemwide Actual & Projected Ridership and Service Levels, FY25 - FY31

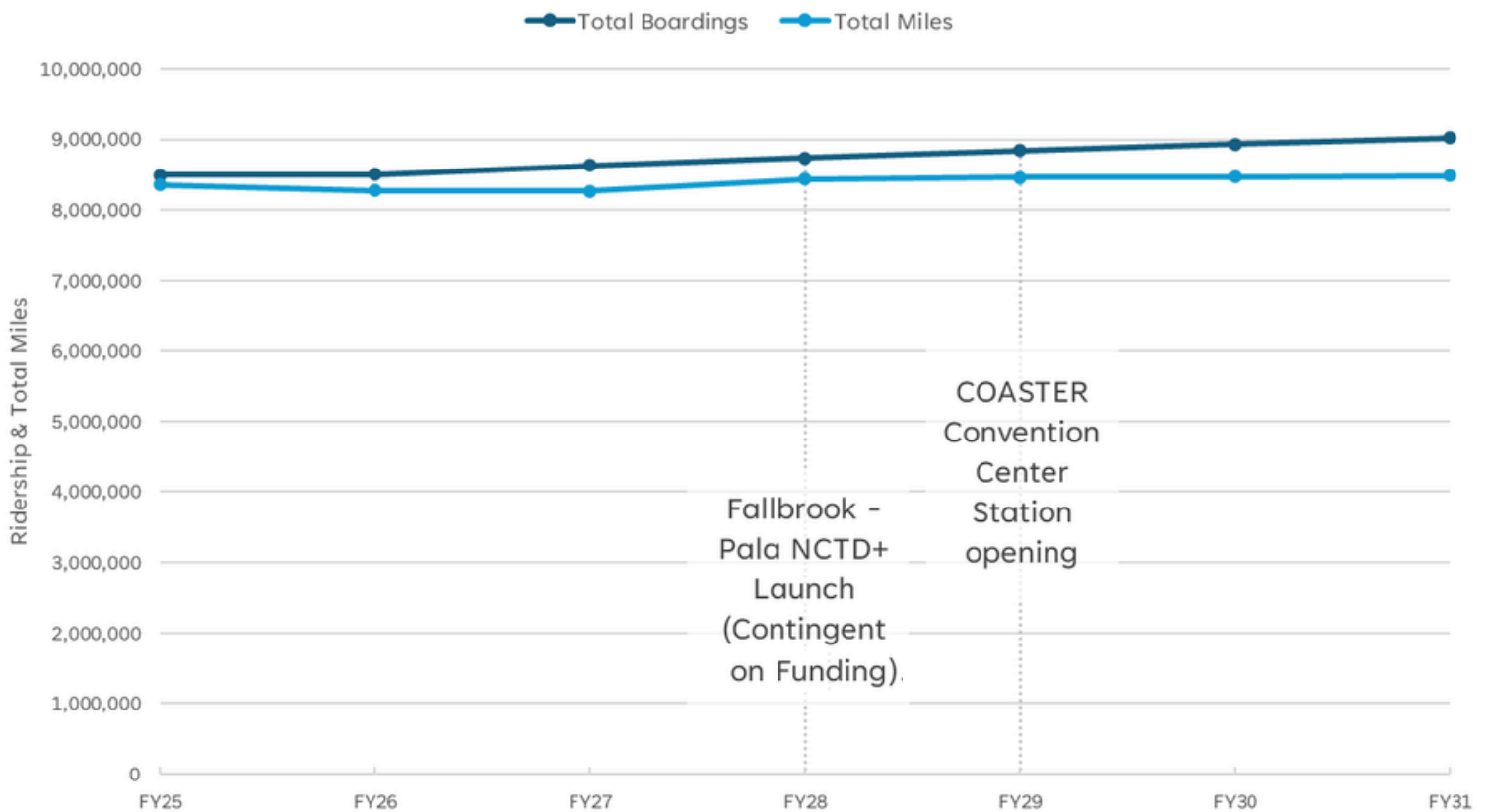


Table 8. BREEZE Ridership & Service Forecast, FY27 - FY31

BREEZE	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030	FY2031
Total Ridership	5,603,693	5,659,730	5,716,327	5,773,490	5,831,225
Total Revenue Miles	4,875,785	4,875,785	4,875,785	4,875,785	4,875,785
Total Miles	5,755,046	5,755,046	5,755,046	5,755,046	5,755,046
Total Revenue Hours	421,175	421,175	421,175	421,175	421,175
Total Hours	457,592	457,592	457,592	457,592	457,592

Table 9. SPRINTER Ridership & Service Forecast, FY27 - FY31

SPRINTER	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030	FY2031
Total Ridership	1,671,683	1,688,400	1,705,284	1,722,337	1,739,560
Total Revenue Miles	518,926	518,926	518,926	518,926	518,926
Total Miles	521,147	521,147	521,147	521,147	521,147
Total Revenue Hours	23,588	23,588	23,588	23,588	23,588
Total Hours	23,742	23,742	23,742	23,742	23,742

Table 10. COASTER Ridership & Service Forecast, FY27 - FY31

COASTER	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030	FY2031
Total Ridership	1,080,628	1,091,434	1,117,846	1,129,024	1,140,314
Total Revenue Miles	407,220	407,220	418,670	418,670	418,670
Total Miles	424,586	424,586	436,525	436,525	436,525
Total Revenue Hours	12,737	12,737	13,095	13,095	13,095
Total Hours	13,645	13,645	14,029	14,029	14,029

Table 11. LIFT Ridership & Service Forecast, FY27 - FY31

LIFT	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030	FY2031
Total Ridership	115,147	116,575	117,741	118,918	120,107
Total Revenue Miles	871,853	882,665	891,494	900,406	909,408
Total Miles	939,038	950,684	960,192	969,791	979,487
Total Revenue Hours	49,558	50,173	50,674	51,181	51,693
Total Hours	54,044	54,714	55,261	55,814	56,372

Table 12. FLEX Ridership & Service Forecast, FY27 - FY31

FLEX	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030	FY2031
Total Ridership	111,682	115,064	116,806	117,974	119,154
Total Revenue Miles	344,416	344,416	344,416	344,416	344,416
Total Miles	441,931	441,931	441,931	441,931	441,931
Total Revenue Hours	20,104	20,104	20,104	20,104	20,104
Total Hours	24,023	24,023	24,023	24,023	24,023

Table 13. NCTD+ Ridership & Service Forecast, FY27 - FY31 *

NCTD+	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030	FY2031
Total Ridership	46,897	67,076	67,747	68,424	69,108
Total Revenue Miles	134,527	267,055	269,727	272,422	275,145
Total Miles	180,977	340,545	343,952	347,389	350,861
Total Revenue Hours	12,695	26,063	26,324	26,587	26,853
Total Hours	16,628	36,504	36,869	37,238	37,610

*Projected increases in FY2028–FY2031 service levels, revenue miles, revenue hours, and ridership are contingent upon securing external funding for additional NCTD+ zones.