

# Ventura County Transit Integration & Efficiency Study

Evaluation of Opportunities and Approaches to Integration

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Ventura County Transportation Commission

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# Table of Contents

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<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Transit Integration &amp; Efficiency Overview</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Success and Strengths of Transit in Ventura County.....	2
Key Issues and Opportunities Identified.....	4
Alternatives Considered .....	8
Risks to Consolidation.....	10
Conclusion .....	18
<b>Transit in Ventura County from the Rider Perspective</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Fixed-Route Services.....	19
Fares and Rider Policies.....	24
Customer Experience and Service Information.....	25
Demand-Response Services (ADA Paratransit & Dial-A-Ride) .....	27
<b>Transit Operations and Administration</b> .....	<b>31</b>
Governance.....	31
Finance .....	35
Transit Staff and Represented Labor .....	41
Physical Assets and Technology.....	44
<b>Alternatives and Strategies</b> .....	<b>47</b>
Strategies to Improve Passenger Experience, Reduce Operating and Capital Costs, and Better Integrate the Existing Systems.....	48
Alternative 1: Partial Consolidation.....	50
Alternative 2: Moderate Consolidation .....	54
Alternative 3: Full Consolidation .....	58
Other Alternatives to Consider .....	61
<b>Financial Risk Comparison of Alternatives</b> .....	<b>63</b>
Operating Cost Assumptions by Alternative.....	64
TDA Funding Transitions by Alternative .....	68
Initial/Transition Cost Implications by Alternative.....	70
<b>Transition and Governance</b> .....	<b>73</b>
Alternative 1 .....	74
Alternative 2 .....	75
Alternative 3 .....	76

<b>Data Sources and Input .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Reference Literature.....	77
Data Provided by Agencies.....	77
Other Agency and City Data and Reports.....	77
Interviews .....	77
<b>Acronym Definitions .....</b>	<b>79</b>



# Transit Integration & Efficiency

## Executive Summary

Today there are nine different bus transit operations in Ventura County serving riders in their local communities or connecting between cities and to neighboring counties. Transit service in each community reflects the local circulation needs and the development style of the city; in more dense west county cities transit service includes more frequent fixed routes while cities to the east of Oxnard and Ventura tend to offer more demand-response service and lower frequency fixed routes. Connections between cities rely almost exclusively on VCTC Intercity services, partly due to distances and mountain ranges separating community centers that would make for inefficient and unproductive routes.

While the existing structure in Ventura County provides high-quality service for existing riders, it does not form a highly effective regional or subregional network. Because so many cities are engaging their own staff to operate transit service independent of their neighbors, there is some administrative redundancy in the county that fewer agencies could manage more cost-efficiently. With intercity connections relying on routes that are limited stop and largely park-and-ride based, people who want or need to make a trip exclusively on transit between cities have limited options, especially with VCTC Intercity's low frequency. Trips between multiple providers can take hours and require multiple transfers; it would be unreasonable to expect many people to choose this option if they can drive, and so most people do drive.

Camarillo Area Transit  
(CAT)

Gold Coast Transit  
District (GCTD)

Kanan Shuttle

Moorpark City Transit  
(MCT)

Ojai Trolley

Simi Valley Transit (SVT)

Thousand Oaks Transit  
(TOT)

Valley Express Transit  
(VE)

VCTC Intercity Transit

Transit nationwide is in crisis, with ridership having been declining even prior to the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Federal and state funding bolstered agencies through the worst of the last two years, but agencies are faced with questions today about whether riders will return and what revenues will be available in the long term. In Ventura County, without making big changes to the overall county transit network and how service is delivered, there is little reason to expect ridership will grow substantially in the future. What form those “big changes” could take is the focus of this study.

## **The Transit Integration & Efficiency Study has identified strategies to improve bus transit throughout Ventura County that most improve passenger experience, reduce operating and capital costs, and better integrate the existing systems.**

TIES studied three alternatives as a means to deliver these improvements. Each alternative should be able to achieve an improved regional network, gain cost efficiency, and provide an experience that welcomes new passengers into the system. The difference in each alternative is the level at which it relies on cooperation and collaboration between the existing cities and agencies versus relying on consolidating into fewer agencies with a larger regional service area and exclusive focus on transit. Conditions today reflect primarily cooperative efforts is effectively the existing condition; a prior study in 2012 led to some structural changes in the County and has created some new service and cooperative agreements but reflects relatively incremental change for riders and cost efficiency in ten years.

Consolidation would be a substantial change and comes with greater funding risks but results in agencies that depend less on intercity coordination and agreements and more direct ability to enact change. In most other cases, consolidation has been found to result in improved cost efficiency if not lower total costs over time, because cost savings are immediately reinvested to improving transit service and addressing other needs.

The alternatives in this report are based on analysis of all of the stakeholder agencies, cities, operations, and context from prior to and during the pandemic. The alternatives offer a suggested framework for how to proceed, and it is up to the stakeholder cities and agencies to determine which path to follow and how to implement it. The exact alternatives analyzed here could be modified to fit changing circumstances or in response to interagency negotiation. The alternatives are not necessarily sequential; if enough stakeholders see merit in alternative 2 or 3, they could proceed directly with one of those alternatives. Or, alternative 1 could be seen as a first step towards increased countywide integration with alternatives 2 or 3 providing a template for further progress in that direction.



Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
<p>Consolidation of East County demand-response services into ECTA; all other services remain as they are.</p>	<p>Consolidation of all demand-response services into a new countywide agency. Fixed-route services consolidated into east county (new agency) and west county (Gold Coast) agencies.</p>	<p>Consolidation of all fixed-route and demand-response services into an expanded Gold Coast Transit District, with VCTC remaining in its function as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA).</p>
<p>Low financial risk, but also less improvement for cost efficiency. Maintains local oversight of service. Requires stronger interagency agreements to achieve benefits for riders.</p>	<p>Moderate financial risk. Creates street maintenance funding gap for cities who join Gold Coast Transit. Builds on successful coordination and maintains responsiveness to subregional demand. Fewer points of coordination for improving regional network.</p>	<p>High financial risk. Creates street maintenance funding gap for cities who use TDA on streets and roads. Most direct potential to create a regional network and consistent customer experience. Still requires multiple operating bases around region.</p>



# Transit Integration & Efficiency Overview

In summer 2020, the longstanding funding constraints affecting transit in Ventura County suddenly became a potential crisis with the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic's long-term effects on ridership, funding, and even the viability of sustaining service. The Commission moved to comprehensively study the structure of transit in Ventura County to explore opportunities to make transit services more efficient and effective. **The goal of the study is to improve bus transit throughout Ventura County through strategies that most effectively improve passenger experience, reduce operating and capital costs, and better integrate the existing systems.**

VCTC studied the structure of transit from 2010-2012 in the *Ventura County Regional Transit Study*. The prior study led to several outcomes that have fostered greater subregional and regional collaboration among agencies in the County, including the transition of Gold Coast Transit into its own Transit District (GCTD) from the prior joint-powers authority (JPA), and the formation of the East County Transit Alliance (ECTA). Subsequently, VCTC and the various cities and agencies have continued to study and refine the services they offer both locally and regionally. In 2018, the Ventura Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo), in its role evaluating governmental structures to ensure efficient provision of services and encourage the orderly formation of local agencies, recommended to each city to consider the steps taken since 2012 and continue to pursue consolidation of agencies in Ventura County to further improve connectivity, passenger experience, and consistency in ease for new first-time customers. The presumption of the 2012 study and the LAFCo recommendations is that a regional transit agency (or one for the east and one for the west county areas) would be best able to address the regional nature of travel and provide improved service for public transit users.

In this *Transit Integration & Efficiency Study* (TIES), the consultant team has reevaluated transit in Ventura County with significant engagement of stakeholder staff and city leadership. The objectives to improve passenger experience, operate service more efficiently, and integrate systems are clear, but the methods for doing so are varied. After evaluating the pre-pandemic transit services and the conditions in 2021, the TIES began to develop recommended strategies responsive to the needs, gaps, and opportunities. In drafting these strategies and organizing them into three alternatives, the consultant team sought to create a roadmap to the objectives that agencies can follow with flexibility in approach. At each step, the consultant team has engaged with stakeholder staff, considered input, and reviewed other recent and current planning efforts related to transit in Ventura County. While TIES was underway, VCTC was also conducting an update to its Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan), which references TIES where applicable, and provided an opportunity for rider and community engagement to touch on both studies' needs. **The consultant team and VCTC project team thank all of the stakeholders, especially staff from each participating agency, for significant time and care invested to explore and address all of the aspects of TIES.** Every successful integration study has relied on staff building trust and willingness and pursue a better future transit network.

## Success and Strengths of Transit in Ventura County

Transit in Ventura County serves a wide variety of local and regional needs, ranging from the municipal operators that offer local circulator routes and a higher degree of demand-response services, to the more urban GCTD service area with a dense and relatively frequent local route network connecting several cities, and finally VCTC which both oversees regional planning and transportation funding and operates the regional service. Transit services are locally administered (except for GCTD and VCTC) and quickly adapt to local circulation needs, and cities have flexibility to respond to differing community values with local policies and unique service designs that large agencies sometimes avoid in the interest of consistency or cost.



GCTD has developed an effective subregional network that is responsive to its riders needs and suited for the dense older city development patterns in the Oxnard-Ventura area. GCTD also has a strong relationship with its member cities, with city leadership supportive of the agency and its service, but also cooperating to serve local needs independent of GCTD if necessary. One example is the Ojai Trolley, which the City of Ojai operates in addition to also being a member of GCTD and having access to the rest of the GCTD service area through a route to Ventura.

There is already a great degree of coordination between transit providers that has continued to grow and improve. The region has implemented live bus tracking for all agencies, a regional universal farecard and mobile payment solution, and a single point for ADA paratransit eligibility processing, among many other examples. As mentioned, the formation of ECTA following the 2012 study eventually led to an expansion of intercity demand-response service between east county communities. Agencies have developed other partnerships, such as VCTC providing oversight of the Valley Express services on behalf of Santa Paula, Fillmore, and the County, or more informally with GCTD and the City of Ojai coordinating on vehicle procurement and planning needs.

**Since the study began in 2021, there have also been a number of changes and improvements that local agencies have implemented and continued coordination countywide.** The implementation of a new regional fare system mentioned above is one example. Others include:

- The City of Moorpark has launched a microtransit pilot (MCT On Demand) which has shown early promise at improving individual mobility in a city where fixed route service may not be the most effective model.
- The City of Camarillo shifted to using TDA money for transit as of fiscal year 2022; the analysis in report was based on prior year allocations in which Camarillo used general funds for transit and TDA for road maintenance.
- More agencies provide service planning information through Google Maps (publishing General Transit Feed Specification, or GTFS) through a cooperative agreement with VCTC.
- Gold Coast Transit District began operating a late-night safe rides on-demand program.
- VCTC has organized a countywide youth free ride program that is offered on all transit agencies in the County.
- Fares charged by each agency may have changed since the initial analysis. Many agencies operated fare-free during the height of the pandemic and may currently be offering short or long-term discounts.

## Key Issues and Opportunities Identified

TIES examined many aspects of transit in Ventura County, from the services offered to the administrative details of how many staff and how much money it takes to operate. The following five issues represent the greatest opportunities to improve passenger experience, make operations more cost-efficient, and better integrate transit.

Key Issue or Opportunity	Discussion
1 The fixed-route network serves existing riders well, but people who have “regional” travel needs between cities in Ventura County (excluding within GCTD’s service area) have limited options that can require two transfers, three agencies, and a lot of time.	Multiple agencies operating in the same county is not inherently a problem; the local routes serve the community centers which are separated by significant distances and barriers such as mountain ranges that make providing effective transit between them challenging. However, the fact remains that people do need to make these trips and they are onerous enough that very few <i>existing</i> riders do it. Improving regional connectivity would benefit existing riders and attract new riders from an underserved market.



Key Issue or Opportunity	Discussion
<p>2 Demand for paratransit services has grown, leading to new agreements between agencies to provide more direct inter-city paratransit service. In the case of ECTA, it made sense for one agency, Thousand Oaks Transit (TOT), to handle calls, scheduling, and provide the service. However, for local demand-response trips, riders still call their local city. And, for riders between service areas (GCTD, Valley Express, Camarillo, and ECTA), a transfer is still required. Although relatively few individuals use paratransit trips across multiple providers, transferring vehicles is onerous and expensive for riders with disabilities and also expensive to provide. One seat demand response service is a strategy of the Coordinated Plan.</p>	<p>The current state of paratransit in Ventura County presents a clear opportunity for administrative cost efficiency gains and improved rider experience. Demand-response service is less cost-efficient to operate than fixed routes, so any opportunity to improve efficiency is important. Many cities are administering their own demand-response service with staff performing similar functions as their neighbor. More centralization of demand-response administration would realize administrative cost savings and potentially achieve more efficient vehicle utilization over time. Under the current arrangement, agencies do not provide direct paratransit trips into another service area because the vehicle would waste time idling or deadheading. However, transferring someone using a wheelchair between two vehicles is also an inefficient use of time and requires extra coordination between providers. In a regionalized paratransit system, a long-distance trip is not necessarily inefficient because the vehicle could fulfill other demand-response trips en route, or locally between the long-distance origin and return trip. For the riders who make these trips, the experience is improved greatly.</p>
<p>3 The existing transit structure has a great deal of variation between cities regarding rider policies, fare prices, quality of published materials and information for riders or potential customers, and other public-facing aspects of the service.</p>	<p>In the interest of providing a more integrated system to attract more riders, greater uniformity would be beneficial. Providing uniformity unlocks opportunity for a more integrated network of services that is easy for anyone to navigate.</p>

Key Issue or Opportunity	Discussion
<p>4 Contracts to operate service have become far more expensive, and agencies in recent years have received fewer bids, which is exacerbated by the challenge of hiring operators due to the pandemic.</p>	<p>Coordinating operating contracts and other service contracts is a clear opportunity for improved administrative efficiency and in some cases could improve reliability of service for passengers. Fewer, larger contracts covering more of the region should be more attractive to bidders, potentially result in more favorable prices and could save in staff time in developing and administering contracts over their lifetime. A contract that covers more of the county could also alleviate some staffing issues in which agencies are competing for a limited pool of bus operators in the region.</p>
<p>5 There are existing lines of coordination to build on to achieve better integration. GCTD is an example of an existing subregional agency with a history of strong relationship with its service area. Santa Paula and Fillmore have entrusted VCTC to provide transit service for many years rather than directly administering their own service. The east county cities have formed ECTA, which eventually led to a service expansion agreement between the participants. All of the cities and agencies participate in TRANSCOM and work together on regional initiatives. These coordination efforts have yielded some positive outcomes for riders and made more effective use of city or agency resources. However, overall change in terms of ridership and markets served has been incremental while overall costs have grown.</p>	<p>Communities are willing to coordinate to improve outcomes for transit riders and support each other. Some cities simply lack the staff or skills to carry out certain tasks or initiatives, while another city could offer their support for a marginal cost, if any. These relationships are the foundation for carrying out any alternatives from TIES. Better integration of service and more uniformity don't necessarily require agencies to consolidate. Dedicated coordination efforts and a clear objective can lead to success for riders and effective delivery. <b>However, as costs rise and ridership remains relatively flat, agencies have few choices to further improve cost-efficiency: attract more riders (and fare revenue) and improve administrative efficiency.</b> Consolidation is more likely than coordination alone to gain administrative efficiencies that can be reinvested to strategies that attract more riders.</p>



There are many other opportunities to consider, such as continued regional technology partnerships (which is already a strong area of coordination), development of regional marketing support to attract new riders, and more focus on developing strategic partnerships that could provide route funding guarantees. The report explores ideas like these within the framework of three alternatives.

The evaluation of conditions and discussion with staff and leaders around the County illustrate that more resources are needed for transit to improve intercity access and attract more riders to the existing and future network. There are many opportunities to make administration and delivery of service more efficient, from better sharing of resources to consolidating some functions that are redundant between cities. This series of strategies, summarized here and presented in detail later in the report, are actions to take for the benefit of riders and communities, regardless of which alternative is selected. As the next section describes, consolidation is a method to carry out these strategies, not necessarily an outcome in and of itself.

1. **Work to combine as many procurements or contracts as possible;** in many cases, cities and agencies are each spending staff time to procure very similar assets and services. Larger service contracts could attract more competitive bids. Less staff time spent writing, managing, and administering procurement for the same thing will improve efficiency.
2. **Coordinate on the transition to zero-emissions fleets.** This is a major change in technology that will require significant capital improvements, training for maintenance and other staff, and potentially some restructuring of services. Although the options for zero-emissions buses are effectively limited to either battery electric or hydrogen fuel cell, there are likely economies of scale by adopting a countywide approach that could include other public agencies that will also need to transition their fleets.
3. **Centralize demand-response call-taking and trip scheduling functions** (a countywide brokerage system) which should improve administrative efficiency as well as provide a clearer, data-based understanding of the potential for more efficient delivery of service by finding ways to combine trips between programs and cities.
4. **Align rider policies and fares between local services** to lay the foundation for a better intercity fixed-route and demand-response network. The current variations between cities' fares and rider eligibilities are small enough to be inconsequential for the countywide bottom-line but creates an unnecessary hurdle for passengers and to developing shared-ride agreements or future route networks with more intercity connections. Policies to align include fares, youth and senior ages, transfer policies, code of conduct policies and items allowed and not allowed on board.
5. **Conduct a countywide service planning study** with specific objectives to explore how incremental changes to local routes and schedules can improve network connectivity (timed connections, better interlining, reconfiguration of local routes to better feed the Intercity network), and an additional tier of new or additional service based on a comprehensive travel market analysis. Studies that rely only on Census commute data are flawed because people ride transit for many reasons besides commuting; modern sources of big data provide finer-grain insight into travel patterns by time of day. The potential to implement increased service is

dependent on achieving significant administrative and operational efficiencies through other actions or allocating more funding for transit, or both.

6. **Develop standardized surveys, coordinated marketing materials and campaigns, and consistent online presence.** Several agencies do not regularly survey riders, and even fewer conduct “non-rider” surveys. Gathering and analyzing data regularly is necessary to measure the progress of any strategies or alternatives, to respond to countywide and local needs, and to make strong policy arguments about important issues facing transit. High-quality marketing materials and online presence are important to attract and retain more customers.
7. **Work collaboratively to address the challenges of TDA.** The most important revenue source for transit in the County is also the most contentious. Cities and agencies must work together to develop a plan to ensure transit funding is available for transit, and that no individual city must suffer from losing a revenue source they depend on for other staff and maintenance needs. This single issue is the greatest barrier to making substantive transit improvements in Ventura County. TDA is complicated by a state requirement for farebox recovery, and all agencies should continue to jointly advocate for revisions to the TDA that align regulations with current state objectives for transit, including greater flexibility and ending the farebox recovery penalty.

## Alternatives Considered

After developing a series of independent strategies to address the issues and opportunities, the consultant team organized the strategies into three alternatives. Each alternative is intended to be a discrete action plan, with a different approach to achieving the study objectives. The alternatives are a scale of minimal consolidation to full consolidation. While each alternative includes some level of agency consolidation, the action plan within each alternative differs in how it would respond to the identified opportunities. Under the most minimal level of consolidation, agencies would have to develop more agreements and proactively coordinate with each other on a wide variety of strategies to achieve better regional outcomes for passengers. Under the full consolidation alternative, a single regional agency would be able to carry out its own regional studies and initiatives rather than relying on periodic coordination and MOUs.

For the purpose of considering the risks and benefits of full consolidation, Gold Coast Transit District was assumed to be the single agency into which all other transit operations would be consolidated. GCTD has the legislative definition to support such an outcome and has an organizational structure that supports expansion to operate transit in a larger jurisdiction and as such was the model considered for analysis purposes. Another option for full consolidation could include formation of an entirely new agency, however forming another new agency would ultimately assume all of the assets and liabilities of GCTD and may therefore be impractical. Full consolidation under VCTC is another possibility but would require a greater change to the administrative structure than consolidating into GCTD. Regardless, whatever existing or future agency takes on any level of regional consolidation, the resulting agency would inherently be a different one than currently exists.



Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
<p><b>Partial Consolidation</b> Subregional Demand-Response Consolidation and Increased Agency Coordination</p>	<p><b>Moderate Consolidation</b> Countywide Paratransit, and Subregional Fixed-Route Consolidation</p>	<p><b>Full Consolidation</b></p>
<p>Consolidate East County demand-response services into ECTA as a formalized organization. All other agency-cities retain administrative control of fixed-routes but improve coordination.</p>	<p>Consolidate all demand-response into one agency. Consolidate fixed-route operations by geography with Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Moorpark, and the VCTC East County Route becoming an east county transit agency, and all other services being consolidated with Gold Coast Transit District.</p>	<p>Consolidate all transit operations into Gold Coast Transit District. VCTC remains with RTPA/Transportation Commission functions.</p>

Improving passenger experience and transit system integration should be achievable through any of the three alternatives. Consolidation is not, in and of itself, a solution to the issues identified in Ventura County.

The alternatives described in this report provide a framework responsive to feedback the consultant team has received during the study. It is expected that whatever path is chosen will shift somewhat through the process of implementation.

## Risks to Consolidation

The single most pressing risk identified by the stakeholders, is to the funding structure for transit in Ventura County as a consequence of any level of consolidation but particularly full consolidation. Despite a genuine interest in exploring strategies to improve coordination between agencies and consider potential benefits for a more integrated approach, staff and leadership from every community were the most concerned about how any TIES alternatives would potentially reallocate funding away to another community. The sentiment, “do no harm,” was a common theme in engaging staff and leadership, meaning that any outcome of TIES must first and foremost preserve the same level of service in each community. Governance and funding are inextricably linked, and much of the literature on regional transit governance and coordination or consolidation of multi-agency regions focuses on the importance of building consensus on issues of revenue and resource distribution<sup>1</sup>.

The consultant and stakeholders identified the following risks across several categories in considering how to achieve the objectives. Most are framed around the concept of consolidating agencies, whether fully into a single countywide transit agency, or some lesser version of consolidation.

Finance Risks	Discussion
Consolidating agencies would directly reduce TDA funding for cities that currently have legal authority to claim a portion for streets and roads (provided there are no unmet transit needs), because those TDA funds would be required to shift to Gold Coast Transit.	Consolidation of agencies could be a benefit in allocating more funding to transit but has a clear negative impact for cities that depend on TDA for streets and roads. Efficiency gains could help to offset this to some degree. To avoid a single-year budget shock, the transition to a consolidated condition would be negotiated well in advance with sufficient time for cities to transition funding sources. It is possible that some arrangement could be made for short-term return of TDA funding to communities for local transit projects; GCTD currently provides a certain percentage of TDA funds back to its member agencies, for example.

<sup>1</sup> Sources related to consolidation and transit governance of other regions in the U.S. are listed at the end of the report.



## Finance Risks

## Discussion

A full consolidation scenario with GCTD as the lead agency could negatively affect VCTC's access to FTA and STA funding for planning and other regional activities.

In existing conditions, VCTC is the designated FTA recipient and STA recipient and provides funding pass-through to other cities. Discussions with FTA, CalSTA, and further investigation are required to ensure that VCTC would continue to have access to funding for its regional planning and administrative functions if all transit operations were transferred to GCTD.

Even among existing partnerships it can be difficult to reconcile differing financial, administrative and labor models between cities.

Differing cost assumptions between cities will require negotiation and consideration of related issues such as represented labor agreements or pension liabilities. Change could require gradual transition.

In consolidating service from cities into an existing agency, the cities would want assurances that the receiving agency can financially sustain the expanded portfolio. Cities who are not part of a regional agency now don't know enough about the risks of joining; likewise, existing agencies would need to understand the risks of taking on new service areas and services.

All public agencies in California undergo multiple forms of review to determine financial sustainability in the face of potential consolidation. These results are published in documents such as ACFRs and the periodic LAFCo Municipal Services Report, which also includes special districts such as Gold Coast. When an entire division/service of a city is transferred to another agency, existing liabilities are transferred as well; historical information on the formation of GCTD or the transition to VCTC from its predecessor, VCAG, serve as examples.

Finance Risks	Discussion
<p>Consolidation may not lead to overall cost savings even if issues with TDA allocations are resolved.</p>	<p>The national Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) <i>Report 173: Improving Transit Integration Among Multiple Providers</i> emphasizes a key point that often consolidation is desirable for reasons other than cost savings. The TIES report describes how three alternatives ranging from little to full consolidation seek to achieve the same outcomes of improving transit network integration, improving consistency for existing and potential riders, and increasing administrative efficiency. In most other cases, consolidation has been found to result in improved cost efficiency but not lower total costs over time, because cost savings are immediately reinvested to improving transit service and addressing other needs. The objective of this TIES study is not to lower the total cost of operating transit in Ventura, but to improve efficiency in order to improve customer experience and service offerings.</p>



## Finance Risks

## Discussion

Consolidation has unknown startup costs and long-term risks, particularly for pension liabilities.

The overall “cost” of consolidation varies depending on the initiatives stakeholders choose to pursue. Actions that consolidate administrative functions should have negligible startup costs and result in improved cost efficiency. Actions such as creating a central call center could have startup capital and training requirements, but, as they would not be built from scratch, should represent marginal cost or transfer of assets from a city to the consolidated agency. Consolidating operations should incur marginal costs over time to align practices, retrain staff, and replace materials (manuals, marketing, signage). The greatest cost would be to absorb staff from one agency to another; there are unknown one-time costs for early retirements and other payouts. Effects on revenue depend on choices to align fares across the region, which could increase or decrease in particular communities. These examples and others would be determined as agencies agree to pursue a particular alternative. Other successful examples of consolidation, such as Butte County, CA, set an initial goal to develop cost-sharing agreements and administrative consolidation by pursuing actions that utilized existing resources and minimized negative financial impacts to any individual city. Administrative and staff salary differences and pensions are a key risk to explore in further negotiation. Chapter 5 examines a hypothetical approach.

Risks for Customers	Discussion
<p>Centralized demand-response dispatch may result in staff less familiar with local client needs, local expectations and practices and lead to decreased quality of service for customers.</p>	<p>Although Ventura County is reasonably large both in area and population for a single call center to cover, it is reasonable to expect that appropriately trained staff could be successful in supporting the full region. A centralized call center would require staff to be dedicated, while freeing up current city administrative staff from transit responsibilities to support other city needs.</p>
<p>Shifting service to a more regional network will harm existing riders by reducing local services they depend on.</p>	<p>Any redesign of fixed-route services, regardless of their relationship to TIES, would always examine the potential impact to current customers including a full Title VI evaluation. This study does not critically examine what exactly a more regional network would look like, nor how resources would be potentially reallocated to achieve a regional network. The report demonstrates that some level of consolidation could lead to increased countywide funding for transit, which could add new service without affecting existing routes. Or a comprehensive regional service evaluation could identify ways to integrate existing local and regional routes so that both trip purposes are served within the same resources. Regardless, it would be the responsibility of either the future regional transit agency (in a consolidated scenario) or an agreed regional initiative (without consolidation) to examine that, with appropriate engagement from the public and stakeholder communities.</p>



## Risks for Customers

## Discussion

A countywide agency would be less responsive to local community needs and less willing or able to adapt transit services to the unique character of a given community.

It is inherently easier for a community-operated transit service to adapt to local rider and citizen requests than a larger regional agency. A countywide agency would need structures in place to ensure the public across the county has a voice in how a countywide transit service, and their own local routes and services, are operated. Other regional agencies achieve this through local or subregional rider advisory councils,

## Labor Risks

## Discussion

Consolidation would require great care working with unions and require their input on how to proceed.

Staff who deliver and maintain service are some of the best resources for identifying the potential benefits from any TIES alternative. The next steps following TIES should include careful review of the alternative concepts in collaboration with union representatives.

## Governance Risks

## Discussion

Consolidation would dilute the board of the receiving agency/Consolidation would dilute the city's input and responsiveness to its own service needs.

This sentiment is effectively the same from all parties. Regional boards are imperfect, as are city councils. There are many transit governance models across the U.S. and California that work well and create a strong relationship between the regional service provider and the local communities.

Governance Risks	Discussion
<p>Procedure for consolidation of agencies into GCTD has never been fully explored.</p>	<p>If full consolidation is desired, full analysis of that alternative is needed. Although many of the actions and potential outcomes from any TIES alternative might be new to stakeholders in Ventura County, there are published examples throughout California and the country of successful consolidation.</p>
<p>Centralized dispatching and oversight would not be possible because the County geography would still necessitate multiple operating bases each requiring a dispatcher.</p>	<p>No version of consolidation would assume consolidating operating bases. Demand-response service could be centralized through a single-point call center/brokerage model.</p>
<p>Consolidation could result in reallocation of resources and service levels from one community to another.</p>	<p>The TIES analysis assumes that in the near-term existing services would remain in place. It would be the responsibility of a resulting regional agency (or agencies) to reevaluate service over time, and work with the riders and community leadership to find the right balance of services.</p>
<p>Cities and smaller organizations are more nimble and responsive to local needs; enacting new programs that are outside the norm for a large agency could be slow or difficult.</p>	<p>Cities and GCTD can and have quickly responded to local issues, including providing microtransit. Though it may be harder, regional transit agencies are not inherently incapable of adapting quickly or being flexible in its service offerings and do so in many cases. Within GCTD’s service area a portion of TDA funds are redistributed to the cities to support local transportation programs that GCTD does not provide, which potentially could help continue these programs.</p>



## Governance Risks

## Discussion

If consolidation were pursued, the benefits of such an action would be lost if particular cities opt not to participate.

In practice, few regions in the U.S. have truly “fully consolidated” to the point where only one agency operates 100% of the public transportation services. There are many examples where regional consolidation was carried out even when a particular community opted not to participate, at least initially. The potential “full consolidation” outcome examined in the report examines what could happen if all agencies sign on but does not require that outcome for success.

## Conclusion

This chapter summarized the findings of the TIES study and how conditions for riders could be improved, changes to the network and the passenger experience could attract more riders given the limitations of current countywide transit options, and three ways those changes could be achieved by either greater coordination among the existing agencies or by consolidating into fewer agencies that would have more direct ability to effect change. There are risks to these approaches and the risks increase with each alternative and increasing level of consolidation. Consolidation is not an easy task, but the existing model of interagency coordination has limits to how quickly and how greatly it can change the overall conditions.

The following chapters provide greater detail on the existing conditions and analysis of how they inform the recommended strategies. Chapter 2 explores subjects that are directly related to riders, such as the transit services provided, the experience and policies between agencies, and availability of information for newcomers to the system. Chapter 3 explores subjects that are more directly related to staff and city leaders, including agency governance, finance, labor force, and assets. While these subjects also affect riders, choices and changes in these categories are less likely to influence riders' choice to use transit. Chapter 4 describes how each of the three alternatives address the findings, and explains the challenges, opportunities, and needs for next steps or further analysis. Chapter 5 examines the financial implications of consolidation scenarios and Chapter 6 describes the potential next steps of the integration and governance process.



# Transit in Ventura County from the Rider Perspective

Public transit services include scheduled fixed-routes and reservation-based, or demand-responsive services (ADA paratransit and community dial-a-ride), which are the focus of this study. Ventura County is also served by Metrolink and Amtrak passenger rail services. This chapter reviews topics that are “visible” to the riders such as routes, accessibility, fares, and eligibility, as opposed to “behind the scenes” of the operation which the next chapter covers. Each topic summarizes existing conditions and considers opportunities for integration and efficiency.

## Fixed-Route Services

Fixed-route transit service in Ventura County is offered under nine different identities, although some services are fully administered by another entity as described in Chapter 3.

Service Name	Unique Routes	FY19 Annual Revenue Service Hours	FY19 Unlinked Passenger Trips	Communities Served
Camarillo Area Transit (CAT)	2	5,389	80,000	Camarillo
Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD)	17	201,430	3,500,000	Oxnard, Ventura, Port Hueneme, Ojai, County of Ventura unincorporated areas
Kanan Shuttle	1	4,828	70,000	Oak Park, Agoura Hills

Service Name	Unique Routes	FY19 Annual Revenue Service Hours	FY19 Unlinked Passenger Trips	Communities Served
Moorpark City Transit (MCT)	2	5,782	50,000	Moorpark
Ojai Trolley	1	8,041	70,000	Ojai
Simi Valley Transit (SVT)	4	26,727	270,000	Simi Valley, Chatsworth
Thousand Oaks Transit (TOT)	6	21,765	150,000	Thousand Oaks, Malibu (summer route)
Valley Express Transit	3	6,480	50,000	Santa Paula, Fillmore, Piru
VCTC Intercity Transit	8	66,418	650,000	California State University Channel Islands, Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Oxnard, Piru, Santa Paula, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Ventura, Carpinteria, Goleta, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara

Generally, services across agencies have a weekday span of 5 or 6AM until about 8PM. Outside of the Gold Coast Transit service area, most routes run hourly. The map below shows the service areas of each agency.



The fixed-route network covers the county's most developed areas and provide access to key destinations



including major employment centers, schools and colleges, retail centers, and hospitals. The fixed-route services are generally more extensive and frequent in the west county, especially in the cities of Oxnard and Ventura where the built environment and population are denser, and the street networks are more urban grids. In other areas of the County, development is more suburban in nature with winding roads and relatively low density within a short walk of most bus stops.

### **Route Overlap and Interagency Transfers**

There is little overlap between routes of different agencies, and transfer opportunities between agencies are limited. While most services in the County are linked together by VCTC Intercity routes, in practice these connection opportunities are limited due to infrequent schedules. The only direct transfers between municipal agencies are between SVT and MCT at Moorpark College, and between GCTD and Ojai Trolley in Ojai. Oxnard and Camarillo are neighboring communities, but a transit trip between the two could require three agencies because only VCTC Intercity routes, with limited stops, operate between the two cities.

The topography of Ventura County presents a significant obstacle to connecting routes between communities due to several mountain ranges that are difficult to operate buses through. The developed centers of many communities, where potential to generate ridership is greatest, are far apart even without topographical barriers.

VCTC commissioned an origin-destination and transfer survey in 2019 (“OD Study”) covering 18 routes on 6 operators in the County: VCTC, GCTD, TOT, SVT, MCT, and VE. The transfer surveys included 12 locations. The origin-destination intercept surveys captured over 1,200 responses from riders. The “typical” rider often uses transit to travel to either work or home (≈70 percent), does not make transfers (55 percent), has a total travel time under 45 minutes (60 percent), normally walks to the origin bus stop (75 percent), and makes the (surveyed) trip at least once weekly (90 percent). Almost half of respondents making the (surveyed) trip at least five days each week (46 percent).

The transfer survey tracked three different transfer behaviors for weekday travel: (1) passengers transferring between buses belonging to a single operator (aka, internal transfer); (2) passengers transferring between buses of two different operators (interagency transfer); (3) passengers transferring from rail (Metrolink/Amtrak) to bus operators. Field observations found that 18 percent of trips involved an interagency transfer between two bus agencies. In all cases, interagency transfers were between VCTC and the local provider (GCTD, MCT, CAT, SVT, or VE).

Transfer Location	Interagency Transfer	%	Internal Transfer	%	Total
Oxnard Transit Center	10	2%	505	98%	515
Ventura Transit Center	101	24%	323	76%	424
C Street Transfer Center	23	10%	205	90%	228
Esplanade	53	60%	36	40%	89
Government Center	17	15%	98	85%	115
Moorpark Metrolink Station	8	100%	0	0%	8
Camarillo Metrolink Station	27	38%	44	62%	71
Thousand Oaks Transit Center	15	58%	11	42%	26
Simi Valley Town Center	12	92%	1	8%	13
Fillmore Terminal	2	67%	1	33%	3
Santa Paula City Hall	1	100%	0	0%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>1,224</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>1,493</b>

The OD Study also evaluated transfer activity through the rider origin-destination intercept survey. Here, respondents indicated that nearly half of the trips involve one or more transfers across the routes surveyed. Internal transfers (within the same agency) are shaded in the table.

Route Surveyed	GCTD	MCT	SVT	TOT	VE	VCTC
Gold Coast Route 17	43	1	2	1		10
Gold Coast Route 19	25					3
Gold Coast Route 20	19		1			3
Gold Coast Route 5	52	2	1	4		23
Moorpark Route 1		4	2			3
Simi Valley Route A			7		1	4
Simi Valley Route C	1	2	21	1	3	3
Thousand Oaks Route 3/Red	3			6	1	10
Thousand Oaks Route 4/Blue				16		7
Valley Express Santa Paula A						2
VCTC Coastal Express	10					9
VCTC CSUCI-Oxnard	5					3
VCTC East County		4	9	4		3
VCTC East-West Connector	4	2	5	1		8
VCTC Hwy 101	37		3	15	1	26
VCTC Hwy 126	26	1	3	2	8	20
VCTC Oxnard/Camarillo/CSUCI	14		2	2		6
<b>Total</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>143</b>



## Process for Identifying Service Gaps

Countywide service gaps have been identified in the past through two processes; a countywide 2015 Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP), and the annual Unmet Transit Needs Assessment (described later in this report). The SRTP identified a service gap between south Oxnard and Camarillo, a condition which remains; another gap between Simi Valley and Moorpark College has since been filled by a westward extension of an SVT route. The SRTP also identified gaps in timed transfers between agencies and the limited span of service countywide which can limit the ability for people to depend on transit because a connection later in the evening may not be possible. Additionally, service gaps have been identified by the Ventura County transit operators through SRTPs and Master Plans.

The Unmet Transit Needs process is an annual public process for identifying possible extensions of service to reach employment, healthcare and social services through route expansions or major increases in service hours and frequency. Based on VCTC's adopted policy, sufficient support to accept an unmet need requires at least 15 requests for general public services or 10 requests for service specific to people with disabilities. Historically, frequent requests for new service are between Fillmore and Moorpark and Fillmore and Santa Clarita. In the last five years, service that has been implemented as a result of the Unmet Transit Needs process includes extending Coastal Express service to Camarillo and implementing Saturday Metrolink service.

VCTC staff, as well as Commissioners and City and County leadership spoke strongly in interviews throughout the TIES about the challenges of using transit to travel from one community to another. There are many examples, and residents of Santa Paula, Fillmore and Piru are in some of the greatest need for improved connections. Between east county and west county, transit connections are possible but incredibly time consuming and can be limited by time of day.

## Fixed-Route Issues and Opportunities

- Each city operates service that addresses its local circulation needs, and regional connectivity between cities is left to VCTC Intercity, for the most part. This has resulted in nine independent operations. Having multiple operations in a single county is not inherently an issue for riders. In fact, it is considered a strength in terms of responsiveness and agility to address local needs.
- However, the arrangement results in perhaps a less effective regional and intercity network. Despite VCTC's routes connecting most cities, the limited opportunities to transfer between agencies and the limited span of service across all agencies makes transit inflexible for people traveling between cities in Ventura County. When cities are very isolated from one another but provide sufficient opportunity within their own borders, being highly responsive to local travel demand is all that is needed, but there is no question that many parts of Ventura County rely on other communities for access to services, healthcare, recreation, and jobs.
- It is hard to quantify how much "latent demand" for regional transit there is, although planners recognize the need based on traffic patterns and community input. The existing network is limited enough that measuring existing interagency transfers only confirms that activity is very low. All of

the transfer activity between agencies (excluding train trips) involved a leg on VCTC. Many of the survey respondents required two transfers for trips between cities.

- There are effectively no areas of “route overlap” that would suggest need to consolidate agencies to solve issues of ineffective route planning or access barriers between duplicative routes. In other regions, consolidation can help resolve issues where two agencies overlap so extensively that a single agency would naturally provide a better rider experience and could more effectively allocate transit resources across a combined network.
- In Ventura County, many neighboring cities (excluding the GCTD service area) are separated by enough distance that local fixed route networks have few opportunities to connect except via transfer to VCTC. This makes forming an effective regional network difficult; VCTC may choose to either operate express routes with a higher number of local stops (and therefore slower or less direct) in order to directly reach as many key destinations as possible, or serve fewer stops and rely more heavily on the local routes, which are generally infrequent, to extend the reach. Of course, in practice VCTC Intercity riders also rely heavily on park & rides, but this makes the directness of service on the other end of the trip even more important.

## Fares and Rider Policies

Each operation in Ventura County has its own approach to passenger fares. The agencies in partnership with VCTC have been advancing an effort to implement a regional farecard system which reduces the payment barrier between using multiple systems.

Based on pre-pandemic conditions, agency single-ride fares varied between \$1.00 and \$2.00 per trip, except VCTC which operates a zone-fare system with a top tier of \$4.00. The information below summarizes what was published as of 2021. The Kanan Shuttle is excluded because it is free of charge for all riders. Many agencies suspended fare collection during the height of the pandemic and may be charging different rates by the publication of this report.

### Agency Single-ticket Fares and Discounts

	CAT	GCTD	MCT	OT	SVT	TOT	VCTC Zone 1	VCTC Zone 2	VE
<b>Regular</b>	\$1.00	\$1.50	\$1.00	\$1.50	\$1.50	\$2.00	\$1.75	\$4.00	\$1.25
<b>Discount 1</b>	\$0.50	\$0.75	Free	\$0.75	\$0.75	\$0.50	\$0.80	\$2.00	\$0.60
<b>All: Senior</b>	-	Also Veterans	-	Also MediCal	-	Also MediCal	Also MediCal	-	-
<b>65+ Disabled/ Medicare</b>	Free	Free	-	Free	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Discount 2</b>	Leisure Village Res.	Seniors 75+	-	Seniors 75+	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Child</b>	Free	Free	Free	Free	-	Free	Free	Free	Free



<b>Student/Youth</b>	-	Free	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$0.60
<b>College Students</b>	Free on all fixed-route services								

Agencies also varied somewhat in or prior to 2021 in the passes and payment methods available to riders. In 2021, VCTC introduced the regional VCbuspass contactless transit card which allows riders to store value or load agency-specific passes onto a single card that works on all services that charge rider fares.

### Fixed-Route Fare Pass Availability

	CAT	GCTD	MCT	OT	SVT	TOT	VCTC	VE
<b>Passes Available</b>								
<b>Day</b>		✓		✓	✓			
<b>Week</b>	✓					✓		
<b>Month</b>	✓	✓ (31-day rolling)	✓		✓	✓	✓ (31-day rolling)	✓
<b>Ticket pack</b>	10	15	10	25		10		
<b>Payment Methods</b>								
<b>Cash</b>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Change given</b>		Credit				✓		
<b>Passes/packs</b>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Smartphone</b>		✓			✓			

### Fares and Rider Policies Issues and Opportunities

- The range of local agency fares, excluding VCTC and the free Kanan Shuttle, are between \$1.00 and \$2.00. This is a relatively narrow range of variation, and not likely to make a meaningful difference in a rider's choice to use transit nor in a city's bottom line, though it can be an additional inconvenience for passengers.
- If the variation between cities' prices and pass options do not have a meaningful effect on rider choice, then these qualities simply become a barrier to better integration when considering intercity agreements for shared routes or shared paratransit trips. The financial and policy implications are discussed in Chapter 3.
- Payment methods and passes have become even less of a barrier as agencies have been coordinating on a new fare system led by VCTC.

### Customer Experience and Service Information

Customer satisfaction on transit in Ventura County prior to the pandemic was generally high, with satisfaction of 70-100%. However, customer surveys were administered relatively unevenly with only 4-5 agencies (GCTD, VCTC, VE, SVT, and MCT) having recently surveyed riders as of 2021 and TOT last in 2018. Each agency that conducted a customer survey also used a different approach to measure satisfaction, with methods ranging from 3 to 7-point scales.

Likewise, the other questions related to experience and service demands varied between the agencies. Regardless of the differences in survey methodology, the most popular response for service improvements was to provide more frequent service, rather than faster service or services to more destinations. Most riders believe that Ventura County transit agencies are safe, ranging from 82% (GCTD) or higher for other agencies (only GCTD allows for a “neutral” response).

In terms of rider profiles, a majority of respondents rely on transit because they cannot drive or do not have access to a car. These conditions range between the agencies that surveyed riders, but even for VCTC which operates intercity services that are somewhat more commuter-oriented, nearly two thirds of respondents identified themselves as relying on transit for one of these reasons. Responses were higher for other agencies, including 90% among SVT respondents.

Closely related to customer experience, customer service and marketing are activities and methods that transit agencies use to inform riders and potential riders of their travel options. Marketing transit services broadly to non-riders is perhaps the most under-valued activity in the public transit industry. Most agencies rely heavily on passive marketing tools that someone must seek out, such as websites or printed brochures.

All Ventura County transit agencies have route, schedule, and fare information on their websites. However, this information is not always presented in the most customer-friendly manner. Several agencies do not have a full system map on their website, which makes it difficult for customers to determine where transit service is available in relation to where they are or want to go. While some agencies list hours for phone contact, four agencies (MCT, OT, SVT, and VE) do not list hours of operation with their phone numbers. Only five agencies answer phone calls on the weekend. Even fewer offer an in-person and regularly staffed customer service center.

### Call Centers or Walk-In Hour of Operations

	CAT	GCTD	Kanan	MCT	OT	SVT	TOT	VCTC	VE
Call Center Weekdays	7 am – 5 pm	7 am – 7 pm	5:30 am – 7:30 pm	5:30 am – 7:30 pm	-	7 am – 6 pm	5:30 am – 7:30 pm	8 am – 5 pm	-
Call Center Weekends	8 am – 4 pm	None	7:30 am – 7:30 pm	7:30 am – 7:30 pm	-	7 am – 6 pm	7:30 am – 7:30 pm	none	-
Walk-In Weekdays	-	8 am – 5 pm	-	-	-	-	7:30 am – 6 pm	-	-
Walk-In Weekends	-	none	-	-	-	-	8 am – 5 pm	-	-

Only GCTD and TOT have travel training sections on their websites. No other agency lists personal travel training services, though some may conduct such services as part of partnerships with local organizations.

Four agencies maintain both active Twitter and Facebook accounts, while SVT has an inactive Twitter account. The agencies that do use social media post periodically, typically a few times a week or less.



Besides GCTD and VCTC, the agencies which use social media largely post content about general updates, holidays (like Mothers’ Day), and promotions (like National Bike Month), and COVID-19 reminders.

### Customer Experience and Service Information Issues and Opportunities

- Measuring transit performance is highly inconsistent between agencies. This is not a problem unique to Ventura County but is a clear opportunity for improvement. This is relevant to customer experience as measuring experience regularly and uniformly (across time and between agencies) is critical to understanding the extent of trends such as ridership decline, unmet transit needs, and opportunities for improvement and coordination.
- It is difficult to measure things that do not happen; for example, agencies have almost no way of knowing how many people consider transit but never try or fail to make it a habit. Customer experience and promotional materials are critical as a likely first point of entry for potential riders, and therefore it is critical to make this the best that it can be. Customer information among agencies in the County varies widely but is generally much more approachable from some than others.
- Similarly, phone access to dispatch and in-person support varies widely; some agencies do not offer general call-center hours within the full extent of the operation.

### Demand-Response Services (ADA Paratransit & Dial-A-Ride)

Demand-response services, including complementary ADA paratransit and dial-a-ride in Ventura County is offered under seven different identities, although some services are fully administered by another entity.

Measure	GCTD	Camarillo	Thousand Oaks	Simi Valley	VCTC	Moorpark	ECTA
<b>ADA Paratransit/ DAR Service Name</b>	GO ACCESS	Camarillo Area Transit	Thousand Oaks Transit	Simi Valley Transit	Valley Express	Moorpark City Transit	CONNECT
<b>Service Area</b>	Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Ventura, and western unincorporated areas of Ventura County	Camarillo	Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village, Unincorporated Areas of Newbury Park, Ventu Park, Rolling Oaks, Oak Park, Hidden Valley, and Lake Sherwood	Simi Valley and Chatsworth Metrolink Station	Fillmore, Santa Paula, and the County of Ventura	Moorpark	Moorpark, Simi Valley, Camarillo, Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village, Agoura Hills, and the unincorporated portions of eastern Ventura County

<b>Type of Service Provided</b>	ADA paratransit; Premium, Eligibility-Based DAR	ADA paratransit; Premium, Eligibility-Based DAR; General Public DAR	ADA paratransit; Premium, Eligibility-Based DAR	ADA paratransit, DAR	ADA paratransit; Premium, Eligibility-Based DAR; General Public DAR	ADA Paratransit; Premium, Eligibility-Based DAR	Premium, Eligibility-Based DAR
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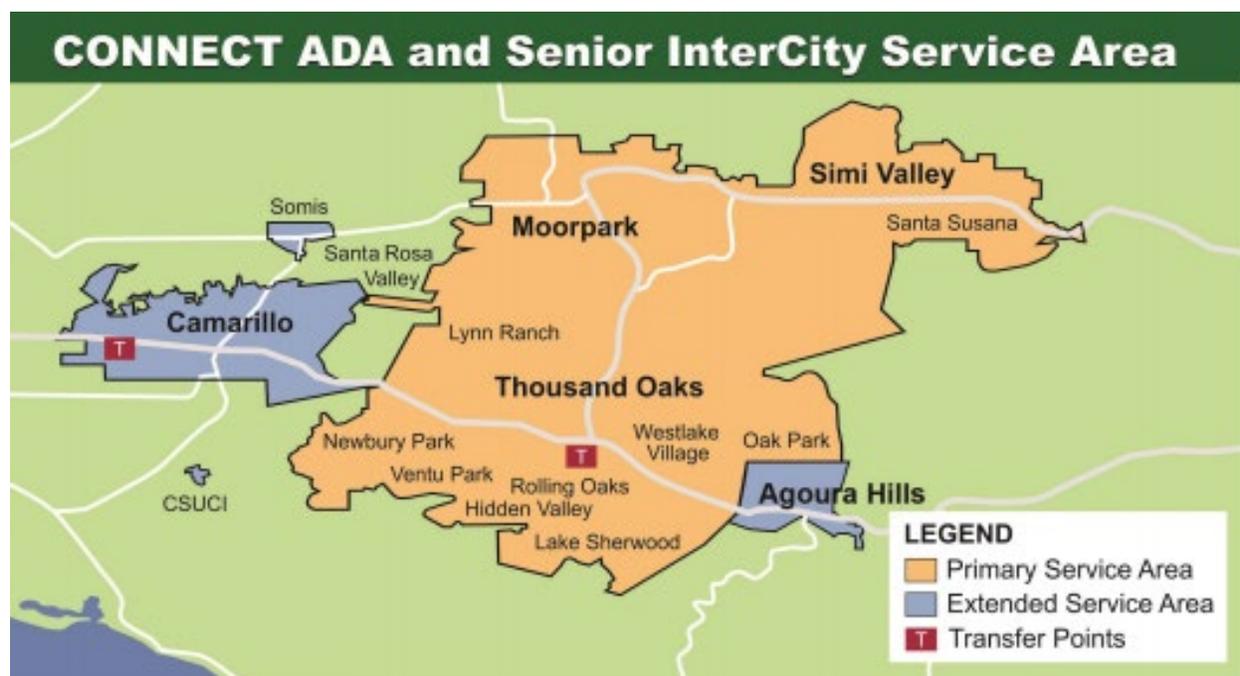
In compliance with ADA requirements, all local fixed-route services offer complementary paratransit within their service area, either through contracted or directly operated service. GCTD provides complementary paratransit within Ojai including the Ojai Trolley area. VCTC Intercity service is not required to provide ADA paratransit due to the express nature of its services. While federal regulations are relatively specific regarding service levels, fares, and service area minimum requirements relative to the fixed-route service, each agency has substantial latitude beyond those minimums (for example, agencies may charge no greater than twice the fixed-route fare but may choose to charge less).

Measure	GCTD GO Access	Camarillo	Thousand Oaks	Simi Valley	Valley Express	Moorpark	ECTA
<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	ADA card, Seniors (65+), participants in Senior Nutrition Lunch Site Program	<b>All City of Camarillo residents (“General purpose” DAR)</b>	ADA card, Seniors (65+)	ADA card, Seniors (65+)	<b>All residents and visitors; ADA and Seniors (65+) are given priority reservations</b>	ADA card, Seniors (65+)	ADA card, Seniors (65+)
<b>Reservation Window</b>	ADA/general DAR: 24 hours in advance Late Night DAR: 1 hour in advance	7 days to 24 hours in advance	Subscription: 90 days in advance Advanced: 14 days to 24 hours in advance <b>Same Day: 2 hours in advance First Available (Same Day): No advance notice necessary</b>	7 days to 24 hours in advance	7 days to 24 hours in advance	Subscription: 90 days in advance Advanced: 14 days to 24 hours in advance <b>Same Day: 2 hours in advance</b>	Subscription: 90 days in advance Advanced: 14 days to 24 hours in advance
<b>On-Time Window</b>	20-minutes	20-minutes	30-minutes	30-minutes	30-minutes	30-minutes	30-minutes
<b>Fares (One-Way)</b>	<b>Disabled/Senior: \$3</b> Senior Nutrition: Free Book of 10 tickets Disabled/Senior: \$30.00 Companion/Guest: \$3.00	<b>Seniors (65+) and Disabled: \$2</b> Adults/Students: \$3	<b>Disabled/Senior: \$4</b>	<b>Single trip: \$2</b> Personal Care Assistant: Free Companion/Guest: \$2.00 10-ride book of passes: \$20.00	<b>Senior/Medicare/ADA: \$2</b> (\$25/month) Adult: \$2 (\$30/month) Youth: \$2 (\$30/month)	<b>Travel within Moorpark: \$2</b>	<b>Intercity DAR: \$6</b>



The characteristics of demand-response service in Ventura County vary widely, with some communities offering full “general purpose” DAR to all residents and others allowing only the federally required eligibility for people with disabilities or older than 65. Some communities offer to serve same-day trip requests with 2 hours’ notice or even less. Most communities consider a trip request honored on-time within 30 minutes, but two have a narrower 20-minute window. Fares within a single service area range from \$2 to \$4; ECTA is an exception that provides intercity trips within its service area for \$6.

Direct paratransit services between different communities are available in much of the West County through GCTD and the Valley Express, and much of the East County through ECTA, but generally trips between East and West County require a transfer which requires the passenger to transfer between paratransit vehicles. ECTA’s CONNECT service directly transports passengers between Moorpark, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, and Camarillo, as well as nearby unincorporated areas, such as Newbury Park. The service also connects to Western Ventura County through a transfer to GCTD through a transfer point in Camarillo and provides connections to Chatsworth through Simi Valley Transit. GCTD offers transfer trips to Valley Express (via Wells Road in Saticoy). GCTD now provides direct paratransit service for GCTD passengers to and from Camarillo. CAT offers transfers to GCTD via St. John’s Regional Medical Center in Oxnard. CAT provides direct paratransit services to Simi Valley, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks.



The paratransit eligibility process is administered centrally through VCTC; VCTC contracts with the non-profit agency Mobility Management Partners to facilitate the ADA certification process. Once applicants are certified through VCTC, they are eligible to request paratransit service from any Ventura County agency. However, this is limited to the required ADA-eligible categories related to people with disabilities; communities that offer expanded eligibility for their DAR services handle those certifications independently.

## Demand-Response Services Issues and Opportunities

- Like fixed routes, each community has developed a demand-response service that fits its particular market, with some going so far as to offer dial-a-ride that's open to all residents, which is not common in larger communities.
- Increasing demand-response service needs have resulted in agreements between agencies to operate more direct service between communities; this is perhaps the clearest indicator that there is intercity travel demand, and benefits to interagency coordination. Agreements in recent years led to the development of ECTA providing intercity trips in the east county cities as well as direct round-trip service into Camarillo. A similar agreement is in place between CAT and GCTD to provide paratransit trips directly into the other's service area. Camarillo provides direct paratransit services to Simi Valley, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks. However, Camarillo has not participated in either agreement at a level in which operational benefits could be realized. Camarillo provides direct service only to north Oxnard, as the Gold Coast service area is so large. Riders going further still require a transfer. Similarly, passengers traveling to or from the Valley Express service area must transfer to/from Gold Coast Transit.
- Though there have been great improvements to the regional paratransit network in Ventura County in the last decade, the travel time, transfers needed and regional paratransit fare being six to eight times the cost to take regional fixed-route in the county.
- There are some communities where demand-response is most appropriate for local travel needs because population and job densities are low and many residents travel outside the city for work each day. Availability of dial-a-ride service in addition to the minimum-required paratransit can provide a higher degree of service to individuals without larger fixed-route buses "driving around empty" as is sometimes the public perception. Advancement of technology for more efficient on-demand reservation-taking and trip-matching can lead to better utilization of demand-response vehicles by pairing paratransit trips with other trip types, provided the regulations for paratransit trips are the priority served.
- Cities and agencies offer riders different policies and experiences for booking trips. Reservation windows vary from the FTA-required minimum 24-hours advance to some cities explicitly offering trips on-demand if the schedule can accommodate, or within a 1 or 2-hour window. This is partly a function of scheduling technology and capacity; because FTA does not require greater responsiveness than 24-hours' notice, which is considered a premium service.
- Improvements to paratransit service should include strategies recommended from the Coordinated Plan, including coordinated policies and on demand/improved regional paratransit services.



# Transit Operations and Administration

Transit operations, finance, assets, and governance represent the “behind-the-scenes” aspects of the buses on the street and are key subjects of opportunity for integration and efficiency.

## Governance

In Ventura County, the fixed-route transit and paratransit operations (ten, inclusive of ECTA) generally fall into these categories:

- **City-administered services**, which are either a distinct department of city government or housed under another, typically public works, and the city council typically acts as the transit board. Camarillo Area Transit, Ojai Trolley, Simi Valley Transit, Moorpark City Transit, and Thousand Oaks Transit make up this group.
- **Independent agencies**, which are a regional or sub-regional bodies typically formed and defined by a state legislative act and have their own governing board representing their service area. This category broadly includes Gold Coast Transit District, Ventura County Transportation Commission, and the County of Ventura; however, there are significant distinctions in roles between each of these.
  - GCTD is a special transit district formed by AB 664 and has a governing board made up of representatives from each city it serves.
  - VCTC is the regional transportation planning agency (RTPA), which is a body designated by the state serving planning functions and oversight of federal and state transit funds.

VCTC is also the state-designated County Transportation Commission for administering local sales tax allocations to transit. VCTC directly operates transit service (as well as operating the Valley Express), although this is not necessarily a role of an RTPA or CTC, meaning that the board (the Commissioners) also serve as the de facto board for VCTC Intercity service

- The County of Ventura is a funding partner and stakeholder for transit throughout the county, including the Kanan Shuttle, the Valley Express, Ojai Trolley, and some GCTD services. The County does not directly operate any transit services, although it could do so rather than contracting the Kanan Shuttle, for example. The County Board of Supervisors is the governing board.
- Services defined by third parties and **operated by another agency**, which include the Kanan Shuttle and the Valley Express. These are unique cases in which a service was developed in response to a community need and is overseen and/or funded by an agency but fully administered by another party.
  - Kanan Shuttle is technically a service of the County of Ventura, which provides the funding and oversight but is otherwise fully administered by TOT. Kanan Shuttle’s governing board is effectively the County administration, and TOT is the executor.
  - The Valley Express is a community service that encompasses the cities of Santa Paula, Fillmore, and the County (representing Piru), all of which provide funding and play an advisory role, but the service is otherwise fully administered by VCTC. Valley Express has a governing committee and technical advisory committee advising VCTC.

Agency	Fixed-Route	Paratransit/ DAR Service	Governance Structure <sup>1</sup>
<b><i>Camarillo Area Transit</i></b>	Contracted with RATP Dev	Contracted with RATP Dev	City Department
<b><i>East County Transit Alliance (ECTA)</i></b>	N/A	TOT is fiscal agent, by TOT under contract to MV Transportation	Memorandum of Understanding between the Cities of Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, Moorpark, and County of Ventura
<b><i>Gold Coast Transit District</i></b>	Directly operated	Contracted with MV Transportation	Special District – Established by state legislation that includes City of Ojai, City of Oxnard, City of Port Hueneme, City of Ventura, and County of Ventura.
<b><i>Kanan Shuttle</i></b>	Administered by TOT, operation contracted to MV Transportation	N/A (Covered by TOT/ECTA)	County Public Works Agency
<b><i>Moorpark City Transit</i></b>	Contracted with MV Transportation	Administered by Moorpark, operated by TOT under contract to MV Transportation	City Department
<b><i>Ojai Trolley</i></b>	Directly operated	N/A (Covered by GCTD)	City Department
<b><i>Simi Valley Transit</i></b>	Directly operated	Directly operated	City Department



Agency	Fixed-Route	Paratransit/ DAR Service	Governance Structure <sup>1</sup>
<b>Thousand Oaks Transit</b>	Contracted with MV Transportation	Contracted with MV Transportation	City Department
<b>Valley Express</b>	Administered by VCTC, operation contracted to MV Transportation	Administered by VCTC, operation contracted to MV Transportation	Cooperative Agreement between the Cities of Fillmore, Santa Paula, the County of Ventura, and VCTC. Fully administered by VCTC.
<b>Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) Intercity</b>	Contracted with RATP Dev	<i>Not required for express bus</i>	Regional Transportation Planning Agency

Administration of transit in Ventura County is a somewhat complex web of stakeholder and governing bodies, agreements for oversight and service operation, and contracting mechanisms. What is now Gold Coast Transit District evolved from separate municipal transit operators in the 1970s which organized under a joint-powers agreement and later evolved into the district in response to changing state transit funding circumstances. In the east county, the City of Thousand Oaks has gradually offered more transit administrative and operating functions for its neighbors such as operating paratransit service on behalf of Moorpark, operating the Kanan Shuttle on behalf of the County, and serving as the fiscal agent and operator for ECTA Connect service. In contrast with the GCTD evolution, the communities in the east county have not formed a JPA. The City of Thousand Oaks offers their services under funding agreements but the public oversight of services outside Thousand Oaks remains with those city councils, or the County Supervisors.

In the Santa Clara River Valley, the communities and the County formed an advisory committee to oversee the Valley Express services, and the committee is effectively a subcommittee of VCTC Commissioners. The service is functionally administered and planned by VCTC on behalf of the stakeholder communities. Meanwhile, the cities of Camarillo and Simi Valley fully administer their own services within their cities. The cities of Simi Valley and Camarillo also participate in ECTA for the purpose of coordination (along with Thousand Oaks, Moorpark, and the County), but Camarillo has not elected to participate in the cost-sharing agreement. Instead, Camarillo provides direct service to and from Simi Valley, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks via CAT for Camarillo residents 65 and older and individuals with a disability. The ECTA service provides trips to/from Camarillo for its riders as well as to points west via a transfer with GCTD.

### Governance Issues and Opportunities

- City-administered transit departments or regional transit agencies are neither inherently better nor worse models of transit provider. In Ventura County, there are examples of cities where transit is a relatively small division of the Public Works department and others where transit is effectively its own fully-staffed division. Elsewhere, there are cities where the transit system is its own department reporting directly to the City Manager. These models are no better or worse than a dedicated transit agency, as long as the oversight of the service is effective.

- In Ventura County, the public oversight of transit is generally clear, but in some ways masks complex behind-the-scenes administration. For example, residents of Moorpark have their City Council serving as the board for Moorpark City Transit, and there are Moorpark city employees who officially administer the service. However, many of Moorpark's transit services are actually operated by the City of Thousand Oaks under a series of agreements. This is largely and rightly invisible to the customer, and by all accounts works very well. It is an example of the complex arrangements that come about in the interest of efficiency; in this case, the City of Thousand Oaks had more "critical mass" in terms of operating transit and offered their services to Moorpark, which has been a benefit for both communities. Likewise, the Valley Express service likely appears to the public to be its own agency despite being largely overseen and operated by VCTC with local oversight by committee.
- However, it is hard to quantify whether the Moorpark arrangement is better than an alternative in which Thousand Oaks were to directly operate transit service in the City of Moorpark as "Thousand Oaks Transit" in place of Moorpark City Transit. Hypothetically, the City of Moorpark could develop an agreement with Thousand Oaks Transit to directly operate and administer all transit service in Moorpark (whether branded as MCT, or TOT), and completely divest itself from direct city administration. Typically at this level, a joint powers authority or transit district would be formed.
- VCTC in its role as the RTPA conducts an annual public process to identify "unmet transit needs," which is well-intentioned but limited in its ability to understand potential for expanded transit. The process relies on the public to identify a need, and articulate that same need an arbitrary number of times for it to be considered officially, and even then is not guaranteed to be linked to funding. The people most likely to provide feedback are existing riders, whose travel patterns are correlated with the existing network. Experience has shown very few of these riders consistently request service between communities where there is no service. The process is not really designed to evaluate true travel demand compared with existing transit, and does not proactively engage infrequent or non-riders to assess transit need from their perspective (although infrequent riders do submit comments), and therefore limits transit expansion potential only to what is incrementally possible from the limited existing network, or would require an unusual groundswell of support for a new idea. While this approach to the Unmet Needs process is more a product of state legislation than necessarily a local issue, VCTC does have the legal power to revise its procedure for analyzing transit demand, soliciting public input regarding, and definitions for, unmet transit needs and what is reasonable to meet.
- Coordination and collaboration between agencies does occur, and there are many examples cited throughout this study. However, service planning and connectivity between communities is largely an ad-hoc process. The TRANSCOM committee of VCTC, which is a proactive forum for coordinating communities on regional transit issues, is not proactively used to align service schedules, study travel demand, or identify strategic opportunities for coordination or collaboration.



## Finance

Federal, state, and local (city) sources fund public transit in Ventura County, and each program is administered and disbursed differently for each community and/or agency, making for perhaps the most complex topic for the TIES to consider. Ventura County does not have a countywide revenue source such as a sales tax measure, as many other counties in California do. This chapter attempts to address the high-level and salient points related to TIES in a simplified manner for a highly complex subject. Much of the analysis in this section is based on agency TDA reporting to VCTC and compiled in triennial performance reports (TPAs), last completed by Moore & Associates in 2020 for the preceding three years.

**Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding** comes to the region through FTA “direct recipients” and is then distributed to sub-recipients if applicable. In Ventura County, GCTD, VCTC, and Simi Valley Transit are direct recipients of FTA funding. VCTC distributes FTA funding to sub-recipients, which include cities operating their own transit or using federal funding for capital projects. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, additional funding programs were made available to bolster transit through the crisis, but under normal circumstances funding for operations is allocated by formula based on population and revenue miles of service and requires local match (which can include state funds).

FTA funding available to transit is affected more by population change and major changes in transit service levels than by which agency operates the service. Camarillo and Simi Valley qualify as “small urban” operations and funding availability for operations is higher for these areas than for “large urban” areas such as the greater Oxnard urbanized area. Rural and low-density areas of the county are eligible for rural funding (Section 5311), which is passed through VCTC and would support the Valley Express services and Ojai Trolley, for example. As population and density increases, these categories could change. For example, Simi Valley could be recategorized as a large urban area based on the 2020 Census, which could decrease overall FTA funds available for the same planned level of service. This allocation is independent of whether Simi Valley or another agency operates the service because it relates to where the revenue miles operate, and the funds are allocated to the operating agency. If another agency assumed Simi Valley’s services, they would instead receive the same FTA funding. It should be noted that Ventura County is still waiting for revised urbanized area maps based on the 2020 Census which have unknown implications for funding.

**State funding** is primarily derived from the Transportation Development Act (TDA), a revenue source that provides two funding streams: State Transit Assistance (STA) and Local Transportation Fund (LTF). TDA funding comprises the largest proportion of funding for all transit service in Ventura County. VCTC is responsible for disbursing TDA funds to the Cities of Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Ojai, Santa Paula, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, the County of Ventura, Gold Coast Transit District, and Metrolink.

The LTF allocation is based solely on community population, while the STA funds are allocated 50% by population and 50% according to prior year transit operator revenues. Both of these programs present challenges for transit in Ventura. First is that the TDA has a farebox recovery requirement, effectively 20% for urbanized areas and 10% for non-urbanized areas. When an agency is unable to meet this

requirement, it must either “backfill” with local revenues or claim no more than 50% of their operating budget. This requirement was suspended during the pandemic and is being considered for revision based on statewide advocacy. However, until it is revoked, **it represents a financial risk** for communities that has been a periodic challenge in the past for several cities, including Camarillo, Moorpark, Ojai, and Simi Valley.

Secondly, communities with populations of less than 100,000 (Camarillo, Moorpark, Fillmore, and Santa Paula), and the City of Thousand Oaks by special legislation, are allowed to allocate TDA funding to streets and roads if there are no “unmet needs” as defined by the RTPA (VCTC). Based on the VCTC Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2019, over \$30M in LTF funds were allocated to local agencies, of which nearly \$5M (about 16%) was allocated to streets and roads in total by the communities above. In Fiscal Year 2022, Camarillo transitioned its funding allocations such that LTF funds were allocated to transit, rather than relying on general funds as it has previously.

Local Agency	Transit	Bicycle and Pedestrians	Streets and Roads	Fiscal Year 2018/2019
City of Camarillo	-	\$8,770	\$2,382,314	\$2,391,084
City of Fillmore	\$337,584	\$9,647	\$215,289	\$562,520
City of Moorpark	\$680,000	\$535,964	\$603,811	\$1,819,775
City of Ojai	-	\$797	-	\$797
City of Oxnard	-	\$5,063	-	\$5,063
City of Port Hueneme	-	\$10,165	-	\$10,165
City of San Buenaventura	-	\$64,180	-	\$64,180
City of Santa Paula	\$322,494	\$5,980	\$756,636	\$1,085,110
City of Simi Valley	\$4,462,355	\$187,687	-	\$4,650,042
City of Thousand Oaks	\$3,512,121	\$5,980	\$1,000,000	\$4,518,101
County of Ventura	-	\$37,902	-	\$37,902
Gold Coast Transit	\$15,499,751	-	-	\$15,499,751
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$24,814,305</b>	<b>\$872,135</b>	<b>\$4,958,050</b>	<b>\$30,644,490</b>

**Local funding** varies by community and includes passenger fares, advertising sales, developer fees, local business or institutional partnerships or route guarantees, and local sales tax measures. For agencies using TDA for transit operations, these sources can also be counted towards fulfilling the farebox recovery requirement, although anything other than actual passenger fares and passes are distinguished in reporting. In the prior 5-6 years, few agencies in Ventura County have been able to meet the 20% requirement with passenger fares alone.

### Operating Costs and Capital Expenses

There are a wide range of operating costs and performance indicators between agencies in Ventura County, which are affected by salaries and benefits, types of service operated, efficiency and utilization of



employees, and other factors. Performance indicators such as passengers per revenue hour or per revenue mile are indicators of how well-utilized and efficiently operated a service is; unsurprisingly, GCTD has some of the most cost-efficient performance given the dense environment in the service area. VCTC Intercity services have a relatively high operating cost per revenue hour, because express/intercity services operate “closed door” for long distances between communities and often involve long deadheads for peak period service (however, farebox recovery is usually high because these services operate at a premium and seat utilization is generally high).

Performance Measure	Camarillo	GCTD	Moorpark	Ojai	Simi Valley	TOT	Valley Express	VCTC
Operating Cost (Actual \$)	\$2,359,867	\$24,560,098	\$1,221,985	\$709,780	\$7,570,447	\$5,167,940	\$1,634,190	\$9,965,179
Fare Revenue (Actual \$)	\$153,800	\$3,216,832	\$61,498	\$74,835	\$460,401	\$290,322	\$214,979	\$2,375,531
Vehicle Service Hours (VSH)	33,669	251,657	9,208	8,041	43,953	52,420	21,916	66,418
Vehicle Service Miles (VSM)	385,902	2,940,297	152,101	101,929	536,014	804,782	274,931	1,564,942
Passengers	182,405	3,642,129	56,032	74,056	316,852	216,301	89,296	654,595
Employees	27	237	10	6	39	51	24	71

**Performance Indicators**

Operating Cost/VSH (Actual \$)	\$70.09	\$97.59	\$132.71	\$88.27	\$172.24	\$98.59	\$74.57	\$150.04
Operating Cost/Passenger (Actual \$)	\$12.94	\$6.74	\$21.81	\$9.58	\$23.89	\$23.89	\$18.30	\$15.22
Passengers/VSH	5.42	14.47	6.09	9.21	7.21	4.13	4.07	9.86
Passengers/VSM	0.47	1.24	0.37	0.73	0.59	0.27	0.32	0.42
Farebox Recovery	6.5%	13.1%	5.0%	10.5%	6.1%	5.6%	13.2%	23.8%
Hours/Employee	1,247	1,061	920	1,340	1,127	1,027	913	935
Operating Cost/VSM	\$6.12	\$8.35	\$8.03	\$6.96	\$14.12	\$6.42	\$5.94	\$6.37
VSM/VSH	11.46	11.68	16.52	12.68	12.20	15.35	12.54	23.56
Fare/Passenger	\$0.84	\$0.88	\$1.10	\$1.01	\$1.45	\$1.34	\$2.41	\$3.63

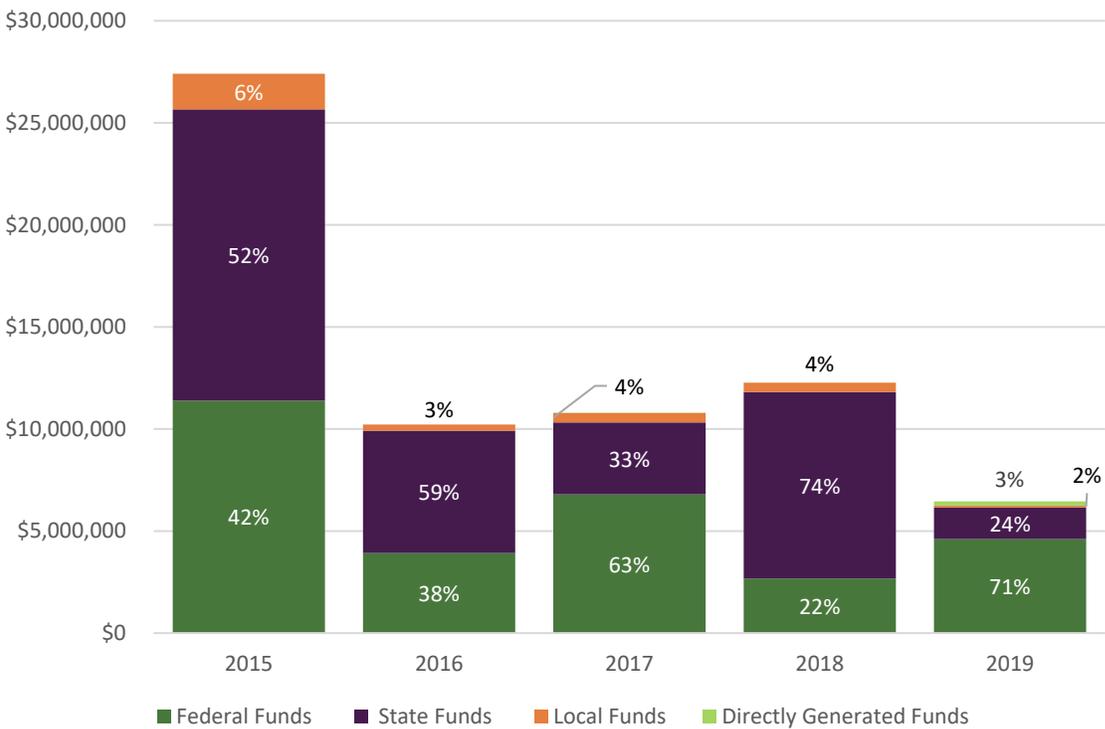
Most notable is Simi Valley Transit’s operating cost per revenue hour and per revenue mile compared with all other operators in the County. The agency’s operating cost rate is comparatively high when considering that SVT is on the lower end of revenue hours per employee and performs reasonably well for passengers per revenue hour compared with other agencies. Some contributing factors to these differences in cost efficiency could include:

- High total compensation: SVT is the only city to directly operate all local bus and paratransit in its community; its operators are represented by SEIU Local 721.
- Inefficient service: Prior to implementing restructured routes (see below), SVT previously operated four fixed routes; its line connecting east to Chatsworth involved several miles of deadhead along the 118 freeway, while another circulator route carried fewer than ten boardings an hour and typically only a few people on the vehicle at a time.
- Total staffing: Its most recent Short-Range Transit Plan (SRTP) suggests that SVT may have more administrative and supervisory staff than other agencies running a comparable level of service.

This is not to say that SVT operates a poor system, nor that there is no opportunity for improvement among other operators. It is merely notable that SVT's performance indicators are not comparable with the average in the County. SVT completed an SRTP in 2019 and implemented several recommendations, although the pandemic of course disrupted some of the planned changes and likely slowed realization of the expected benefits for the restructured routes, as with other agencies. Camarillo's cost indicators also appear low in the context of other comparable cities for reasons that are unknown. Camarillo prior to 2022 did not claim TDA funds for transit, but a TPA is required by VCTC regardless.

Transit capital expenses change over time as agencies have different fleet replacement cycles and infrastructure projects. For example, GCTD recently completed a new operating base, which is one of the most significant capital projects any agency will undertake in its history besides fleet replacement. Other projects have included bus stop improvements, new technology, and equipment or supplies for maintenance and operations. Revenue for capital expenses comes from both federal and state sources; agencies must navigate a mix of formula and competitive grant programs and spend a fair amount of effort considering major capital projects years in advance in order to be ready when a competitive program becomes available.





In the coming years, capital expenses will continue to grow as California requires agencies to transition to zero-emissions fleets. This will require not only phasing in newer and more expensive vehicles in the regular fleet replacement cycles, but likely buying more vehicles (in the case of electric buses) and constructing the new fueling or charging infrastructure required. Most agencies in Ventura County had not completed the required zero-emissions bus transition plan by 2022; plans for small agencies are due by July 1, 2023.

### Finance Issues and Opportunities

- Generally, there should be no change in FTA transit operations or capital funding levels as a result of transfer of service or consolidation itself. However, there are some potential challenges to explore directly with FTA regarding certain funding programs; for example, it is unknown if planning funds that VCTC accesses as a direct recipient could be applied for by VCTC through another direct recipient. Presumably, if VCTC Intercity services were transferred to another agency such as GCTD, VCTC could no longer be eligible as an FTA direct recipient because it would be neither an operator nor the MPO. It is likely that funds would remain available but could require some additional administrative agreements to access (VCTC becomes a subrecipient of planning and capital funds). Similarly, how the STA funds would be handled would need to be explored further, as STA funds flow to the regional transportation commission (VCTC) and are disbursed to other operators.
- The most significant issue facing any consolidation actions is the use of TDA funds for streets and roads. Consolidation of any city transit operation into another agency would result in those TDA

funds being dedicated to transit. The approximately \$5 million could provide a substantial boost to transit operations for the resulting agency, but also represents a loss of critical revenues for road projects in five cities. Ventura County has made multiple attempts to pass a local sales tax measure to fund roads and transit. Without a tax measure there are no clear alternatives for closing the funding gap that would be created. The individual communities affected could find means to address the gap within their own budget, but this is unlikely given the historic reliance on this revenue source.

- The up-to \$5 million in TDA funds claimed for streets and roads would represent thousands of hours a year worth of additional transit service. How it would be spent would depend on the final outcome of consolidation and the new transit priorities identified. Using a hypothetical situation for context, assuming only 80% went towards expanding fixed-route service and using GCTD's fixed-route operating cost per revenue hour, approximately \$4 million in additional funds could generate 37,000 hours a year of transit service, which is approximately an 10.7% increase in revenue hours (compared to FY 2019 total revenue hours) or roughly equivalent to 6 buses operating from 5:00AM to 9:00PM daily.
- The wide variability in operating costs is another issue to address in coordination or consolidation. Costs had been escalating for transit agencies already, and national labor shortages becoming more acute in 2021-2022 have worsened the outlook. The current total cost and efficiency metrics for agencies reflect refinement over time to serve their particular market and represent the community's values (for example, some cities place more value on demand-response services, which are less cost-efficient to operate but provide a higher degree of service to the individual). Consolidation would change all of these metrics for the receiving agency (or agencies) because the blend of services offered would change. Efficiency could also change; for example, some levels of demand-response consolidation could result in more efficient delivery of service that could help keep costs down.
- As noted, costs are increasing and despite the wide variation in reporting by cities, costs are likely to increase roughly the same among all cities in the County independent of any TIES actions. This is another reason to take advantage of any regional collaboration or consolidation that could improve cost efficiency, to help the region become more resilient to rising costs.



## Transit Staff and Represented Labor

Staff administering transit service can be described in a few general categories:

1. Agency staff, hired by GCTD or VCTC, who administer and support service delivery and are generally fully dedicated to transit (although this is an oversimplification for VCTC since the agency also has regional planning functions)
2. City or County staff who administer and support service delivery but generally also have other non-transit responsibilities, with some exceptions.
3. Contractor employees who generally operate service

Based on the TPA reports, employees range from as few as 3 for the County's Kanan Shuttle to as many as 237 at GCTD. However, these numbers do not account for staff in administrative or support functions. According to TOT, the City employs approximately 21 people whose positions are at least partly paid for through TDA funds, but only 3 of those staff are fully dedicated to the transit department.

FY 19 Operators	CAT	GCTD	Ojai Trolley	MCT	SVT	TOT	Valley Express	VCTC	Ventura County
Fixed Route	4	195	6	7	17	17	7	71	3
Demand Response	23	42	0	3	22	34	17	0	
<b>Total Operators</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>3</b>
City Department / Organization	Public Works	Agency	Public Works	Public Works	Public Works	Public Works	MOU Housed under VCTC	Agency Dept.	Public Works

Generally, the cities of Camarillo, Ojai, Moorpark, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, and the County have few staff who oversee many of the "office" functions of transit including performance monitoring, supervising, planning, and in some cases even customer service. These staff may also have other similar responsibilities for other departments in the city; for example, the City Attorney for Thousand Oaks supports the transit program at approximately 10% FTE through cost allocation. In some cases, even the role of directly overseeing the transit service is only one hat of a public works director or deputy director.

Employees at several agencies, cities, or contractors have organized representation either by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) or the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, although not all represented by the same local.

	Contract	Function	Contract Expiration	Employees Represented	Labor Organization
<b>CAT</b>	Camarillo Public Works Dept	Management, Stop Infrastructure Maintenance	-	Public Works Director	Not represented
	RATP Dev	Operations and Maintenance	-	Drivers	Not represented
<b>GCTD</b>	MOU	Operators	6/30/2021	Drivers	SEIU Local 721
	MOU	Administration	6/30/2021	Customer Service Assistant, Maintenance Material Specialist, Marketing Coordinator	SEIU Local 721
	MOU	Supervisors	6/30/2023	Customer Service Supervisor, Maintenance Administration Supervisor, Maintenance Supervisor, Operations Safety & Training Supervisor, Operations Supervisor, Dispatchers	Teamsters Local 186
	MOU	Mechanical	6/30/2021	Mechanic I, II, III, Service Worker I, II, Facility and Equipment Mechanic I, II, Building Maintenance Worker	SEIU Local 721
	MV Transportation		FY2030	Paratransit	Teamsters Local 186
<b>Ojai Trolley</b>	Ojai Public Works Dept		-	Transit Operations Supervisor, Mechanic, Drivers, Assistant Supervisor, Trolley Cleaner	Not represented
<b>MCT</b>	Moorpark Public Works	Management, City Fleet Maintenance	-	Program Manager, Admin Assistant, City Fleet Maintenance Staff	Not represented
	City of Thousand Oaks	Operations, Preventative Maintenance, Customer Service	30-Jun-23		
	MV Transportation	Operations, Leased Vehicle Maintenance	2023	Drivers	Teamsters Local 848
<b>SVT</b>	Simi Valley Public Works		-	Deputy Public Works Director, Senior Management Analyst, Management Analyst, Transit Operations Manager, Transit Supervisors, dispatchers, Transit Operations Assistants, mechanics	Not represented
	MOU		30-Jun-21	Drivers	SEIU Local 721
<b>TOT</b>	Thousand Oaks		-	Senior Transit Analyst, Transit Analyst, Transit Aide, Mechanics (TO- and Moorpark-owned vehicles)	Not represented
	MV Transportation	Operations and Maintenance	2023	Operations Manager, Dispatch Manager, Fleet Services Technician (leased vehicles)	



	MV Transportation		2023	Drivers and mechanics	Teamsters Local 848
<b>VE</b>	VCTC	Project Management and Oversight	-	Public Transit Director, Program Manager - Transit Services, Transit Analyst	Not represented
	MV Transportation	Operations and Maintenance	March 2023	Drivers	Teamsters Local 186
	MV Transportation		March 2023	Fleet Services Technician, Mechanics, Maintenance Manager, Shop Foreman	
<b>VCTC</b>	Ventura County Transportation Commission	Transit Division	-	Transit Director, Program Managers, Transit Planner, Customer Service Reps, Transit Specialist	Not represented
	RATP Dev	Operations	FY 2023/24	Safety and Training Manager, Maintenance Manager, Operations Manager, Assistant Safety Manager, Drivers	Not represented
<b>Ventura County</b>	Public Works Dept		-	Senior Transportation Analyst	Not represented
	City of Thousand Oaks	Maintenance and Operators			
	MV Transportation	Maintenance and Operators	2023	Drivers	Teamsters Local 848

### Transit Staff and Represented Labor Issues and Opportunities

- **Engagement with unions is a critical next step** for success in pursuing any TIES alternative. Although it will not be easy to negotiate, the objectives of the TIES alternatives to improve opportunities for riders need not come at the cost of represented staff, especially with the staff shortages communities face. Front-line and other represented staff should be part of the solution to identify how to create opportunities for everyone.
- Two private contractors (RATP and MV Transportation) hold operations contracts with seven of the transit agencies, which could present opportunities for coordination and integration as contracts expire around similar timeframes. By this point, planning is already underway for contract renewal in 2023, but agencies can look forward to the next round with sufficient time to engage contractors and union representatives.
- The issue of operator seniority in unionized labor would be a significant issue to negotiate in forming a consolidated agency. However, as noted elsewhere in this report, even a single countywide agency would need to maintain several operating bases throughout the region, which could allow a transition period to resolve seniority “conflicts” for staffing assignments.
- An issue that several communities noted is that staff often shift between cities and agencies around the county creating some degree of competition between transit operations for hiring, staff training and retention. Better coordination and more consistent employment opportunities across the county could improve the job market overall. There are many reasons people choose

to take or leave a job; there was no evidence that any city or agency offer an inherently better or worse job opportunity.

- There are likely to be significant regional efficiency gains from consolidating administrative functions that could allow reinvestment of staff resources back to cities and potentially offset some of the financial concerns around TDA funding. For example, every city operating its own transit system dedicates part of an FTE to various functions supporting transit such as legal counsel, data analysis and reporting, state and federal program compliance, trip reservation taking, customer service, and more. Some cities direct little if any staff time to ancillary functions such as transit marketing to attract riders. All of these functions represent administration that would be marginal additions to staff responsibilities at a regional agency. The exact amount of efficiency gain is hard to determine because most cities only have a qualitative idea of how much staff time is dedicated to functions like transit compliance reporting out of all of the other functions a city administrator might be responsible for. Regardless, it is certainly not a 1:1 ratio when centralizing those functions.

## Physical Assets and Technology

Transit maintenance facilities, bus stops and transfer centers, bus fleets, and ancillary technology such as fareboxes and similar equipment comprise the majority of physical assets distributed between the agencies. Each agency has some administrative space, while fewer own and operate a dedicated transit operations base because several cities (and VCTC) rely on their contractor to provide the fleet storage and maintenance.

Several agencies participate with VCTC in a group Transit Asset Management Plan (TAM Plan), last conducted in 2018. This is an inventory of all assets and their condition, as well as an outline of planned capital activities. Given how much has changed since the 2018 TAM Plan, this summary provides an overview of key characteristics. Most importantly, the future of fleet assets and fueling infrastructure is about to change for all operators with the transition to zero-emissions buses. ZEB roll-out (transition) plans are due for all agencies in Ventura County (operating fewer than 100 vehicles in peak service) by July 1, 2023. No agency in Ventura County had a completed ZEB roll-out plan published on the California Air Resources Board website by summer 2022, although several agencies are actively studying and planning for the transition.



	CAT	GCTD	Ojai Trolley	MCT	SVT	TOT	Valley Express	VCTC	Ventura County
<b>Fixed-Route O&amp;M</b>	With Contractor	New (FTA)	City shared facility	With Contractor	City transit facility (FTA)	City shared facility (FTA)	With Contractor	With Contractor	With Contractor
<b>Demand Response O&amp;M</b>	With Contractor	With Contractor	N/A	With Contractor	City transit facility (FTA)	City shared facility (FTA)	With Contractor	N/A	N/A
<b>Transit Centers</b>	Camarillo Station (FTA)	Serves several owned by others	N/A	Moorpark Station	Simi Valley Station	Thousand Oaks Trans. Center	N/A	Serves several owned by others	N/A
<b>Bus Fleet</b>	Owned	Owned	Owned	Owned	Owned	Owned or Leased	Owned (VCTC)	Owned or Leased	Leased

("FTA" indicates a facility was supported by federal grants)

Most agencies own their fleet, although in some instances the fleet is owned or leased by the contractor. Operating bases are located close to their service areas, including those maintained by the contractor.

## Technology

Transit technology, including complex systems such as automated passenger counters, contactless fare payment, and dispatching and scheduling software are an area of strong coordination between Ventura County agencies. Several examples have been successfully deployed and others with challenges have become lessons learned. Most recently, a countywide fare payment system has been launched including mobile ticketing and contactless farecard payment on all systems.

## Physical Assets and Technology Issues and Opportunities

- Physical assets represent an area of the least obvious benefit for consolidation or coordination. Even in a scenario with a single county-wide operator, the existing operating bases would likely remain in place for the foreseeable future. There are no clear benefits to attempting to consolidate operating bases given the distances and geographic barriers in the County. In fact, consolidating operating bases could actually introduce new start-up costs. For example, Thousand Oaks existing facility, shared with other City functions, could not feasibly take on Simi Valley's fleet as well, nor is it likely that Simi Valley's facility could absorb all of the other east county operations, meaning even under some form of consolidation each maintenance and operation base is likely to remain for the foreseeable future. This is not an unreasonable outcome for any TIES action; most consolidated transit agencies with a geography as large as Ventura County would typically operate out of multiple locations even if planning and administrative functions are primarily centralized elsewhere.
- An exception is the VCTC operating base which is held by the Contractor and presents a challenge for VCTC in transitioning to a zero-emissions fleet regardless of any consolidation activities. GCTD has opened a new facility which theoretically could accommodate VCTC Intercity services;

although this adds some deadhead compared with the existing condition, there may be other benefits in terms of near-term facility modernization costs.

- In terms of bus fleet, agencies should be coordinating closely on zero-emissions transitions. If several agencies in the County pursue different strategies (hydrogen versus battery-electric), opportunities for cost-sharing, training, and other coordination could be lost.



# 4

## Alternatives and Strategies

In considering all of the needs, issues, opportunities, recent history of transit structure, and stakeholder input, the consultant team has developed three alternatives that strive to improve conditions for passengers and develop a system that is able to attract more riders. Each alternative approaches the same desired outcome by considering a different level of consolidation. In consolidation studies across the U.S., there are some cases in which agency consolidation is the clear path to achieve the desired outcomes, while in others there are a series of strategies which do not require agency consolidation.

For Ventura County, there are benefits to consider for agency consolidation especially given the progress in the last decade between cities at the subregional level; a subregional (alternative 2) or countywide (alternative 3) consolidation approach would result in an agency with more clear ability to directly develop a regional transit network and improve the overall quality of experience to attract more riders, and these need not come at the expense of local circulation. These outcomes can also be achieved with only a partial degree of consolidation (alternative 1), provided the participating communities and agencies commit staff time to pursuing these actions and monitoring success. There is greater risk for alternative 1 to result in slow and incremental progress without formalized agreements to collaborate on actions, but alternatives 2 and 3 have greater financial risk for participating communities and require more negotiation to proceed.

**Each alternative assumes that, especially at first, all current passenger services would remain in operation, even if another agency would be assuming operation.** For example, in alternative 2, the creation of a countywide demand-response/paratransit agency is assumed to take on operation of all ADA paratransit services as well as any local city demand-response services including general public dial-a-ride. Further bifurcating these services rather than consolidating them would not achieve the assumed

benefits of administrative and operational integration, and there is no obvious advantage or intent to force a community to discontinue its local program simply because another agency does not operate such a service elsewhere.

Eventually, as integrated agencies are able to realize cost efficiencies and the transition to regionalized administration settles, further examination of the integration outcomes would lead to new, or revised services. It is not the purpose of this study to imagine how or where service could be reallocated in the future; that would be up to the resulting regionalized agencies (if any), which would be in the best position to assess the outcomes and demand at the time and respond accordingly.

## **Strategies to Improve Passenger Experience, Reduce Operating and Capital Costs, and Better Integrate the Existing Systems**

These strategies are the guide for each alternative which should lead, rather than follow, any discussion of consolidation.

**Work to combine as many procurements or contracts as possible** to improve administrative efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

**Coordinate on the transition to zero-emissions fleets** to support effective project delivery and maximize staff resources and knowledge across providers and even leverage opportunities to pool resources with non-transit fleet and energy needs.

**Centralize demand-response call-taking and trip scheduling functions** to improve administrative efficiency, provide a single countywide point of contact for paratransit service, and more uniform customer experience. In the long term this should lead to more efficient service delivery and utilization. Along with aligning demand-response services, agencies should seek to improve vehicle utilization by taking advantage of the centralized trip management and modern software to improve trip-matching and shared rides between different service types, consistent with the Coordinated Services Plan.

**Align rider policies and fares between local services** to lay the foundation for a better intercity fixed-route and demand-response network and provide uniformity for people who wish to travel around the region.

**Conduct a countywide service planning study** with specific objectives to improve regional connectivity through adjusting existing routes and developing new or additional service based on a comprehensive travel market analysis.

**Develop standardized surveys, coordinated marketing materials and campaigns, and consistent online presence** to measure the progress of any strategies or alternatives, respond to countywide and local needs, and make strong policy arguments about important issues facing transit.



**Work collaboratively to address the challenges of TDA** and develop a plan to ensure funding for transit is available for transit, and that no individual city must suffer loss from a revenue source they depend on for other staff and maintenance needs.

**Explore every possible avenue for additional funding to improve frequency and add new regional connections.** As the need for alternatives to single-occupant driving becomes more dire due to climate change, rising traffic deaths, increasing economic disparity, and increasing traffic congestion, transit is one of the alternatives that needs financial support closer to parity with the investment in highways. Ventura County must explore new locally-generated sources of revenues including potential new taxation, innovative approaches such as freeway congestion pricing or some form of tolling, or environmental mitigation fees directed to transit.

## Alternative 1: Partial Consolidation

### *Subregional Demand-Response Consolidation and Increased Agency Coordination*

<b>Consolidation Level</b>	Consolidate East County demand-response services into ECTA as a new, formalized organization. All other agency-cities retain administrative control of fixed-routes.
<b>Key Actions</b>	<p>Formalize ECTA to provide all demand-response type service (including paratransit and expanded dial-a-ride services) in East County on behalf of participating communities. <i>Fixed routes in east county would not necessarily transition to ECTA given the minimal connectivity between the cities today but could be incorporated as an additional step.</i></p> <hr/> <p>Consider additional integration of Camarillo demand response service into Gold Coast or full participation in ECTA.</p> <hr/> <p>Implement a centralized call-taking and dispatching center serving all demand-response operations (paratransit and dial-a-ride).</p> <hr/> <p>Standardize paratransit and DAR rider and operating policies across agencies.</p> <hr/> <p>Utilize TRANSCOM more intentionally and regularly for regional service planning and coordination to maintain connections and expand regional offerings.</p> <hr/> <p>Conduct a comprehensive regional service planning analysis to examine how alterations to all routes could create a network that better serves both the regional travel demand and local circulation.</p> <hr/> <p>Consolidate fixed route operating contracts only (agencies remain independent otherwise), presumably split geographically, with 1-2 entities managing the procurement.</p>
<b>How it improves passenger experience</b>	Moderate improvements for demand-response riders resulting from a centralized call-center. Long-term benefits for fixed-route riders as interagency coordination leads to better route connections. Although it is likely these trips would still be interagency transfers, two further steps reduce the possible friction for riders: More welcoming for all first-time customers with more centralized/regional customer service, unified marketing and web presence. More uniform customer experience through coordination to align rider policies.



<b>How it reduces operating and capital costs</b>	Some cost efficiency from consolidation of east county paratransit and dial-a-ride operations with incremental reduction in administrative redundancy, increased efficiency in dispatching. Better coordination and opportunities by aligning contracts and procurements, providing incremental cost efficiencies. Organizing a central call-center and demand-response reservation system would provide the best regional data on how to chain and share demand-response trips of all types (paratransit, dial-a-ride and other curb-to-curb or point-to-point services). Part of the objective of centralizing this function is to support the ability to provide regional trip-sharing among the various demand-response programs which can and should include other health and human-services (non-emergency) transport and improve vehicle utilization and therefore keep costs down. Such activities are nearly impossible to accomplish without a unified trip taking and assignment function.
<b>How it integrates existing operating systems</b>	Through increased coordination, which can be used as an incremental step towards future consolidation. Formalizes ECTA as an agency based on existing operating experience. Coordination strategies focused on more joint procurements, better route connections.
<b>How it enhances regional service coverage</b>	Relies on coordination activities, better use of TRANSCOM for scheduling and service development, and VCTC to continue its role in advocating for regional service based on analysis of demand. Without additional funding, any changes in frequency or establishment or new routes is unlikely.
<b>How it provides more community-responsive and equitable transit service</b>	<p>Maintains focus on local service and administration. A centralized demand-response reservation system will help develop data to improve efficiency and make service more efficient over time.</p> <p>Due to the less formalized nature of the alternative, concentrated effort would be needed to increase equity and improve regional transit.</p>
<b>Risks and challenges of this approach</b>	Relying primarily on coordination could lead to slow or little change over time, particularly on improving regional connectivity. Relatively low incentive to make big, meaningful change. Harder to ensure and agree to investments in expanding intercity connections as decision-making is still incentivized to protect resources and allocations entirely within city boundaries. Least gain for cost efficiency.
<b>Implementation Complexity</b>	Low. Develop Action Plan to formalize coordination, timeline for activities such as aligning contracts or procurements, align service planning and scheduling activities. Creation of paratransit call center requires agreements and partnerships but technically straightforward. Formalization of ECTA as operating agency likely simplified by TOT continuing as legal/fiscal agent.

### Alternative 1 Further Actions and Study Required

Because this alternative relies primarily on interagency coordination, an additional series of strategies are identified to maximize the benefits. They are:

### **Planning and Resource Sharing:**

- Develop an analysis and action plan of how best to formalize ECTA.
- Conduct an annual day-long transit agency staff “retreat” to collaborate and share knowledge on service planning, operations, funding, etc.
- VCTC as the RTPA takes a more direct role in Countywide service planning coordination by identifying regional travel demand needs and linkages between land use planning and transit.
- Develop a training consortium for common skill sets, such as bus operator training and licensing, maintenance, dispatching, etc.
- Work with labor leadership regularly on how to align union objectives with improved rider outcomes and ensure employee needs are met in TIES strategies.
- Work to combine as many procurements as possible. Combining procurements between cities and/or agencies could require additional effort under Alternative 1 with legal review and sign-off between multiple stakeholders.
- Advocate for permanent change in TDA regulation to remove farebox recovery penalty.
- Advocate jointly for shifts in other state funding towards transit, consistent with statewide policies and goals to reduce VMT and GHG.
- Develop a coordinated countywide ZEB plan that considers cooperative procurement strategies, including joining the CALACT Purchasing Cooperative and ZEBRA working group, and shared charging/hydrogen infrastructure (also has significant financial implications), aligning planned procurements to maximize opportunity for shared training and resources.
- Transition to countywide cooperative purchasing including through CALACT, to make fleet more uniform and simplify availability of parts, transfer of maintenance and sharing of assets (helps with cost efficiency).
- Pursue shifting of VCTC Intercity operations to Gold Coast facility as part of ZEB transition for long-term cost savings.
- Align performance management software for all agencies to produce reports in the same format.
- Provide a common service planning software to all agencies and coordinate service planning tasks between larger and smaller agencies.
- Implement consistent route type classifications and performance metrics while allowing agencies to determine appropriate local performance standards and service design guidelines.
- Increase existing regional route frequency to create a frequent backbone network.
- Design route schedules with common headways and departure times at major transfer points and common endpoints.

### **Marketing, Customer Service and Experience:**

- Develop a standardized rider survey that all operators can use with the ability to add 1-2 customized questions. Survey should hold mostly constant year to year.
- Develop a working definition for equity that addresses both regional and local travel needs, as well as shared goals among agencies.



- Complete a countywide fare study to explore opportunities for simplifying fares, including making sure all fare policies are aligned. Consider exploring free fares, a regional Low Income Fare policy, and fare capping.
- Create a "Safe Routes to Transit" program that uses dedicated ATP funds to improve access to transit.
- Create a Marketing Subcommittee of TRANSCOM to discuss and coordinate marketing strategies and efforts.
- Designate a marketing manager (or integrate with a countywide marketing staff strategy) to manage transit social media and other marketing activities countywide to attract new riders.
- Develop uniform marketing materials and mapping services (potentially through a countywide contract).
- Create a uniform online presence for all agencies (all services use the same web template) with standardized copy for ride guides, fares and passes developed and maintained by a single agency.
- Leverage VCTC staff to support employer/school/institutional partnerships that support all agencies.

## Alternative 2: Moderate Consolidation

### Countywide Paratransit, and Subregional Fixed-Route Consolidation

<p><b>Consolidation Level</b></p>	<p>Consolidate all demand-response (paratransit and dial-a-ride) operations into a new countywide agency. Consolidate fixed-route operations by geography with Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Moorpark, and VCTC East County Route becoming an east county transit agency, and all other services being consolidated with Gold Coast Transit District.</p>
<p><b>Key Actions</b></p>	<p>Shift all paratransit and dial-a-ride services to a new countywide operator with single call/dispatch center. Integrate strategies from the Coordinated Plan where possible.</p> <hr/> <p>Integrate Camarillo Area Transit, VCTC Intercity and Valley Express into Gold Coast Transit District (with the option for Ojai to join the Trolley service). Board would be revised to include representatives from added communities. Alternatively, Camarillo could integrate fully with East County transit agency.</p> <hr/> <p>With consolidated West County/Santa Clara Valley operations, explore a subregional network redesign to enhance connectivity.</p> <hr/> <p>Relocate VCTC Intercity assets and maintenance to Gold Coast facility.</p> <hr/> <p>Consolidate East County fixed route services into an independent subregional transit agency following a JPA or district-model. <i>This could be executed as a later phase; see notes, below.</i></p> <hr/> <p>With consolidated East County operations, explore subregional network redesign to enhance connectivity.</p>
<p><b>How it improves passenger experience</b></p>	<p>Improvements for demand-response riders from single countywide operator, simplifying long-distance trips. Improvements for fixed-routes by providing a better subregional network and a less complex transit network. Subregional agencies would set more consistent customer policies for core services (fixed-route and paratransit), while maintaining local unique service offerings such as general public dial-a-ride or microtransit. Increased operating efficiency could lead to reinvesting in better inter-regional services. More consistent passenger experience across subregions and likely the county at large. More welcoming for first-time customers with more consistent customer service, unified marketing and web presence.</p>



<p><b>How it reduces operating and capital costs</b></p>	<p>Increased administrative and operational efficiency through subregional consolidation; streamlines reporting, procurement, dispatch, planning, and other activities. Improved demand-response efficiency through centralized scheduling and trip assignments and combined contracts. Similar benefits for demand-response scheduling and data management to Alternative 1, with the added direct ability for the regional demand-response agency to operate all trips regardless of geography, meaning single-seat long-distance trips are less likely to be an operational/cost inefficiency. Incremental benefits for fixed route possible through redesign of subregional services to improve fleet utilization, transferability of staff. Cost savings can be reinvested to regional service network.</p>
<p><b>How it integrates existing operating systems</b></p>	<p>Consolidates operating systems logically by region (fixed-route) and service type (demand-response). Fewer points of coordination between transit agencies and other stakeholders, reducing complexity. Builds on existing momentum of subregional coordination between east and west communities.</p>
<p><b>How it enhances regional service coverage</b></p>	<p>Subregions will have best balance of local service planning and opportunity to provide better regional service without requiring complex negotiations. Some localized efficiency gains could support increased subregional services. Still requires coordination for regional (cross-county) connectivity.</p>
<p><b>How it provides more community-responsive and equitable transit service</b></p>	<p>Maximizes subregional responsiveness to needs. Countywide paratransit simplifies services for riders with the greatest need. Better opportunity to address equity sub-regionally but could fall short on improving connectivity for the most isolated and disadvantaged communities. Moderate improvement to serving regional travel demand by simplifying number of agencies planning routes and coordinating transfers or jointly operating cross-county routes.</p>
<p><b>Risks and challenges of this approach</b></p>	<p>Significant fiscal impact for cities currently flexing TDA funds for streets, especially for those integrating into Gold Coast Transit. Consolidation requires substantial negotiation and risks of labor agreements, fiscal liabilities. Potentially significant up-front costs to establish a new independent operator for demand-response and transition East County administration into a single agency. Could require substantial payouts or require a lengthy transition for staff if labor agreements and benefits are substantially imbalanced between the existing agencies and the future entity. Simplifies coordination and administration of transit networks but splits planning and balance between fixed-route and demand-response into separate agencies, creating a new point of coordination.</p>

### **Implementation Complexity**

Moderate. Formalizing east county consolidation requires more substantial action to create a separate agency and transfer activities from individual cities. Alternatively, TOT could continue as the fiscal agent. Negotiation and resolution of fiscal impacts to cities will be challenging, especially to ensure an agreement that sufficiently funds the demand-response needs at the regional level that exist today and provides the support a separate agency would require to be successful. West county consolidation relatively more simple rolling operations into GCTD, besides no longer allowing TDA funding to be used for streets and roads. Creation of new county demand-response operator similar complexity to east county fixed-route agency; requires more negotiation to bring all partners together.

### **Alternative 2 Further Actions and Study Required**

Alternative 2 is intended to achieve improvements for riders and administrative efficiency by further building on the success of subregional coordination. This reduces the points of interagency coordination which should make it easier to improve a regional network and have great benefits for riders. This alternative will require negotiation between cities to share funding that is currently dedicated solely to local service for a subregional agency to operate on their behalf. TDA funding will be a challenge to address. To ease the transition, reapportioning the funds back to the cities that use TDA for streets and roads for a short term could be considered while developing a new plan to fill the municipal funding gap.

Similarly, there is uncertainty about how VCTC, which would remain in its role as the RTPA and transportation commission, would continue to fund its regional planning activities if it were no longer the direct recipient of FTA funds. Presumably, agreements can be made with FTA, GCTD, and VCTC, to retain this funding either directly to VCTC or in a pass-through arrangement from GCTD. This requires further investigation and discussion with FTA.

As noted above, consolidation of east county fixed-route services could be accomplished as a later phase of this alternative. Although east county fixed-routes are already partly integrated under operating agreements with the City of Thousand Oaks, going a step further to integrate Simi Valley Transit faces some labor and financial challenges given the differences in cost models. Furthermore, consolidation of the fleet is illogical as no city has a centralized transit facility that could support the region, meaning most of the operations would continue as they are, even with administrative integration. An interim step could be to comprehensively reexamine all services in the east county and develop a joint service planning model and integrated rider policies to improve intercommunity circulation and connectivity, without consolidation.

Other strategies for Alternative 2 include:

#### **Planning and Resource Sharing:**



- Conduct a study and operational analysis of how best to implement the countywide paratransit agency. Develop an analysis and action plan of how best to integrate other west county operators into Gold Coast Transit.
- Maintain TRANSCOM as a function of VCTC (neutral party) to coordinate between regional transportation planning, fixed-route and demand-response agencies, with a focus on regional service coordination. This would become the core point of regular, public coordination between the three resulting agencies, in addition to direct staff coordination on administrative matters.
- VCTC as the RTPA takes a more direct role in Countywide service planning coordination by identifying regional travel demand needs and linkages between land use planning and transit.
- Work with labor leadership regularly on how to align union objectives with improved rider outcomes and ensure employee needs are met in TIES strategies.
- Advocate for permanent change in TDA regulation to remove farebox recovery penalty.
- Advocate jointly for shifts in other state funding towards transit, consistent with statewide policies and goals to reduce VMT and GHG.
- Align performance management software for all agencies to produce reports in the same format
- Coordinate technologies between the remaining operators and to maximize efficiency in purchasing and deployment of new technology.
- Collaborate between east and west county to improve timed connections between Intercity routes and redesigned local/subregional services.

#### **Marketing, Customer Service and Experience:**

- Develop a standardized rider survey that all operators can use with the ability to add 1-2 customized questions. Survey should hold mostly constant year to year.
- Develop a working definition for equity that addresses both regional and local travel needs, as well as shared goals among agencies.
- Create a "Safe Routes to Transit" program that uses dedicated ATP funds to improve access to transit.
- Utilize LCTOP and new state funding sources to support countywide free or subsidized fares programs to increase ridership.
- Develop uniform marketing materials and mapping services (potentially through a countywide contract). Consider designating a social media manager (or integrate with a countywide marketing staff strategy) to manage transit social media countywide.
- Cooperatively fund and fill a countywide role (and possibly attach to TMA activities) for transit marketing and communications with specific, countywide goals for promoting transit.
- Create a uniform online presence for all agencies (all services use the same web template) with standardized copy for ride guides, fares and passes developed and maintained by a single agency.
- Leverage VCTC staff to support employer/school/institutional partnerships that support all agencies.

## Alternative 3: Full Consolidation

<b>Consolidation Level</b>	Consolidate all transit operations into Gold Coast Transit District. VCTC remains with only RTPA/Transportation Commission functions.
<b>Key Actions</b>	<p>Consolidate all transit operations in the County into Gold Coast Transit District.</p> <p>Restructure the Board of GCTD to reflect the expanded regional scope. Consider how the governing structure and voting procedures can be revised to ensure service is provided where it is needed and there is an appropriate representation of the people and communities served.</p> <p>With all operations consolidated, explore countywide network redesign to enhance connectivity by providing a frequent backbone subregional network.</p> <p>Integrate consolidated demand response actions with the Coordinated Services Plan.</p> <p>Develop subregional service councils for local service advisory; similar function to TRANSCOM. Maintain VCTC presence at all to provide linkage between regional planning and local travel demand.</p> <p>Conduct a comprehensive regional travel demand analysis with VCTC in combination with a countywide service planning study to examine a regional restructuring of service; in combination with demand-response strategies.</p>
<b>How it improves passenger experience</b>	<p>Improvements for demand-response riders from single countywide operator, simplifying long-distance trips. Improvements for fixed-routes by providing a better regional and subregional network. Consistent passenger experience across the county. More welcoming for first-time customers with more consistent customer service, unified marketing and web presence.</p>
<b>How it reduces operating and capital costs</b>	<p>Maximum administrative efficiency through consolidation; streamlines reporting, procurement, dispatch, planning, and other activities. Improved demand-response efficiency through centralized scheduling trip assignments and consolidated contract. Incremental benefits for fixed route possible through redesign of subregional services to improve fleet utilization, transferability of staff. Cost savings can be reinvested to regional service network.</p>
<b>How it integrates existing operating systems</b>	<p>Consolidates operation to county level, maximizing benefits of specialized transit agency. Coordination shifts from interagency to agency-community.</p>
<b>How it enhances regional service coverage</b>	<p>Countywide agency will be able to comprehensively plan a route network that serves local needs and easily coordinate schedules and transfers within a single system. Reinvestment from efficiency gains should bolster regional lines.</p>



<b>How it provides more community-responsive and equitable transit service</b>	Countywide paratransit simplifies service for riders with the greatest need. A single agency has the best ability to analyze and act on regional equity needs to improve connectivity for disadvantaged communities. Greatest potential to meet regional travel demand.
<b>Risks and challenges of this approach</b>	Significant fiscal impact for cities currently flexing TDA funds for streets. Concern among subregions about redistribution of resources out of one region to the other. Consolidation requires substantial negotiation, risks around labor agreements and fiscal liabilities. Can be harder to implement locally-specific microtransit and flex services as is done now. Harder to create locally-specific rider or service policies as is done now.
<b>Implementation Complexity</b>	High. Although GCTD is legislatively appropriate for consolidation of all county services, negotiation with incoming cities, alterations to Board and fiscal impacts to cities will be challenging to resolve. Although the agency would have countywide role, geography demands existing operating bases remain in place in near-term, meaning a unified agency culture will take time to develop.

### Alternative 3 Further Actions and Study Required

Alternative 3 relies on formation of a countywide transit agency. This alternative requires further study and analysis before implementing. Improvements to the route network and providing a more uniform and higher quality passenger experience to attract more riders would be less complicated and easier for a single transit agency. A single transit agency should maximize efficient use of funding and resources and allow for more robust transit services. This Alternative has similar financial risks, for the most part, as Alternative 2, because all TDA funds would be required to be used for transit. In the short term, the resulting agency could develop agreements with the five cities affected to offer a funding return to fill the gap for streets and roads while a new funding plan is developed.

Other strategies and actions include:

- A series of more detailed assessments would be required based on the structure of consolidation and the desired outcomes. For example:
  - Effects of unifying fares across all agencies: more detailed data from the agencies on revenues by fare type to estimate the effects of a uniform fare program that could raise or lower fares by jurisdiction compared to the status quo.
  - Consolidation of operating contracts: more detailed analysis of time spent procuring, administering, and reporting for contract operations; isolating contracting costs from external variables.
  - Analysis of specific staff positions at cities, if any, to be consolidated to GCTD and determining fit within existing organizational structure.
  - Opportunity cost of continuing to pursue zero emissions fleet transition independently.

- VCTC supports countywide short/long-range service planning coordination by identifying regional travel demand needs and linkages between land use planning and transit; general bus service planning conducted exclusively by GCTD.
- Work with labor leadership regularly on how to align union objectives with improved rider outcomes and ensure employee needs are met in TIES strategies.
- Advocate for permanent change in TDA regulation to remove farebox recovery penalty. Analysis suggests that a Countywide agency could insulate underperforming routes from farebox penalty, reducing financial risk to cities compared with existing conditions.
- Begin identifying contracted tech (software, leased equipment) renewal dates and phase out, if not done in earlier alternatives. Anticipate initial cost increase when consolidation requires replacing existing hardware to unify systems.
- Design subregional schedules with timed connections to regional routes; where possible, identify segments of local and regional routes that could be combined for improved efficiency and redirect revenue hours to improve frequencies or extend coverage.
- Increase existing regional route frequency to create a frequent backbone network.
- Standardize rider surveying across county, measure at regular intervals, and incorporate feedback into planning and operations procedures.
- Develop a working definition for transit equity for the county that addresses both local and regional travel needs and initiatives to improve transit experience support those who need it most.
- Create a "Safe Routes to Transit" program that uses dedicated ATP funds to improve access to transit; under consolidation, this would be a partnership with VCTC and GCTD.
- Utilize LCTOP and new state funding sources to support countywide free or subsidized fares to increase ridership.
- Develop or expand staff positions focused on marketing, promotions, and institutional/business partnerships. Role/group should be shared with local government coordination.
- Develop agency policy and culture around marketing/promotion in service of attracting ridership.



## Other Alternatives to Consider

The three alternatives discussed are not the only viable outcomes. They were organized along the spectrum from independent agencies collaborating with one another to a full administrative and operational consolidation into a single agency. Transit integration is always a spectrum, and the best outcome for Ventura County will be influenced by public input in reaction to this study and discussion or direction from Commissioners, city and county leadership, and staff recommendations.

Other means of integrating systems could include:

- **Expanding contractual agreements to operate service:** Certain cities could seek an existing subregional operator (such as GCTD or TOT) to take on the administration and/or operation of their service without fully ceding oversight. This is similar to Moorpark's agreements with the City of Thousand Oaks and could be extended to Simi Valley and/or Camarillo. Likewise, Camarillo could consider contracting operations with GCTD. This approach was not examined in detail because it does not offer clear benefits over the alternatives presented but has no apparent drawbacks for regional integration either.
- **Contracting of specific functions with a regional agency:** Cities and agencies could form agreements with VCTC, for example, to oversee transit marketing, rider surveying, procurement, or other functions. Some examples of these activities have already occurred at various times typically on a project-by-project basis or as grant funds are available. This is partly captured by Alternative 1.
- **Consolidation of core services with locally-specific programs set aside:** Cities with specialized local transportation programs such as the recent Moorpark microtransit service could retain direct control of such programs while still proceeding with consolidation of other demand-response and/or fixed-route service. The microtransit service is already a model for this approach; while Thousand Oaks operates most of Moorpark's service, the microtransit is contracted and administered directly by the City of Moorpark. The City of Ventura also operates certain local transportation programs independently of GCTD, using TDA funds set-aside for this purpose.
- **Consolidation to VCTC, rather than Gold Coast:** As mentioned briefly earlier, another approach to Alternative 3 would be to consolidate all transit services to VCTC. GCTD was chosen as the most logical avenue for full consolidation as the agency is already legislatively empowered to take on other transit providers in the County and has the infrastructure and expertise to do so. VCTC, on the other hand, is a relatively small agency with a primarily planning focus and transit operations which, while planned directly, are entirely contracted out for operation. However, there are some merits to the idea of VCTC being the unified service provider. First, the agency already has a truly regional focus and a corresponding regional governing board. Secondly, VCTC's role as the RTPA offers the most comprehensive access to funding and the direct mandate to consider public transit within the broader context of the surface transportation program including highways and regional active transportation. Although GCTD would naturally have to take on a more regional view and its board makeup would change, it would not take on the regional transportation infrastructure and operations role that VCTC has. As California transitions more

policy and funding programs to manage climate change and congestion by lessening the focus on highway expansion, VCTC is better poised to directly support those funding choices with the linkage to regional transit. However, the fact remains that it would be a much more substantial investment of time and cost to scale up VCTC as an agency to operate all transit than it would to rely on GCTD.



# Financial Risk Comparison of Alternatives

Each alternative has different implications on the long-term cost efficiency, and initial or one-time transition costs that are based on the approach taken. This section addresses the most likely factors relevant to Ventura County. First, **total operating costs** vary depending on the type of service and the agency operating, although the overall operating cost range is relatively narrow between the alternatives. Secondly, the **TDA funding availability** differs in each scenario depending on the level and form of service consolidation; more TDA to transit is a benefit for expanding transit offerings but creates a revenue gap for several cities in alternatives 2 or 3<sup>2</sup>. Thirdly, each alternative has some **initial or transition costs** related to transitioning staff and administrative functions or expanding one agency's capability to serve a more regional function.

This high-level analysis uses data available as reported by agencies directly to the National Transit Database or as part of TDA triennial performance audits (TPAs) conducted by a consultant under contract by VCTC, which are functionally an audit of the transit operations in Ventura County. Although these are the best data sources available to provide a comparison, they are far from perfect. An issue affecting transit agencies nationwide is inconsistency in allocating and reporting costs; for example, independent

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<sup>2</sup> TDA funding is the focus of this review because, as described in Chapter 3, FTA formula grants are assessed differently than TDA and cannot be used for any other activity, unlike TDA which has a set-aside for road maintenance under specific circumstances.

transit agencies generally report fully-loaded costs, while city-operated transit service sometimes under-report costs because their transit operation overhead is shared with other city functions.

## Operating Cost Assumptions by Alternative

Operating expenses for transit service vary somewhat by alternative based on the transition of some services from one agency to another. Unfortunately, transit operator (whether city department or independent agency) operational cost allocations are not standardized, which leads to uncertainty in why two seemingly similar transit operations have significantly different cost metrics. At a high level, whether examining NTD data or TPA reports, the countywide annual expense for operating transit is approximately \$53 million. Based on the best information available, the total expense was calculated for each Alternative using the following assumptions:

- Alternative 1, in which ECTA would evolve to directly offer all demand-response service in Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, Moorpark, and unincorporated County communities:
  - Since Thousand Oaks already operates all of this service except Simi Valley's paratransit, there is an assumed reduction in cost by allocating all of SVT's demand-response revenue hours to TOT and operate through TOT's operating contract. The actual resulting cost is likely to be higher than TOT's current operating rate, which could increase somewhat as a result of the expansion and taking on a new geographic area.
  - There are no other major changes assumed in operations around the county.
- Alternative 2, in which a new countywide demand-response agency is formed and fixed-route services are consolidated into two agencies (GCTD for the west and Santa Clara Valley communities, TOT to operate all routes on behalf of Moorpark, Simi Valley, and the County):
  - A new demand-response agency assumes all related revenue hours, and a cost per revenue hour assumption of \$93 is based on average costs across California from agencies serving urbanized areas up to 1 million in population (this assumption is also consistent with the average of the providers in Ventura County). For a more conservative estimate, a cost of \$100 per revenue hour was ultimately used. The assumptions for Alternative 2, consistent with the other alternatives, are that the existing demand and service levels are maintained (as in, no new services implemented or existing services cancelled as a result of a countywide paratransit operation), but the total demand-response program becomes marginally more efficient by increasing the potential for shared rides between programs and allowing vehicles to directly serve not only inter-city trips but local trips wherever is needed, rather than remaining idle or deadheading.
  - All fixed-route revenue hours for Ojai Trolley, CAT, and Valley Express would operate based on GCTD's fixed-route cost per revenue hour. VCTC's Intercity routes are incorporated with GCTD but using a higher operating rate due to the nature of express bus service. VCTC's East County Route is shifted to TOT.
  - All fixed-route revenue hours for the County (Kanan Shuttle), MCT, and SVT would operate based on TOT's fixed-route cost per revenue hour. VCTC's East County Route is also assumed under TOT using the higher operating rate as above.



- These assumptions in the near-term would result in an estimated increase in total costs at the County level of approximately \$2 million, primarily due to increases in costs for GCTD operating Ojai, Camarillo, and Valley Express service and TOT operating Moorpark service. More assessment is needed before this alternative can be recommended since Ojai, Camarillo, and Moorpark may have varying degrees of understated cost per revenue hour assumptions (particularly Camarillo, which is an outlier for cost per revenue hour by a significant margin<sup>3</sup>).
- Also, the effects of consolidating these agencies on the average cost per revenue hour is impossible to predict. As service contracts are renewed (regardless of consolidation), costs go up; in recent years, cost escalations have been substantial and even triggered mid-contract reviews and renegotiation. Consolidating contracts could help offset some of the cost increases through economies of scale and greater flexibility for the vendor.
- Alternative 3, in which all fixed-route and demand-response service would be consolidated into GCTD using GCTD’s blended operating cost per revenue hour except for the Intercity routes, as noted above.
  - The cost is presented as a low-high range for this alternative because of the variability in an established agency taking over such a wide range of services that are all geographically distinct.
  - Initially it is possible that the operating cost per revenue hour would be greater than GCTD’s existing (even accounting for taking on the Intercity services at a higher rate per hour), as the transition period could require some learning and adaptation until a more regional network is developed and administrative functions are fully transitioned.
  - However, the total cost is expected to be slightly lower than the existing cost based on reduced operating costs for some of the most expensive operations transitioning to GCTD and would be supported additionally by overall administrative efficiency gains. As noted earlier, overall costs have continued to rise for all goods and services following the pandemic, and these assumptions and estimated outcomes are based on increased *efficiency* rather than reduced actual costs.

The following tables are divided roughly by east and west county for legibility. The tables show the 2019 NTD metrics, compared with the TDA data for the closest comparable period from the 2020 TPA reports.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the most recent NTD metrics, Camarillo is one of only two agencies serving a UZA up to 2 million population reporting revenue cost per hour this low (\$52). The next highest is \$63 per hour, and the average across all agencies in that category is \$108.

<b>NTD Data</b>	<b>GCTD</b>	<b>Ojai</b>	<b>Camarillo</b>	<b>Valley Express</b>	<b>VCTC</b>
Fixed Route Expense	\$21,052,979	\$911,834	\$277,569	\$456,551	\$8,652,890
DR Expense	\$3,507,119	-	\$1,726,269	\$1,137,497	-
<b>Expense Total</b>	<b>\$24,560,098</b>	<b>\$911,834</b>	<b>\$2,003,838</b>	<b>\$1,594,048</b>	<b>\$8,652,890</b>
FR Hours	201,431	8,041	5,325	6,481	66,419
DR Hours	50,704	-	28,280	15,434	-
<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>252,135</b>	<b>8,041</b>	<b>33,605</b>	<b>21,915</b>	<b>66,419</b>
FR Cost per Hour	\$104.52	\$113.40	\$52.13	\$70.44	\$130.28
DR Cost Per Hour	\$69.17	-	\$61.04	\$73.70	-
<b>TPA (TDA) Data</b>					
FR Operating Cost	\$21,052,979	\$709,780	\$145,192	\$424,792	\$9,965,179
DR Operating Cost	\$3,507,119		\$1,274,521	\$1,012,595	
<b>Total Operating Cost</b>	<b>\$24,560,098</b>	<b>\$709,780</b>	<b>\$2,359,867</b>	<b>\$1,634,190</b>	<b>\$9,965,179</b>
FR Hours	201,430	8,041	5,389	6,480	66,418
DR Hours	50,227		19,652	15,436	
<b>Total Hours (VSH)</b>	<b>251,657</b>	<b>8,041</b>	<b>33,669</b>	<b>21,916</b>	<b>66,418</b>
FR Operating Cost/VSH	\$104.52	\$88.27	\$26.94	\$65.55	\$150.04
DR Operating Cost/VSH	\$69.83	-	\$64.85	\$65.60	-
<b>Blended Operating Cost/VSH</b>	<b>\$97.59</b>	<b>\$88.27</b>	<b>\$70.09</b>	<b>\$74.57</b>	<b>\$150.04</b>
<b>Forecast Estimates</b>					
Existing (rounded)	\$24,560,000	\$710,000	\$2,360,000	\$1,634,000	\$9,965,000
<b>Alternative 1</b>	<b>\$24,560,000</b>	<b>\$710,000</b>	<b>\$2,360,000</b>	<b>\$1,634,000</b>	<b>\$9,965,000</b>
<b>Alternative 2</b>	<b>\$30,920,000</b>	<i>&lt;- Consolidated to GCTD, paratransit service to Countywide (see next page)</i>			
<b>Alternative 3 LOW</b>	<b>\$48,027,000</b>				
<b>Alternative 3 HIGH</b>	<b>\$52,258,000</b>				



NTD Data	County	Moorpark	Simi Valley	TOT	County-wide DR	TOTAL
Fixed Route Expense	\$362,236	\$819,532	\$3,983,229	\$3,360,127		
DR Expense	-	-	\$3,207,494	\$3,837,820		
<b>Expense Total</b>	<b>\$362,236</b>	<b>\$819,532</b>	<b>\$7,190,723</b>	<b>\$7,197,947</b>		<b>\$53,293,146</b>
FR Hours	4,828	5,782	26,727	21,765		346,799
DR Hours	-	-	17,226	39,008		150,652
<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>4,828</b>	<b>5,782</b>	<b>43,953</b>	<b>60,773</b>		<b>497,451</b>
FR Cost per Hour	\$75.03	\$141.74	\$149.03	\$154.38		
DR Cost Per Hour	-	-	\$186.20	\$98.39		
<b>TPA (TDA) Data</b>						
FR Operating Cost	\$412,360	\$511,694	\$3,983,139	\$2,861,911		
DR Operating Cost		\$251,972	\$3,587,308	\$2,306,029		
<b>Total Operating Cost</b>	<b>\$412,360</b>	<b>\$1,221,985</b>	<b>\$7,570,447</b>	<b>\$5,167,940</b>		<b>\$53,601,846</b>
FR Hours	4,828	5,782	26,727	21,765		346,860
DR Hours		3,426	17,226	30,655		136,622
<b>Total Hours (VSH)</b>	<b>4,828</b>	<b>9,208</b>	<b>43,953</b>	<b>52,420</b>		<b>492,110</b>
FR Operating Cost/VSH	\$85.41	\$88.50	\$149.03	\$131.49		
DR Operating Cost/VSH	-	\$73.55	\$208.25	\$75.23		
<b>Blended Operating Cost/VSH</b>	<b>\$85.41</b>	<b>\$132.71</b>	<b>\$172.24</b>	<b>\$98.59</b>		
<b>Forecast Estimates</b>						
Existing (rounded)	\$412,000	\$1,222,000	\$7,570,000	\$5,168,000		\$53,601,000
<b>Alternative 1</b>	<b>\$412,000</b>	<b>\$820,000</b>	<b>\$3,983,000</b>	<b>\$6,721,000</b>		<b>\$51,165,000</b>
<b>Alternative 2</b>				<b>\$8,413,000</b>	<b>\$12,706,000</b>	<b>\$55,546,000</b>
<b>Alternative 3 LOW</b>	<i>Consolidated with GCTD (See previous)</i>					<b>\$48,027,000</b>
<b>Alternative 3 HIGH</b>	<i>Consolidated with GCTD (See previous)</i>					<b>\$52,258,000</b>

#### Operating Cost Notes

1. To the extent possible, NTD data and TDA data were provided to verify that high level cost assumptions hold between agencies regardless of reporting mechanism.
2. There are slight differences for most reporters between the NTD and TPA data for total expenses and revenue hours that could relate to different reporting periods or assumptions.
3. Moorpark DR service is reported under TOT to NTD, but are reported separately for TDA purposes
4. Camarillo's NTD and TPA reports are difficult to align. There are historic issues with Camarillo's TPA reports that required using older data (2015) to separate fixed-route and demand-response hours and costs, which do not add up to the most recent (2019) TPA total, and these numbers are somewhat different still from the NTD data.
5. TPA data and operating cost metrics are used to calculate forecast estimates.

## TDA Funding Transitions by Alternative

In terms of revenue, TDA transitions vary based on not only the transit operations consolidated, but also what form the consolidation takes. In the case of Alternative 1, only demand response in east County transitions to ECTA with an expanded agreement between the partner cities for Thousand Oaks to directly operate service. Such a transition requires no change to TDA funding allocations for streets and roads; however, TDA funds currently supporting demand response in the participating communities would need to flow ultimately to TOT. ECTA operation of east county demand response is primarily for administrative and contract efficiency, so there is no reason to expect the level of service operated would change other than already anticipated growth.

In Alternative 2, with fixed-route services transitioning to GCTD (Ojai Trolley, Valley Express, most VCTC Intercity routes, and CAT), the communities of Santa Paula, Fillmore, and Camarillo would face the loss of funds currently used for street maintenance to GCTD. This would be a substantial increase in TDA funding for transit in the west County and could support increased service connectivity between the affected communities. There is currently no source identified to backfill the street maintenance budgets for the affected communities. However, with more efficient administration and potentially lower operating costs, an agreement between GCTD and the affected communities could be brokered to shift back some funds for streets and roads on a transitional basis. This possible strategy requires further exploration.

For communities in the east County transitioning fixed route services to a single operator (TOT), a JPA structure would allow for administrative and operational efficiency gains without requiring the communities to transition TDA funding entirely to transit. This would allow the communities of Moorpark and Thousand Oaks to maintain TDA funds for street maintenance until such time as they agree to allocate more funds to transit for expanded service and develop another solution for the street maintenance revenue. This would be similar to the governance and cost sharing structure of Gold Coast Transit prior to the formation of the current District.

Under Alternative 3, all TDA funding would be allocated to GCTD for transit, negatively affecting street maintenance budgets for Santa Paula, Fillmore, Camarillo, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks. This alternative is the most likely to result in administrative and operational cost efficiencies by shifting to a single transit agency model; coupled with an increase in TDA funding availability, service levels could be expanded as described earlier.



The table below shows the presumed TDA funding effects to cities based on each alternative's assumptions.

TDA Allocations (\$)	Transit	Streets and Roads	Total FY18/19 <sup>4</sup>	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
City of Camarillo	-	2,382,314	2,391,084	No change	TDA to GCTD	TDA to GCTD
City of Fillmore	337,584	215,289	562,520	No change	TDA to GCTD	TDA to GCTD
City of Moorpark	680,000	603,811	1,819,775	No change	No change required	TDA to GCTD
City of Ojai	-	-	797			
City of Oxnard	-	-	5,063			
City of Port Hueneme	-	-	10,165			
City of San Buenaventura	-	-	64,180			
City of Santa Paula	322,494	756,636	1,085,110	No change	TDA to GCTD	TDA to GCTD
City of Simi Valley	4,462,355	-	4,650,042	No change	No change required	TDA to GCTD
City of Thousand Oaks	3,512,121	1,000,000	4,518,101	No change	No change required	TDA to GCTD
County of Ventura	-	-	37,902			
Gold Coast Transit	15,499,751	-	15,499,751			
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,814,305</b>	<b>4,958,050</b>	<b>30,644,490</b>			

<sup>4</sup> The Total FY18/19 column is greater than the sum of transit+streets, as there are some funds set aside for bicycle/pedestrian programs, which is not shown here.

## Initial/Transition Cost Implications by Alternative

Alternative 1 Actions	Transition Cost Implications
Formalize ECTA to provide all demand-response type service in East County.	Staff operating SVT service are direct employees of the City; potential startup costs for staff transitions (or payouts/early retirement) to ECTA. One-time cost. Unknown one-time costs to transition administrative/back-end functions; because any receiving agency would already have the backend system setup, this should be an incremental cost to expand the service area and roll-in agencies from the other system(s).
Consider additional integration of Camarillo demand response service into Gold Coast	This is a contract transition (currently CAT and GCTD demand response services are separately contracted) which would incur only marginal transition costs. Marginal startup costs to transition administrative/back-end functions.
Implement a centralized call-taking and dispatching center serving all demand-response operations.	Marginal costs by expanding an existing call/scheduling center (presumably hosted by GCTD) with startup costs to transition administrative/back-end functions and early monitoring and support. Startup costs could be spread over time by phased transition as contracts are renewed.
Standardize paratransit and DAR rider and operating policies across agencies	Marginal cost of staff time to assess and develop agreements. Marginal costs for updating materials, publicizing changes, etc.
Utilize TRANSCOM more intentionally and regularly for regional service planning and coordination to maintain connections and expand regional offerings.	Marginal cost of staff time.
Conduct a comprehensive regional service planning analysis to examine how alterations to all routes could create a network that better serves both the regional travel demand and local circulation.	One-time service planning study cost.
Consolidate operating contracts only (agencies remain independent otherwise), presumably split geographically, with 1-2 entities managing the procurement	Marginal cost of staff time to negotiate shared procurement and oversight.



## Alternative 2 Actions

## Transition Cost Implications

**Consolidate East County fixed route services into an independent subregional transit agency following a JPA or district-model. Assumes TOT continues as fiscal agent.**

Startup costs for staff transitions (or payouts/early retirement) to TOT. Potentially major one-time cost. Marginal startup costs to transition administrative/back-end functions, although greater than Alternative 1. One-time costs for rebranding services for regional identity, if desired. Anticipate increase in administrative time over first 1-2 years adapting to expanded service area.

With consolidated East County operations, explore subregional network redesign to enhance connectivity.

One-time service planning study cost.

**Integrate Camarillo Area Transit, VCTC Intercity and Valley Express into Gold Coast Transit District. Board would be revised to include representatives from added communities.**

Startup costs for staff transitions limited to administrative and planning functions (likely limited to VCTC). Operating staff for CAT, VCTC and Valley Express are contracted, so transition should be managed through contract renewal process. Unknown costs for negotiation and evaluation between communities and GCTD to agree to join operations, revise board structure. One-time costs to rebrand CAT, Valley Express public facing materials and transition to GCTD. Anticipate moderately increased administrative time over first 1-3 years adapting to expanded service area (building relationships, improving efficiency, monitoring performance).

With consolidated West County/Santa Clara Valley operations, explore a subregional network redesign to enhance connectivity.

One-time service planning study cost.

**Shift all paratransit and dial-a-ride services to a new countywide operator with single call/dispatch center. Integrate strategies from the Coordinated Plan where possible.**

Substantial startup costs to establish new agency, transition or hire new administrative staff, procure new operating contract, transition fleet vehicles, new administrative space, transition backend system from an existing operator and set up new licenses, develop new brand and public facing materials. Cost savings could be achieved by spinning off the new agency as an extension "under an existing roof" (for example, administrative functions and call center shared with GCTD initially).

Relocate VCTC Intercity assets and maintenance to Gold Coast facility.	Expected to be a marginal cost; although additional support staff at GCTD are likely to be needed, would be a transition of expense from existing contract.
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Alternative 3 Actions	Transition Cost Implications
<b>Consolidate all transit operations in the County into Gold Coast Transit District.</b>	Startup costs for staff transitions, particularly from Ojai, SVT, VCTC. Moderate to significant one-time transition costs for administrative functions, backend systems, reporting. One-time costs for rebranding services countywide (could be deferred). Anticipate significantly increased administrative time over first few years adapting to expanded service area (building relationships, improving efficiency, monitoring performance).
With all operations consolidated, explore countywide network redesign to enhance connectivity by providing a frequent backbone subregional network.	One-time service planning study cost.
Integrate consolidated demand response actions with the Coordinated Services Plan.	Cost incurred over time as part of service planning activities.
Develop subregional service councils for local service advisory; similar function to TRANSCOM. Maintain VCTC presence to provide linkage between regional planning and local travel demand.	Cost incurred over time as part of regular functions.



# 6

## Transition and Governance

This section briefly reviews governance considerations and integration implementation timelines and activities for each alternative.

Implementing any actions from the TIES study (perhaps other than purely administrative strategies) should entail a thorough public process. TIES has laid the groundwork for what ideas have the most merit for the county, and the next steps are:

1. Consideration of the alternatives and adopting a preferred alternative by the Ventura County Transportation Commission
2. Public review at the City committee and council level of the alternatives and engagement with front-line staff
3. Development of steering committees (depending on the alternative chosen) to evaluate and negotiate details on policy and technical execution
4. Transition of contracts, assets, information, systems, and branding

For consolidation efforts in Alternative 2 and 3, stakeholders should be aware that these processes can often take years even after a particular path is agreed to in principle. For example, in Butte County, California, after policy boards agreed to consolidation it was another 3-4 years of negotiation and work

before a full agreement and implementation plan were prepared for the participating agencies, and another 1-2 years before the transition was complete<sup>5</sup>.

## Alternative 1

Because Alternative 1 relies primarily on formalizing coordination, most of the recommended actions will likely play out over time as staff availability allows (which is largely the reason this alternative has a higher risk of only incremental progress over time).

1. Agencies begin implementing activities that do not require agreements, such as:
  - a. Utilizing TRANSCOM formally for regional service analysis and planning
  - b. Developing regional rider surveys
  - c. Coordinating rider policies and fares
  - d. Coordinating transit service marketing materials, copy, media
  - e. Transition towards uniform technologies
  - f. Begin jointly procuring equipment, vehicles, technologies
2. Formalizing ECTA operation of all demand-response in East County would likely require up to a year of negotiation to develop legal agreements, and potentially another 1-2 years to transition operating contracts, expand or align customer and fleet databases, and other startup activities. Likely completion of transition by 2025 depending on existing contracts. This may require relying on existing contract extensions or renegotiated interim agreements.
  - a. Camarillo base contract expires in 2023
  - b. Moorpark base contract expires in 2023
  - c. Simi Valley is directly operated
  - d. Thousand Oaks base contract expires in 2023
3. Implementation of a centralized demand-response call center would occur simultaneously. This activity could take up to a year of negotiation and structuring between the partners, plus another 6-12 months to execute and get up and running. This is best to accomplish simultaneously with the ECTA consolidation to transition all back-end customer and operations management once.
4. During the establishment of the operational elements, agencies should also negotiate standardized customer policies and a regional fare rate (to include all various demand-response programs). Although not impossible to operate a centralized call center with differing fares and policies between brokered programs, it seems logical to have this in place for the transition.
5. Consolidating fixed-route operating contracts, where it makes sense, would also happen as contracts come up for renewal. Given the focus of this alternative on demand-response integration and efficiency, this is a lower priority with less clear benefits as a strategy without

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to TCRP Report 173: Improving Transit Integration Among Multiple Providers. Volume 1 provides a summary of Butte County's experience, while Volume 2 offers a much more detailed case study. Other recent examples can be found in Stanislaus County which began its integration study in 2018 and was formally adopted in 2021, with particular aspects of the consolidation implemented over the course of 2021 and 2022.



other agency integration. There is some possible overlap in contracts between demand-response and fixed-routes and, where possible, this item and #2 should be coordinated.

Alternative 1 as written relies heavily on TRANSCOM as the forum for agencies agreeing to, and implementing, change among otherwise independent operations. The Citizens Technical Advisory Committee (CTAC) and other rider and public engagement should be leveraged to hold staff and officials accountable for the commitments to advance the TIES strategies.

## Alternative 2

Alternative 2 could lead to greater changes sooner than Alternative 1, but still has an overall implementation period of at least 2-3 years due to the formation of an entirely new agency to operate all demand-response services in the county, which requires agreements among all of the cities to participate in the new agency and allocate funding accordingly. However, fixed-route integration and improvements are likely able to begin within a year or so, depending on contract renewals.

1. Begin integration of agencies to GCTD (west county) or East County Transit, negotiating funding and representation structures.
  - a. Consider setting up two taskforce/steering committees, one to address policy level and interagency agreements at the city leadership/CEO level. The second, made up primarily of staff, would focus on technical analyses including cost analyses and budgets, legal documents, and implementation timelines. Note that this process would need to incorporate Ventura LAFCO.
  - b. This process should have an agreed-upon timeline for delivery at the start and should be a focused effort no more than a year.
  - c. Evaluate staffing roles and responsibilities between agencies based on FTE allocation to various programs (administration, payroll, HR, dispatching, etc.)
2. Parallel with this effort would be preparing to transition demand-response service to a new, separate agency. These discussions are integral because it involves developing funding agreements from the constituent communities and establishing a separate legal entity. However, establishing a completely new agency could take additional time, and the lead time to get the new operation fully up and running could easily extend to 2 years, depending on how long negotiations take.
  - a. The countywide demand-response agency would follow a similar set of strategies to alternative 1 for creation of a countywide call and scheduling center.
  - b. During the development of the countywide demand-response agency, a similar process to alternative 1 is required to create rider and service policies that are uniform (by service type, if not geography); however, unique local services such as a general public dial-a-ride in a particular community are not assumed to be discontinued or substantially altered.

Alternative 2 recommends formation of an independent East County fixed-route transit provider, which is most beneficial to be structured as a JPA. Although the current arrangement of the City of Thousand Oaks operating a number of external services through agreements works fine, this is somewhat coincidental based on established staff expertise and support from City Council. A subregional JPA builds on this strong foundation but transitions all service into an agency that has a transit focus and is more insulated from any individual city's short-term staffing or political circumstances.

The outcome of Alternative 2 would be only three agencies operating all services in the county, reducing the complexity of coordination and interagency agreements, but not the need for such things. The three agencies should maintain all other strategies identified in terms of coordinating and collaborating on marketing, procurement, technology, policies, rider and travel market studies, and more.

### Alternative 3

Alternative 3 has a similar overall timeline to Alternative 2. Although the consolidation is into an existing agency with the legal authority to integrate with other communities in Ventura County, the additional number of communities who need to consider the consolidation into Gold Coast Transit District, adopt a resolution for formal request to join, and to get through the GCTD Board approval, would likely take more time to complete in full. Alternative 3 should follow a similar procedure to Alternative 2 in terms of developing steering committees to guide policy decisions and develop the details of integration.

1. Initial steps to full consolidation will require likely at least a year of focused working group activity, community engagement, and engagement with city councils and other elected leaders to establish agreements to transition service to Gold Coast Transit District. This work would include:
  - a. Determining the Board structure to appropriately reflect the expanded regional scope.
  - b. Establish subregional/local advisory councils.
  - c. Assess and negotiate staff transition plans.
2. Evaluation of service and operating contracts transitioning to the new agency.
3. Develop public information campaign about the changes and roll them out over time; this change is much larger for a broader spectrum of riders than either alternative 1 or 2.
4. With all operations consolidated, explore countywide network redesign to enhance connectivity by providing a frequent backbone subregional network. Reinvest cost savings and increased revenue, if any, into increased services that improve regional connectivity and improve equity for riders.

Strategies that require the coordination and collaboration of cities and staff in alternative 1 (and to a lesser degree, alternative 2) would instead be directly executed by staff under a countywide agency in alternative 3. Therefore, some of the "low-hanging fruit" items in alternative 1 point #1 above could actually have a longer timeframe to get underway because items such as a countywide rider survey or uniform technologies would likely be deferred until consolidation is largely complete. Once consolidation takes effect, staff could likely execute strategies much faster than the collaborative efforts identified in alternative 1.



# Data Sources and Input

The TIES consultant team reviewed many local studies and national research on transit integration and governance in addition to reviewing data from the stakeholders and interviewing people around the county.

## Reference Literature

Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 173: *Improving Transit Integration Among Multiple Providers* (2014)

ENO Center. *Getting to the Route of It: The Role of Governance in Regional Transit* (2014)

TCRP Report 85: *Public Transit Board Governance Guidebook* (2002)

APTA, Booz Allen Hamilton. *Regional Organizational Models for Public Transportation* (2011)

McGuire and Nelson\Nygaard. *Transit Efficiency and Innovations Study for Stanislaus Council of Governments* (2019)

Nelson\Nygaard. *Sonoma County Transportation Authority Transit Integration and Efficiency Study* (2019)

## Data Provided by Agencies

- Triennial Performance Audits (all), April 2020 (by Moore & Associates on behalf of VCTC)
- Additional ridership, performance, and expenses by mode from National Transit Database (2019 data)
- Organization Charts
- Contracts, MOUs and other formal agreements between communities
- Descriptive information on customer experience, marketing, planning, etc.
- Physical asset inventories (supplementing TPA information)
- VCTC Group Transit Asset Management Plan (2018)

## Other Agency and City Data and Reports

- Transit Asset Management Plan, October 2018, VCTC
- Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (all) FY ending 2021
- Ventura Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) Municipal Service Review (all), 2018

## Interviews

- Staff primarily responsible for administering transit at GCTD, VCTC, the County of Ventura, and the cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Ojai, Simi Valley, and Thousand Oaks.

- Staff representing city administration (typically public works and/or the city managers) of Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Paula, Simi Valley, and Thousand Oaks
- VCTC Commissioners including elected and appointed officials representing nearly all of the County
- Representatives of community organizations, health and human service providers and public institutions, including Area Agency on Aging, Senior Concerns, the ARC, Ventura County Human Services Agency, Mobility Management Partners, CSU Channel Islands, Ventura Adult and Continuing Education.



# Acronym Definitions

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
CAFR	Comprehensive Annual Financial Report
CAT	Camarillo Area Transit
CTC	County Transportation Commission
DAR	Dial-A-Ride Services
DR	Demand-Response Services
ECTA	East County Transit Alliance
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GCTD	Gold Coast Transit District
GTFS	General Transit Feed Specification
JPA	Joint-Powers Authority
LAFCo	Ventura County Local Agency Formation Commission
LTF	Local Transportation Fund
MCT	Moorpark City Transit
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
NTD	National Transit Database
OT	Ojai Trolley
RSH	Revenue Service Hours
RSM	Revenue Service Miles
RTPA	Regional Transportation Planning Agency
SEIU	Service Employees International Union
SRTP	Short-Range Transit Plan
SVT	Simi Valley Transit
STA	State Transit Assistance
TAM	Transit Asset Management
TDA	Transportation Development Act
TIES	Transit Integration & Efficiency Study
TOT	Thousand Oaks Transit
TPA	Triennial Performance Audit
TRANSCOM	Ventura County Transit Operators Committee
VE	Valley Express Transit
VSH	Vehicle Service Hours
VSM	Vehicle Service Miles
VCTC	Ventura County Transportation Commission
ZEB	Zero-Emissions Bus

