



TRANSFORMING TRANSPORTATION IN VENTURA COUNTY

Ventura County Regional Transit Study

FINAL REPORT Executive Summary and Report to the Legislature

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Ventura County Transportation Commission

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings and outcomes of a nearly two-year study of options for organizing public transportation services for Ventura County and the direction and actions adopted by the Ventura County Transportation Commission pursuant to it. The direction for the study came from two sources: A 2009 Commission workshop on the future of VCTC's own VISTA service and legislative provisions arising out of SB 716, which went into effect January 1, 2010. SB 716 generally requires that Transportation Development Act funds be spent for public transit purposes, but in a section specific to Ventura County states that:

The Ventura County Transportation Commission may submit to the Senate Committee on Transportation and Housing and the Assembly Committee on Transportation a report analyzing options for organizing public mass transportation services in the county, for the expenditure of revenues deposited in the local transportation fund, and a recommended legislative proposal for implementing the plan by December 31, 2011. If the legislative proposal is not enacted by the end of the 2011-12 Regular Session of the Legislature, revenues deposited in the local transportation fund in that county shall be available for the fiscal year beginning on July 1, 2014, and each fiscal year thereafter, solely for claims for Article 4 (commencing with Section 99260) and Article 4.5 (commencing with Section 99275) purposes.

The study has involved data collection, analysis of options by a Steering Committee and engagement of the community, the operators, and city and county management. The process culminated in an unprecedented level of consensus among the operators on the desirable path forward in creating a more coordinated, customer-focused system of services in Ventura County. A proposal was developed by transit operators in the County, which ultimately resulted in adoption of a recommendation by the Commission to be forwarded to the Legislature. Details on the analysis, process and recommendations are presented in the report.

Commission Recommendation in Report to the Legislature

As an outcome to this study, the Commission adopted a consensus position reached by the Regional Transit Study Steering Committee, the Transit Managers and the City Managers. The proposal is an innovative combination of the cooperation and consolidation approaches discussed in this report that is uniquely tailored to Ventura County's conditions and needs, and that allows for further development and change over time as results and conditions warrant:

1. Support creation of a Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD) to assume the responsibilities for West County public transportation services. Cities and communities in West County (including Heritage Valley) would be provided with the opportunity to join the District.
2. Transition authority for VISTA services in West County to the new District, with services in the Heritage Valley subject to negotiation and participation by those communities and California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) and Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (for Coastal Express) pending continued funding agreements with those entities.
3. Support creation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in East County between the cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks and the County of Ventura for unincorporated East County, to further coordination of individual services.
4. Transition authority for VISTA East service to the East County MOU.
5. Support legislation to allow the use of TDA funds for Article 8 purposes, including streets and roads, and continued return to source of Local Transit Funds.
6. Use VCTC discretionary transit funds to deliver sustainable levels of transit service.
7. Support the objective of further consolidation over time as needed to improve connectivity and customer service.

Study Background and Process

The study began in April, 2010 with appointment of a Commission Steering Committee from the Commission membership, representing the diverse geography and interests of Ventura County. This Steering Committee met six times over the course of the study, providing policy guidance and a forum for deliberation on issues and alternatives. Each of the ten agencies providing public transportation was interviewed in-depth and operator profiles were prepared. Meetings were held with the technical committee of the operators (TRANSCOM), the City Managers and the public. The public meetings were conducted in conjunction with VCTC's Comprehensive Transportation Plan and involved subregional advisory groups and a regional advisory group.

Guiding Principles

The Commission adopted the following Guiding Principles for the study:

Develop a network of sustainable services that meet the diverse needs of the customers through the following actions:

1. Foster open dialogue among communities, system users, operators and agencies
2. Transition to a user-focused system that goes beyond individual operator boundaries
3. Gain consensus on the approach from elected officials and city management
4. Incorporate applicable Federal, State, regional and local livability, sustainability and greenhouse gas reduction goals

Current State of Transit in Ventura County

Public transportation in Ventura County is provided by ten different agencies through a combination of fixed route and demand-responsive services. These operations range in size from the multi-jurisdictional Gold Coast Transit Joint Powers Authority to the Ojai Trolley. VCTC operates VISTA, which consists of basic interjurisdictional connector routes and a dial-a-ride serving Heritage Valley (mainly the communities of Santa Paula, Fillmore and Piru). Based on local funding policies and perception of transit needs, operators offer different days and hours of service. This makes connections difficult and service confusing, especially for the infrequent or new rider. While VCTC and the operators have attempted to improve connections through coordinated fare media and scheduling software, progress toward truly integrated service has been minimal.

Costs also vary widely – for example according to data from the 2009 National Transit Database (NTD), utilized for illustrative purposes early in the report process, cost per passenger trip for the four largest operations ranges from \$3.66 to \$7.70 for fixed route service and from \$5.55 to \$46.39 for demand-response service. There are many reasons for this range in costs – for example type of area served, level of service provided, type of vehicle operated and variance in labor costs, including contract or in-house service and administrative overhead. Also, agencies can use different reporting methods and some transit costs are not included.

Views of the Current Situation

Interviews of key stakeholders (including all of the Transportation Commissioners) revealed some common views:

- Many of the obstacles to transit service are inherent to Ventura County's characteristics – widely spaced, diverse communities and centers where geographic areas do not share common economic, social and transportation service values.
- Current transportation services are good given the amount of local resources that are available and individual cities are doing a good job of balancing resources.
- There is no one preferred organizational structure for transit service provision – views range from a single entity to the current system of smaller, customized providers
- There is extensive support for quality transit services

Organizational Options Considered

The Steering Committee and the Commission considered four potential models for structuring public transit service in Ventura County:

Collaboration – informal agreements to modify or change the status quo. For example, agreements for an "800" or "511" information number, regionwide marketing, or transfers. Over the years, VCTC has managed a number of these agreements, including a coordinated farecard, paratransit scheduling software and NextBus information program.

Coordination – formal agreements that modify ways of doing business. This could include a countywide ADA paratransit service, agreements to share funding responsibility (such as the current agreement between various parties and VCTC to VISTA service on the 101 corridor), a Joint Powers Authority to govern more formal service coordination, joint procurement or public information and marketing.

Consolidation – a formal combination or blending of services under a single or multiple entities. There are two types of Consolidation – Full or Moderate.

Full Consolidation – a single agency provides all policy, funding, planning and operations.

Moderate Consolidation - a central entity provides policy, planning and funding and one or two operating entities provide the service.

Policy Direction on Options

Mid-point in the study, the Steering Committee determined, with concurrence of the Commission, that Commission staff and the consultant team should move forward with analysis and city consultation on the Full Consolidation option (with strong continued local influence) and a hybrid version of Moderate Consolidation with two operating entities. Under this type of arrangement, the entities could be a combination of a District, a Joint Powers Authority or other alternative. Key principles moving forward were:

- Keep communities whole – having at least the level of service that communities have now
- Increase connectivity
- Improve local service
- Maintain a level of local influence and control

Evolution of the Organizational Concept

During consultation with the operators and City Management, several expressed concern that the Coordination option had been abandoned prematurely and requested that it be re-inserted for further consideration. In meeting with the Steering Committee, the operators and management were offered the option of presenting their own alternative. VCTC informed State Senate Transportation Committee staff that the report would be submitted after December 31, 2011 so that an organizational option could be worked out that the Commission and the communities could come to consensus.

The operators developed an initial proposal that featured:

- Creating a Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD) to provide a framework for consolidated service in West County. Communities, including Heritage Valley, would be provided with the opportunity to join the District.
- Provide for member agency TDA to be subvented to GCTD as of July 1, 2014, net of funding for transit stations, stops and facilities. TDA would be returned to individual jurisdictions in East County and cities would be allowed to file for Article 8 purposes (for streets and roads) if there were no unmet transit needs.

- Transition responsibility for operation of VISTA (with the exception of VISTA East) based on funding agreements established with non-Gold Coast Transit (GCT) partners including California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) and Santa Barbara Council of Governments (SBCAG), to GCTD. VISTA East would be operated under the East County MOU.
- Consolidate ADA service into no more than two areas.
- Create an East County MOU to govern further coordination of service, transfers and fares among East County operators.

They also articulated Guiding Principles that stated the right of local agencies to determine how to provide services, concern with equity of TDA requirements, the importance of continued local control of state and federal funds, and the desirability of consolidation of local ADA and dial-a-ride operations.

Steering Committee and Commission Direction

The Steering Committee considered the operators proposal and recommended:

- Include Customer Focus as a top priority in any Guiding Principles
- Express consensus support for the operators' structural proposal
- Further consolidation would be pursued at a future undetermined date
- The operators' proposal for use of TDA for Article 8 purposes in East County remained an open issue

March 2, 2012 Commission Action

On March 2 the Commission took action to *"Support the Operators proposal in concept with the understanding that all cities would have flexible use of TDA funds and further discussion of Heritage Valley Service would take place before a proposal is brought back to VCTC on April 13th with the specifics fleshed out and with the recognition that the concept of full consolidation will continue to be discussed as a long term goal. Staff was directed to work with City Managers to flesh out specifics."*

Future Steps

VCTC and the operators, working with the consultant team, have identified a number of issues to be considered in successful implementation of this new organizational model. These include logistics for transition of VISTA service, including outside funding

arrangements from CSUCI and SBCAG; VCTC roles and responsibilities; framework for further consolidation of ADA and dial-a-ride services; creation and constitution of GCTD; terms and timing of the East County MOU and arrangements for use of VCTC discretionary funds to meet the objective of “keeping communities whole” from a service perspective. The intent is to submit this report to the Legislature and continue proceeding in the preferred direction for reorganizing and improving the delivery of public transportation in Ventura County.