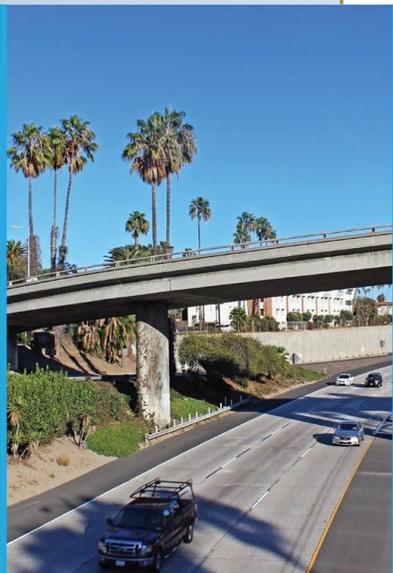


FY 2024-25 Transit Needs Assessment

Ventura County
Transportation Commission



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Chapter 1: What is the Ventura County Transportation Commission?

The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) is the State-designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Ventura County. In this role, VCTC is responsible for overseeing how federal and state monies for transportation are spent and is responsible for developing transportation plans that identify the region's mobility options and priorities. VCTC is also the State-designated County Transportation Commission, carrying the responsibility of designating how local sales taxes are used for transportation. In addition, VCTC provides intercity bus service throughout Ventura County and VCTC Intercity is the second largest transit operator in the county after the Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD).

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Chapter 2: What is the Unmet Transit Needs Process?

The California State Transportation Development Act (TDA), passed in 1971, provides a major source of funding for local transit, bicycle/pedestrian, and street projects. The legislation, as amended, authorizes the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) to administer the local TDA process and oversee regulatory and fiscal compliance.

The California TDA provides two major sources of annual funding for public transportation—the Local Transportation Fund (LTF) and the State Transit Assistance fund (STA). As the RTPA for the Ventura region, VCTC administers the TDA within the region, allocating TDA funds to eligible claimants (the Cities, the County, and transit operators) within its jurisdiction.

Each year, pursuant to Senate Bill 203, VCTC staff facilitates an annual transit needs assessment to determine if there are any areas in the county where populations of less than 100,000 are not served by public transit to meet their daily transportation needs. The areas in Ventura County with populations under the threshold include City of Camarillo, City of Moorpark, City of Fillmore, and City of Santa Paula. Additionally, on June 11, 2018, legislation allowed Thousand Oaks to spend TDA fund on streets and roads and they therefore now participate in the process as well. To complete this process, VCTC adopts definitions of an “unmet transit need” and “reasonable to meet” criteria to determine if service requests collected during this process can be met by local transit operators or not.

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What is an Unmet Transit Need?

In 2014, the Commission established a definition for Unmet Transit Needs, with explicit examples to align with the Transportation Development Act (TDA) guidelines, which are more specific than the broader public perception. This definition includes a clear benchmark for "substantial" community support, with 15 requests needed for general public service and 10 for services aimed at the disabled community.

Building on this foundation, in 2023, the Commission refined the definition of Unmet Transit Need to bolster our dedication to advancing the UTN process, particularly for those in disadvantaged areas. By adopting the Median Household Income (MHI) standard for a low-income threshold, the Commission aims to not just maintain the 10 and 15 comment thresholds but to prioritize improvements that meet these criteria while giving special attention to requests from low-income areas that might fall below this threshold. Additionally, for comments that meet the 10 or 15 comment threshold but are considered "Unreasonable to Meet," the agency tasked will pledge to evaluate the proposed service and explore funding for a pilot. Furthermore, the timeline for assessing passenger per hour performance has been increased from 36 to 60 months, endorsing a more comprehensive approach to evaluating new service efficacy over an extended period.

The Definition is as follows:

UNMET TRANSIT NEED

Public transportation services identified by the public with sufficient broad-based community support that have not been funded or implemented.

Unmet transit needs identified in a government-approved plan that meet the definition of an Unmet Transit Need.

Sufficient broad-based community support means that persons who will likely use the service on a routine basis demonstrate support: at least 15 requests for general public service and 10 requests for disabled service.

An Unmet Transit Need Includes:

- *Public transit services not currently provided to reach employment, medical assistance, shop for food or clothing, to obtain social services such as health care, county welfare programs and education programs. Service must be needed by and benefit the general public.*
- *Service expansions including new routes, significant modifications to existing routes, and major increases in service hours and frequency*

An Unmet Transit Need Excludes:

- *Operational changes such as minor route changes, bus stop changes, or changes in schedule*
- *Requests for extended hours or days of service*
- *Service for groups or individuals that is not needed by or will not benefit the general public*
- *Comments about vehicles, facilities, driver performance and transit organizational structure*
- *Requests for better coordination*
- *Requests for reduced fares and changes to fare restrictions*
- *Improvements funded or scheduled for implementation in the following year*
- *Future transportation needs*
- *Duplication or replacement of existing service*

What is 'Reasonable to Meet'?

Once a service request is received and has broad-based support (meeting the 15 or 10 comment threshold), it is further evaluated to determine how feasible it is for the transit operator to expand service. Figure 1 illustrates the criteria adopted by the Commission to evaluate the feasibility of requests to expand or significantly change service.

Figure 1 – 'Reasonable to Meet' Criteria

| Outcome | Definitions | Measures & Criteria |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Equity | The proposed service will not cause reductions in existing transit services that have an equal or higher priority | Measures: Vehicle revenue service hours and revenue service miles. Criteria: Transit vehicle service hours and miles will not be reduced on existing routes to fund the proposed service |
| Timing | The proposed service is in response to an existing rather than future transit need | Criteria: Proposed service is in response to an existing rather than future transit need; based on public input |
| Feasibility | The proposed service can be provided with the existing fleet or under contract to a private provider | Measure: Vehicle spare ratio: Transit system must be able to maintain FTA's spare ratio requirement of 20% (buses in peak service divided by the total bus fleet cannot fall below 20%). If less than 20%, can additional buses be obtained (purchased or leased) or can service be provided under contract to a private provider? |
| Feasibility | There are adequate roadways to safely accommodate transit vehicles | Measure & Criteria: Route inspection to determine adequacy of infrastructure to accommodate transit vehicles and passengers. |
| Cost Effectiveness | The proposed service will not unduly affect the operator's ability to maintain the required passenger fare ratio for its system as a whole | Measure: Total estimate annual passenger fare revenue divided by total annual operating cost (the entire service including the proposed service) Criteria: Fare revenue/ operating cost cannot fall below the operator's required passenger fare ratio. |
| Cost Effectiveness | The proposed service will meet the scheduled passenger fare ratio standards described in Attachment A | Measures and criteria described below. |
| Service Effectiveness | Estimated passengers per hour for the proposed service will not be less than the system-wide average after five years. | Measure: Passengers per hour. Criteria: Projected passengers per hour for the proposed service is not less than 70% of the system-wide average (without the proposed service) at the end of 12 month of service, 85% at the end of 24 months of service, and 100% at the end of 60 months of service. |

**The fact that an identified transit need cannot be fully met based on available resources shall not be the sole reason for finding that a transit need is not reasonable to meet. Comparing unmet transit needs with the needs for streets and roads is not allowable in determining transit needs that are reasonable to meet.*

Chapter 3: Description of TDA-Funded Transit Providers Included in the Unmet Needs Process

VCTC Intercity service does not utilize TDA Article 8 funds for non-transit purposes; however, service requests for the regional service it provides are included in the process. The Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD), City of Ojai and the City of Simi Valley do not utilize or claim TDA Article 8 funds for non-transit purposes and their service is not subject to the Unmet Transit Needs process.

Camarillo Area Transit

Camarillo Area Transit (CAT) operates two fixed routes. One route runs seven days a week approximately every thirty minutes. The second route runs five days a week, approximately every hour. The routes are within the city and run approximately every half an hour. CAT also offers general public DAR service every day of the week, but it does not include school trips.

Moorpark City Transit

Moorpark City Transit (MCT) operates two fixed routes with service Monday through Friday. The routes are within the city and run approximately every hour. In addition, MCT provides senior DAR and ADA paratransit service Monday through Friday. The City of Moorpark contracts with Thousand Oaks to provide DAR services. MCT also operates an on demand microtransit program available Monday through Friday.

Thousand Oaks Transit

Thousand Oaks Transit (TOT) operates five fixed routes, with service Monday through Saturday. The routes are within the city and run approximately every hour with some variations on Route 44. Thousand Oaks Transit also provides senior Dial-A-Ride and ADA paratransit service seven days a week. In addition a seasonal service to Zuma Beach is provided in the Summer.

Valley Express Bus & Dial-A-Ride

Valley Express Bus & Dial-A-Ride serves the communities of Santa Paula, Fillmore, Piru and the unincorporated areas that make up the Heritage Valley. Fixed-route service consists of two community circulators, within the cities of Santa Paula and Fillmore, and a shuttle service connecting the community of Piru with the city of Fillmore. The Valley Express Bus & Dial-A-Ride service was implemented in March 2015 with service modifications taking effect in January 2016. Each route is scheduled to make timed connections with the VCTC Intercity Highway 126 line (Routes 60-62).

General Public Dial-A-Ride service is available within Fillmore, Santa Paula, Piru, and other unincorporated areas of the Heritage Valley. Seniors and ADA certified riders may use Dial-A-Ride to travel between Fillmore, Santa Paula, and Saticoy.

VCTC Intercity

The Ventura County Transportation Commission operates VCTC Intercity, an intercity bus network that operates primarily within Ventura County, with service also extending into Santa Barbara and Los Angeles counties. VCTC Intercity currently operates six fixed lines that provide inter-city service between,

Woodland Hills, Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, Moorpark, Camarillo, Oxnard, California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI), Fillmore, Santa Paula, Ventura, Carpinteria, Santa Barbara, and Goleta.

Metrolink Commuter Rail

Metrolink is now operating eight round-trip weekday trains through Ventura County and two round-trip Saturday and Sunday trains. Additionally, through the codeshare program an additional five round-trip trains are available to Metrolink ticket holders. Although Metrolink is a regional commuter rail service provider serving the five-county Southern California region including Ventura County, VCTC is a member agency which contributes TDA LTF funding to operate the Ventura County Line. The Ventura County Line serves six stations including Ventura Downtown/Beach, East Ventura, Oxnard, Camarillo, Moorpark, and Simi Valley, plus seven stations in Los Angeles County. Requests for expanded Metrolink service were included in this analysis because of its service to cities with populations of less than 100,000.

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Chapter 4: Public Input

The public comment period for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Unmet Transit Needs process was held between December 15, 2023 and February 15, 2024 with all comments collected throughout the year also included in this report.

Each year, VCTC uses a variety of channels to promote and solicit public comment for the Unmet Transit Needs process including an online survey, social media advertising, eblasts, community meetings, and the GOVCbus app. Public notices were also printed in the Ventura County Star and VIDA News. VCTC hosted three county-wide community meetings, virtual community meeting and a public hearing.

A total of 468 comments were received for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Unmet Transit Needs process which is significantly more than in the previous Fiscal Year 2023-2024 period. This year, 218 surveys were submitted, significantly higher than in previous years. Additional comments were received through a combination of email, phone, community meetings, and social media, 273 individual respondents provided comments.

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Chapter 5: Transit Needs Assessment & Findings

Unmet Transit Needs Analysis

Throughout the year and during the public comment period, VCTC received a total of 468 comments through the online survey, social media posts, email, phone calls, and as public comments that were received at the virtual community meetings and Public Hearing. Many of the comments received were about general increases in service, general comments/complaints about existing bus service, city planning, or transit operations (ex., additional bus stops, etc.). Comments of this nature and ones regarding service areas that are not applicable to the Unmet Transit Needs process were not considered but were forwarded to the appropriate transit operator.

Comments regarding an expressed demand for new service in the applicable cities were screened to determine if the request for service met the definition of an Unmet Transit Need using the Commission's adopted criteria. None of the requests met the 15-comment threshold for fixed route or the 10-comment threshold for dial-a-ride service and therefore were not further screened to determine if the need was reasonable to meet.

The evaluation did not identify any requests surpassing the 15-comment threshold. However, it's significant to note that a collective effort by various individuals resulted in numerous requests (Appendix D). Most of the requested locations are presently covered by transit services (Appendix D). Among these locations, two in Thousand Oaks lack service: the East County jail on Olsen and the National Park Service's Satwiwa off Lynn, each receiving nine (9) comments. Service between Fillmore and Moorpark garnered six (6) comments, service between Fillmore and Santa Clarita received four (4) comments. A number of requests for additional stops at the Tech Park in Goleta, and despite falling short of the comment threshold, these responses demonstrate a noteworthy level of interest from the public for service at the locations.

Service between Fillmore and Moorpark is routinely one of the most requested services VCTC receives through the Unmet Transit Needs process and fully within Ventura County, including this year. To address this continued demand, VCTC staff applied for and was awarded a grant for Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ). The proposed route will provide service to an area that has been unserved, resulting in a substantial reduction in travel time. The new service will run daily with proposed stops at the Moorpark Marketplace, Moorpark College, and Moorpark Metrolink Station. On average, passengers can expect to save nearly two hours on a one-way trip. This improvement will greatly benefit current transit riders, and is expected to attract new passengers as well. The service is planned to begin this summer.

Although service to Santa Clarita is not technically an Unmet Transit Need as the request is for service into outside of Ventura County, VCTC staff has continued to plan for a scenario to bring the service forward as a potential partnership with Santa Clarita Transit. This has been a top requested service improvement over the last several years. Fleet capacity and needs, route costs, sufficient labor and route configuration are issues to be addressed as part of the planning process for this service.

The most frequent comments that did not meet the 15-comment threshold or are not applicable to the Unmet Transit Needs process this year but are valuable for the operators are as follows:

- Expanded service to multiple Los Angeles County locations, including increased Metrolink and Pacific Surfliner service into Ventura County and Santa Barbara.
- Improvements to VCTC Intercity service including added stops at the Goleta Tech Park on Hollister.
- Varying improvements to the Gold Coast Transit District service.
- More frequent services and better connectivity between towns Fillmore, Santa Paula, Camarillo.
- The request for services to specific destinations like Ventura Pier, Camarillo Outlets, and various educational institutions indicates a need for targeted route planning.
- Many comments indicate a need for extended service hours on weekends and late evenings into the night to accommodate leisure activities and non-traditional work schedules.
- There is a call for seasonal service to beaches and regular service to medical buildings, highlighting the need for transit services to adapt to seasonal demands and critical service areas.
- Several comments suggest a demand for microtransit services to cater to less frequent or specific trip requirements, indicating a gap in the current fixed-route offerings.

All comments are essential to improving public transit in Ventura County. Comments that have decent support and have been brought up over the years are taken into consideration for future planning purposes. All comments submitted are included in Appendices B and C. Appendix B includes all comments received that could potentially be considered an Unmet Transit Need if support is increased and Appendix C includes all other comments received through the process.

Conclusion

There were several comments received that VCTC evaluated under the definition of an Unmet Transit Need in terms of public service not provided or service that currently exists but would require significant route or frequency expansion. This year, no requests met the 15-comment threshold, therefore there are no Unmet Transit Needs.

All comments received through this process were forwarded to the operators, who take them into consideration for future planning purposes. VCTC and the operators continue to coordinate to work towards improved transit service including connectivity and transferability for cross-county travel. The comments highlight a community in need of transit services that are more frequent, reliable, accessible, and responsive to their varied daily schedules and destinations. Among these, the demand for extended service hours into late evenings and weekends is prominent, reflecting a shift towards using transit for leisure activities and accommodating non-traditional work schedules. Additionally, there is a notable call for the introduction of microtransit services, which could offer tailored, on-demand transit solutions for less frequent or specific trip requirements, bridging the gap in current fixed-route offerings.

Although the comments received may not meet the “Unmet Transit Needs” and “reasonable to meet definitions,” VCTC and other transit operators in Ventura County, take these comments and all public input received into consideration and they are critical for transit planning efforts. VCTC and the County’s transit operators thank the public for their participation in this process.