

LAFCO 2018 Municipal Service Review Section for Ventura County Cities on Regional Transit

In February of 2018 the Ventura County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) prepared a Municipal Service Review (MSR) for each of the Ventura Counties Cities. Government Code provides that in order to determine or update a sphere of influence, LAFCO shall prepare a MSR and make written determinations relating to the following seven factors:

1. Growth and population projections for the affected area.
2. The location and characteristics of any disadvantaged unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence.
3. Present and planned capacity of public facilities, adequacy of public services, and infrastructure needs or deficiencies including needs or deficiencies related to sewers, municipal and industrial water, and structural fire protection in any disadvantaged, unincorporated communities within or contiguous to the sphere of influence.
4. Financial ability of agencies to provide services
5. Status of, and opportunities for, shared facilities.
6. Accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies.

7. Any other matter related to effective or efficient service delivery, as required by Commission policy.

Regarding Section 7, LAFCO determined that “opportunities for better regional coordination of transit” was a matter related to effective or efficient service delivery. The following analysis was included in the MSR for each City in Ventura County. While the attached excerpt from the MSR references Thousand Oaks, the same information was included for each City (with the exception of Port Hueneme, which was not included in the MSR’s for 2018).

g. Any other matter related to effective and efficient service delivery, as required by commission policy. [§ 56430(a)(7)]

Opportunities exist for better regional coordination of the many transit services within the County. The following discussion includes a summary of existing public transit services within Ventura County, current public transit inefficiencies and limitations on regionalization, progress toward public transit coordination, and opportunities for further public transit coordination. Some cities prefer to control and operate their own transit systems in order to provide service focused on users within their jurisdictions; however, the following discussion is based on the idea that a more coordinated, regional perspective on public transit will result in improved service for public transit users.

Existing Public Transit Services in Ventura County:

- The City of Ojai² and the City of Simi Valley each provide transit service, with City employees operating and maintaining the vehicles.
- The City of Camarillo provides transit service by means of a contract with a private operator (i.e., Roadrunner Shuttle).
- The City of Thousand Oaks provides transit service by means of a contract with a private operator (i.e., MV Transportation).
- The City of Moorpark provides transit service by means of a contract with the City of Thousand Oaks, which holds a contract for service with a private operator (i.e., MV Transportation).
- Under a cooperative agreement amongst the County of Ventura, the City of Santa Paula, and the City of Fillmore, the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC)³ administers public transit service in and surrounding the Santa Paula, Fillmore, and Piru areas of Ventura County (i.e., the Valley Express). The service is provided by means of a contract with a private operator (i.e., MV Transportation).
- The County of Ventura contracts with the City of Thousand Oaks, which contracts the service to a private operator (i.e., MV Transportation), for the operation of the free Kanan Shuttle service between the unincorporated area of Oak Park and the City of Agoura Hills. The service is provided fare-free as the required 20% farebox recovery⁴ required by the Transportation Development Act (TDA) is provided by

² The City's transit service is limited to the Ojai Trolley which operates within the City, and the unincorporated communities of Meiners Oaks and Mira Monte. The Ojai Trolley service operates within the GCTD service area, but is operated directly by the City.

³ VCTC is the regional transportation planning agency of Ventura County, and oversees a large part of the distribution of public funds for transportation and transit within the County.

⁴ TDA funding provided by the State to local jurisdictions may not exceed a certain percentage of the cost to provide public transit service (i.e., 80% for urban areas and 90% for rural areas). The remaining percentage of the

local contributions from Ventura County Service Area No. 4, the Oak Park Unified School District, and, most recently, the City of Agoura Hills.

- Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD) provides local and regional fixed-route and paratransit service in the cities of Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Ventura and the unincorporated areas of Ventura County. Service is provided on 20 fixed routes, with a fleet includes 56 buses and 24 paratransit vehicles. GCTD directly operates its fixed-route service and contracts its paratransit service to a private operator (i.e., MV Transportation).
- The VCTC provides regional service, by means of a contract with a private provider, which consists of the following routes: (1) Highway 101/Conejo Connection (serving the section of Highway 101 between Ventura and the San Fernando Valley), (2) Highway 126 (serving Fillmore, Santa Paula, Saticoy, and Ventura), (3) Coastal Express (serving Ventura County and Santa Barbara County), (4) East County (serving the Simi Valley, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks area), (5) Oxnard/Camarillo/California State University at Channel Islands Connector (serving the Camarillo and Oxnard area), and (6) East/West Connector (serving Simi Valley, Moorpark, Camarillo, Oxnard and Ventura, as of November 2017).
- The ECTA was formed in 2013 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) amongst the City of Camarillo, City of Moorpark, City of Simi Valley, City of Thousand Oaks, and the County of Ventura for the eastern portion of unincorporated Ventura County. ECTA was formed to better coordinate transit services among these agencies. In August 2015, ECTA initiated a service known as “CONNECT City-to-City” which offers Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Senior intercity dial-a-ride service under a single paratransit system.⁵ The City of Thousand Oaks administers the service, which is contracted to a private operator (i.e., MV Transportation).

Current Public Transit Inefficiencies and Limitations on Regional Coordination:

- According to the Ventura County Regional Transit Study (VCTC, April 9, 2012)⁶, public transit within the County was found to be disjointed. Public transit service providers have varying schedules (i.e., days and hours of operation, frequency of buses (headways)), and fares (including different eligible ages for senior fares (e.g., a lower qualifying age for seniors in the City of Camarillo)), and maintain separate websites

cost (i.e., 20% for urban areas and 10% for rural areas) must be covered locally through some other means, known as “farebox recovery.” Note that funding sources other than rider fares may qualify as “farebox recovery.”

⁵ The City of Camarillo does not participate in the CONNECT service because: (1) the City already provides regional ADA and Senior intercity service throughout the East County ((this enables the City to provide senior service to more riders within the City by allowing a lower qualifying age limit of 55 years (rather than 65 years)), and (2) Camarillo ADA and senior riders have the benefit of using just one dial-a-ride system for both local and regional service.

⁶ The study included consultation with VCTC commissioners, city managers, local public transit providers, and the public.

and bus books. No single agency or website provides a complete guide for public transit users who wish to plan interagency trips. The study concluded that “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.”

- Limited access to non-TDA funding for transit restricts the ability of cities and other public transit operators to increase revenue service hours and still meet TDA farebox recovery requirements. Because of the minimal levels of service currently provided in some areas of the County, regional travel times are often lengthy and opportunities for passengers to connect between buses are few. Shorter headways and total trip times depend on increased transit funding under the current funding distribution structure or a different method of distribution for the County’s transit funding. Inability to access funding for transportation also limits implementation of improvements for fleet expansions, pedestrian infrastructure, and street lighting.
- While some of the individual transit-serving agencies have made efforts to improve coordination among systems (e.g., through the formation of the GCTD (formed in 2013), and the ECTA (created in 2013)), public transit in the County overall is divided into separate, often unrelated, transit systems. The Ventura County Regional Transit Study acknowledged the challenges in establishing a coordinated system, including the fact that Ventura County consists of “widely spaced, diverse communities and centers where geographic areas do not share common economic, social, and transportation service values.”
- While it is the intent of ECTA to move toward further consistency and regionalization of services in the eastern portion of Ventura County, the existing local transit programs of two ECTA member agencies are limited in their ability to fully participate in the regional ECTA programs:
 - The City of Simi Valley operates fixed route transit service using City personnel and City-owned equipment.
 - The City of Camarillo receives contributions from local funding partners (e.g., the Leisure Village retirement community for residents age 55 and older). For the purposes of City of Camarillo public transit, riders aged 55 and older qualify to ride as senior fares, whereas 65 is the qualifying age for seniors on other transit systems.
- Senate Bill 325 (1971) established State transit funding (TDA funding) for the purpose of directly supporting public transportation through the imposition of a ¼-cent local sales tax beginning in 1972. An exception was included for rural counties (i.e., counties with populations of fewer than 500,000, based on the 1970 U.S. Census), in general, to also allow use of the funding for local streets and roads if the transportation planning agency finds that there are no unmet transit needs. Through Senate Bill 716 (2009), the law was modified, and specified that the

exception now applied to: (1) rural counties (i.e., counties with populations of fewer than 500,000 (based on the 2010 U.S. Census), and (2) cities within urban counties (i.e., counties with populations of 500,000 or more, based on the 2010 U.S. Census) with populations of 100,000 or fewer. Ventura County has a population of more than 500,000 and therefore qualifies as an urban county; however, several of its cities are eligible to use TDA money for streets and roads projects, provided that they: (1) have a population of 100,000 or fewer, (2) are not within the GCTD service area, and (3) do not have an unmet transit need. Because Ventura County cities with populations of more than 100,000 are restricted to using all their TDA money for public transit purposes regardless of the extent of need for public transit, these cities cannot use TDA funding for streets and roads projects.

Progress Toward Regional Coordination of Public Transit:

- On October 3, 2013, Governor Brown signed into law Assembly Bill 664, which formed the GCTD to include five members: four cities and the County. AB 664 also authorized the remaining cities in Ventura County to request to join the GCTD in the future. Prior to the formation of the GCTD, local TDA funding for operating costs and capital projects was provided to Gold Coast Transit (operating as a Joint Powers Authority (JPA)) by its member agencies, allocated by a formula based on the percentage of revenue miles of transit service provided within each participating jurisdiction. As a district, GCTD has the ability to implement service improvements and meet the public's transit needs from a systemwide perspective, and distributes TDA funds to its members for transit-related purposes such as bus stop construction and transit-related maintenance needs. Following the formation of the District, the GCTD also adopted the following planning documents to further improve the delivery of service to GCTD members: GCTD Service Planning Guidelines (Adopted February 2014), Bus Stop Guidelines (Adopted June 2015), Short Range Transit Plan (Adopted November 2015), and Fleet Management Plan (October 2016). Additionally, in May 2017, GCTD began construction of a new Operations and Maintenance Facility in the City of Oxnard. Once built, the 15-acre facility will allow GCTD to maintain a fleet of up to 125 buses and will include an administration and operations building, an 8-bay maintenance and repair building, a compressed natural gas (CNG) fuel station and bus wash. The facility is scheduled to open in the fall of 2018.
- GCTD's Short Range Transit Plan identified recommended service improvements such as implementing: (1) additional service to Naval Base Ventura County in Port Hueneme, (2) express service between Oxnard and Ventura, and (3) increased service frequencies on its core routes. While funding for these improvements is not in place, service improvements could potentially be funded through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) (FTA Section 5310/5307 program).

- ECTA is the result of greater awareness for the need to improve coordination amongst transit systems in the eastern portion of the County, and has initiated programs to simplify interjurisdictional trips for riders in the eastern portion of the County (e.g., CONNECT City-to-City). The cities of Moorpark, Simi Valley, and Thousand Oaks are each in various stages of completing strategic plans for transit, including improved regional coordination with regard to hours of operation, route schedules and connectivity, fares, senior age criteria, and consistency of policies.
- Technological advances have provided opportunities for improved regional trip-planning resources for riders. GCTD, VCTC, and Thousand Oaks Transit have schedules available on Google Maps. By the end of FY 2017-18, information about other fixed-route transit services countywide is expected to be available on Google Transit (a web application that assists riders in accessing transit schedule information and planning public transit trips). GCTD launched Google Maps Online Trip Planner in 2014, and recently launched a mobile ticketing application.
- Transfer agreements and fare media (GO Ventura 31-day pass) including the installation of the GFI Genfare system on all transit vehicles have helped improve coordination between systems. However, fare discrepancies and fare policies still need to be addressed.
- VCTC's Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan (April 2017) identifies strategies to address gaps or deficiencies in the current public transit system in meeting the needs of senior, disabled, and low-income populations in Ventura County. One of the strategies identified in the plan is the implementation of a countywide “one-call/one-click” transit information center intended to simplify and improve trip-planning and access to information about public transit services. Funding has not yet been identified for this service, but the service could potentially be funded through the FTA.

Opportunities for Further Regional Coordination of Public Transit:

- It is clear that constraints to regionalizing public transit exist within Ventura County, and that local jurisdictions have identified opportunities (and implemented some improvements) with respect to local public transit. The City may wish to continue its dialogue with the County and the other cities to further improve connectivity within Ventura County and simplify customers' public transit experiences, including (but not necessarily limited to) the following discussion topics:
 - Identify one agency as the regional transportation authority to oversee and implement the majority of public transit within the County;
 - Encourage cities that are not currently members of the GCTD to request to join the GCTD, or contract with GCTD for some or all of their planning or operational needs; or

- Establish a new transit district that would complement the GCTD's service area and provide service within areas not currently served by the GCTD in the East County (the formation of ECTA was a step toward potentially realizing this opportunity in the eastern portion of Ventura County).