CA Transit Data Guidelines Draft v3.0 Feedback

What we heard and our response

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Garfield/Main

Save

🚌 30 Garfield Ave   5 min

Live · 11:53 AM

🚌 30 Garfield Ave   Firestone   45 min
Live · 12:33 PM

🚌 30 Garfield Ave   Firestone   2:08 PM
Scheduled

🚌 30 Garfield Ave   Firestone   3:18 PM
Scheduled

🚌 30 Garfield Ave   Firestone   4:23 PM
Scheduled

🚌 30 Garfield Ave   Firestone   5:33 PM
Scheduled

& Garfield Ave Stop

Directions
5m by walking

6, 24 min
On-time
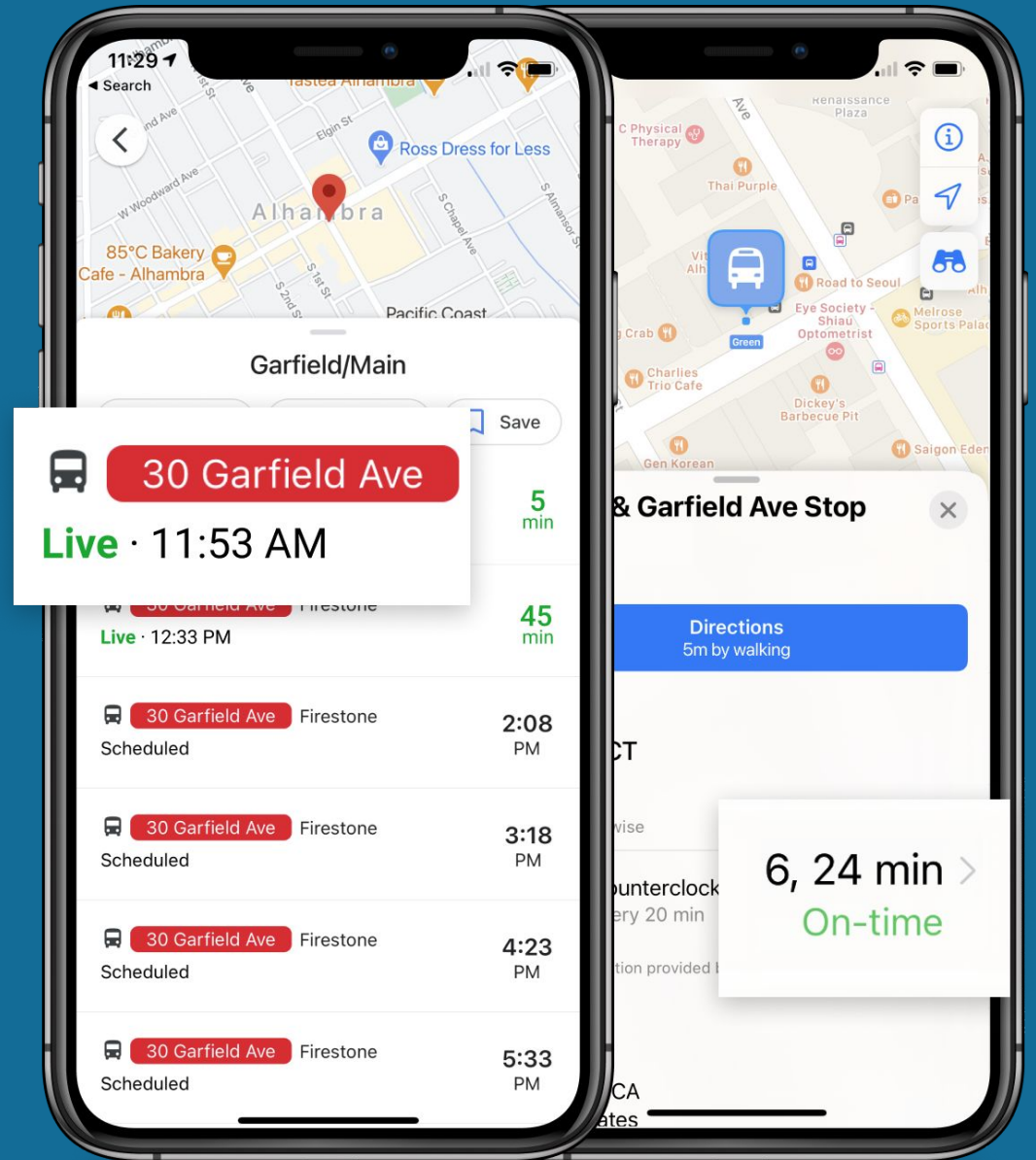
Enthusiasm for the Guidelines

"We are very excited about the new guidelines and we firmly believe this will empower agencies to provide riders with the best data (and the best transit experience)."

"We support a strong network to help transit agencies reach and sustain GTFS compliance per the Guidelines now and in the future"

"Overall, CalACT members are incredibly supportive of the GTFS standards, and the process used by the state to implement them."

Make sure we have the latest links!

What we heard

- Many respondents provided helpful information about where the document needed a link to be updated or added in
- Pathways file

What we've changed

- **MobilityData links updated for:**
  - The MobilityData database
  - The GTFS Schedule Validator webpage
- **Links added for:**
  - The canonical GTFS Schedule data validator Github page
  - GTFS.org - the central platform for the GTFS community
- **Pathways file name updated**

Terminology Clarification and Consistency

What we heard

- The document refers to GTFS Realtime data in many ways (GTFS-Realtime, GTFS-rt, etc)

- Open trip planner: What about website trip planners that use GTFS as their data source?

- We say that GTFS Realtime data should be published "Regularly" …how often is "regularly"? Is it the same as the time length provided within the Service Accuracy section?

What we've changed

- The document now only uses "GTFS Realtime" - same as Google Transit

- Trip planner language changed to be inclusive of other trip planners on provider websites that use GTFS data

- "Regularly" was removed due to its ambiguous meaning. Under the "service accuracy" feature, we have a Guidelines that provides criteria for how often GTFS Realtime feeds should be refreshed. Additionally, the validator will flag any GTFS Realtime feeds that are updated greater than 65 seconds which would be flagged when evaluating a feed under compliance

Features: Clarification & Labeling

What we heard

- Features organization/labeling:
  "*Referring to the list of Features on page 5: "all of these are combined later under a group called 'Schedule Features', which doesn't seem to be mandatory. If so, should you categorize 'compliance' as 'mandatory' and all others as 'recommended?"*

Our response

- Page 5 simply lists out all of the Feature groupings that exist - and are referenced - within the Guidelines document for GTFS Schedule data, GTFS Realtime data, and Data Availability.

- The Features are organized into 2 broader groups: "Compliance" and "Beyond Compliance". Technically, both groupings are "recommended" and we do not wish to introduce the term "mandatory". The reason for the distinction is simply to call out what truly is minimally needed for a GTFS feed to exist and be visible to riders, in order to set a lower threshold for providers to meet. The "Beyond Compliance" group continues to convey Guidelines a high quality should meet in order to give riders the data they deserve.

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Feature: Up to Dateness

What we heard

- Up to dateness section: Transit providers sometimes have planned service changes for which they don't have a schedule a week in advance

Our response

- We recognize that there are occasionally situations where this 7-day goal cannot be met. This Guideline is not a part of the lower threshold of compliance and publishing changes to the GTFS Schedule feed at least one week before a planned service change is a best practice. Data consumers often need this time to ingest the new data and have it run through their QA checks before it goes "live".
- Therefore, we have elected to keep it within the Guidelines

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Compliance and Funding

What we heard

- "Compliance" and funding: Can we confirm that GTFS "compliance" is not linked to current state funding in any way?
- "Compliance" and eligibility: Concern over the meaning behind the word "Eligibility" where the Guidelines refer to "Compliance" as being "...*a more readily-achievable threshold...in order to function as a more basic eligibility requirement*"
  - Does this refer to remaining eligible for select funding?

Our response

- Compliance in this context doesn't have anything to do with funding. It is simply the Guidelines way of setting a level that is truly the minimum to meet to have a viable level of GTFS data that is usable by riders
- Eligibility: We recognize that this sentence was worded in a confusing way. The intent of this sentence was to reiterate that the point of the Feature groupings and "compliance" is to set lower thresholds for agencies to meet in order to have reached the goal of having minimally viable GTFS data. We have revised this sentence to make its intent more clear.

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Compliance: Trip Planners

What we heard

- Question as to why trip planner inclusion is part of "Compliance"

- Suggestion to add a list of most popular trip planners and suggest that the feed must be acceptable by at least two of them. For providers with limited resources, getting feeds in trip planners can be a burden for them to have responsibility over.

Our response

- The Guidelines already include a list of the most popular trip planners as well as instructions on how to start the process of getting your feeds into them

- Asking for GTFS feeds to be present in popular trip planners was intentionally included within the "compliance" feature because it is our position that it doesn't matter how good your GTFS data is if your riders cannot use it within trip planners. We do not make a determination as to how many trip planners constitutes "enough", though we do highly recommend all feeds be in Google Maps, Apple Maps, Transit App. Transit providers know their riders best and are best suited to determine as to whether other trip planners are important to have their feeds in.

  - While ensuring that feeds are included within trip planners is an additional task, Cal-ITP offers free assistance to transit providers to get their feeds into trip planners. Many vendors also make this part of their standard process.

Prioritizing Compliance

What we heard

- Clarification needed over prioritizing Compliance
  - Is there anything within the full list of "Schedule Features" that must be addressed in order to pass the validator?

Our response

- Compliance is one of the Feature groups. When we say "prioritize", we mean you should prioritize that Feature group before others. If you aren't prioritizing compliance your success with the other Feature groups will not be as powerful as it could be.

- Passing validation with no "errors" is part of the "Compliance" Feature group for both GTFS Schedule and GTFS Realtime data. ERROR notices are for items that the GTFS reference specification explicitly requires or prohibits (e.g., using the language "must").

- Schedule Features beyond Compliance are part of Guidelines to get data that customers deserve

- While resolving some validation errors might touch on some of the Guidelines in other Feature groups within the "Beyond Compliance" category, none of the Guidelines in this category on their own would result in a validation error

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Demand Response Transit

What we heard

- Adding Demand-Response Transit can be challenging due to the multiple different approaches to service delivery

- Many services are provided by social service programs and may not be well documented

- Unclear how representing Demand Response Transit within GTFS Realtime feeds should work in practice

Our response/what we've changed

- Clarification: These Guidelines are intended to only apply to those services that are explicitly publicly available. Social service programs would not apply.

- Representing Demand Response Transit within GTFS Schedule data using GTFS-Flex data is in the "beyond compliance" category - meaning transit providers should tackle it as time and resources allow

  - Caltrans staff stands by ready and willing to code Flex data for providers as well as host it for small providers.

- We have removed the Demand Response transit Guidelines for GTFS Realtime - we agree with comments that there are too many outstanding questions as to how this would work in practice based on the current specification

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Best Practices

What we heard

- MobilityData highlighted that some parts of the Best Practices can't be checked by a validator. In order to make this section as easy to check as the others, they could publish:

  - the list of validator notices that are triggered by spec non-compliance, and the list triggered by best practice non-compliance.

  - a GTFS Best Practices "checklist" that would complement the validator warnings. *(if needed; priority is on getting as many Best Practices into the validator as possible, keeping this list small)*

Our Response

- MobilityData has kindly offered to publish some lists related to the Best Practices and the validator, and we have taken them up on their offer

- Cal-ITP and MobilityData will continue to work together to move as many Best Practice checks into the validator as possible

State Assistance/Resources

What we heard

- Collaboration to help agencies both meet and sustain meeting the Guidelines
    - Caltrans/Cal-ITP
    - Agency staff
    - Third party vendors
    - Consultants
- Broadband/WiFI issues impact many rural providers, making the Guidelines more difficult to meet

Our Response

- Yes - our goal is to help all transit providers in the state of CA meet the Guidelines
- We've continue to research the pain points experienced so we can provide the best assistance possible
- Broadband/WiFi issues: Yes, this is a challenge many of you face that is not something within your control and inhibits the adoption of GTFS Realtime data. At Cal-ITP we have started to better track the areas of the state facing these challenges and make note of them - and we are looking for ways that we can work with you to address this problem
    - The Guidelines are meant to help articulate where we ALL need to act in order to get riders info they deserve. In this case, the burden for Broadband is not solely on the transit provider.

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State Assistance/Resources cont'd

What we heard

- A strong need and desire for assistance from the state level, including but not limited to

    - Technical assistance

    - Financial resources

    - Human resources

Our Response

- Cal-ITP is here to provide technical assistance, answer questions, and more! Some of what we offer:

    - Free Cal-ITP Helpdesk: Send any questions or comments to hello@calitp.org

    - Assistance with creating GTFS Flex and GTFS Fares data

    - State Realtime procurement

        - To ensure that transit agencies have access to standardized, reliable, and affordable GTFS Realtime software and hardware, Cal-ITP will be supporting California's Department of General Services (DGS) in a procurement of a GTFS Realtime package. Contact us to learn more!

    - Discount data plans

        - Cal-ITP is excited to announce new affordable data plans on FirstNet, designed with your agency's cellular data needs in mind. Contact us to learn more!

- We are constantly seeking to evolve and improve the type of support we offer. We are here to help!

Suggested Additions

What we heard

- Through GTFS Realtime, highlight the situations where there are stops not served within a trip due to a temporary reason (such as construction) *by setting scheduleRelationship to SKIPPED for the relevant stops in stopTimeUpdate.*

Our Response

- We have opened up a request to have this added to the GTFS Realtime best practices ([see work in progress request here](#) - please comment/share!)

  - Ultimately, we decided to not add this as its own Guideline to avoid a situation where we are creating a Guideline for every type of temporary situation that could be defined in GTFS Realtime. Our focus is on getting these situation adopted within the Best Practices, and we welcome your support with this effort!

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Suggested Additions cont'd

What we heard

- When we refer to the list of groups for which GTFS data should meet the qualitative needs of, data consumers, such as Transit App, are not identified. Should they be?

- Suggestion to add a GTFS definition that described the background of GTFS data
  - Recognize GTFS.org as the central platform for the GTFS community

Our Response

- We did not explicitly call out data consumers in the identified list because they were intended to be implicitly associated under "riders" (as they are the ones who deliver the data to riders). To make this connection more explicit, the sentence has been revised.

- Greater background on GTFS: We want to highlight the resources already available related to the history of GTFS data. We made some additions to the Guidelines to highlight links to external sites (such as GTFS.org) that explain the background behind GTFS data. We also further built out an FAQ that provides some basic information and links out to external sources.

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