



VENTURA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Citizen's Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) /
Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC)

Ventura County Government Center

Hall of Justice – Pacific Conference Room

800 S. Victoria Street, Ventura

www.goventura.org

Tuesday, September 9, 2025

1:30 p.m.

AGENDA

(Action may be taken on any item listed on the agenda)

ITEM 1 CALL TO ORDER

ITEM 2 INTRODUCTIONS & ANNOUNCEMENT

ITEM 3 PUBLIC COMMENT

Under the Brown Act, the committee/council should not act on or discuss matters raised during the Public Comment portion of the agenda which are not listed on the agenda. Committee/Council members may refer such matters to staff for factual information or to be placed on the subsequent agenda for consideration.

ITEM 4 MEETING MINUTES

Recommended Action:

- Receive and file.

Responsible Staff: Cecilia Perez, Administrative Assistant

ITEM 5 PRESENTATION ON BIKE SAFETY AND TIPS

Recommended Action:

- Verbal update

Responsible Staff: Claire Grasty, Director of Public Transit

ITEM 6 FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2026-27 TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT ACT (TDA) UNMET TRANSIT NEEDS (UTN) DEFINITIONS AND SCHEDULE

Recommended Action:

- Review and approve the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Unmet Transit Needs definitions and schedule

Responsible Staff: Dolores Lopez, Transit Planner

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Government Code Section 54954.2, if special assistance is needed to participate in a committee meeting, please contact the Administrative Assistant at (805) 642-1591 ext. 111. Notification of at least 48 hours (about 2 days) prior to meeting time will assist staff in assuring reasonable arrangements can be made to provide accessibility at the meeting.

**ITEM 7 2025-2034 SHORT RANGE TRANSIT PLAN/DEMAND-RESPONSE
PLAN UPDATE**

Recommended Action:

- Receive and file presentation on the 2025-2034 Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan update

Responsible Staff: Aubrey Smith, Program Manager

ITEM 8 UPDATE ON TAP2RIDE PROJECT

Recommended Action:

- Verbal update

Responsible Staff: Matt Miller, Program Manager

**ITEM 9 COUNTYWIDE TRANSIT STOPS AND STATION NEEDS
ASSESSMENT UPDATE**

Recommended Action:

- Verbal update

Responsible Staff: Dolores Lopez, Transit Planner

ITEM 10 CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

ITEM 11 MEMBER REPORTS

ITEM 12 FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Overview of transportation programs in Ventura County

ITEM 13 ADJOURN TO TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2026

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Government Code Section 54954.2, if special assistance is needed to participate in a committee meeting, please contact the Administrative Assistant at (805) 642-1591 ext. 111. Notification of at least 48 hours (about 2 days) prior to meeting time will assist staff in assuring reasonable arrangements can be made to provide accessibility at the meeting.



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Hall of Justice – Pacific Conference Room

800 S. Victoria Street, Ventura

www.goventura.org

Tuesday, June 10, 2025

1:30 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES

CTAC MEMBERS PRESENT: Miranda Patton, Camarillo (Vice-Chair)
Bev Dransfeldt, Camarillo
Sandra Aldana, VCTC at Large
Bruce Belluschi, Santa Paula
Victor Kamhi, Thousand Oaks
Chaise Rasheed, Thousand Oaks
Chera Minkler, City of Ventura

MEMBERS ABSENT: Marissa Rodriguez, Fillmore (Chair)
Joey Juhasz-Lukomski, Fillmore
Susan Leech, Ojai
Bill Milley, Ojai
Dan Weikel, Thousand Oaks
Manuel Minjares, Ventura County
Rob Corley, City of Ventura

CURRENT CTAC VACANCIES: City of Oxnard (2)
City of Moorpark (2)
City of Port Hueneme (2)
City of Santa Paula (2)
City of Simi Valley (2)
County of Ventura (1)
VCTC at Large (1)

SSTAC MEMBERS PRESENT: Megan Telfer, HELP of Ojai

SSTAC MEMBERS ABSENT: Tammy Glen, VC Caregivers
Jeff Lambert, Housing Authority
Maricela Pardo, Area Agency on Aging

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Lupita Monreal, Mobility Management Partners
Jon Looney, ACTION VC
Martha Shapiro, Senior Concerns
Esther Anaya, Arc of VC
Clarissa Marostica, 211 Ride
Alexa Martin, ILRC-TRICO
Jennifer Martinez, ILRC-TRICO
Jennifer Hollowell, VC Caregivers

VCTC STAFF PRESENT:

Claire Grasty, Transit Director
Aubrey Smith, Regional Transit Planning Manager
Dolores Lopez, Regional Transit Planner

ITEM 1 CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Patton called the meeting to order at 1:36 p.m.

ITEM 2 INTRODUCTIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**ITEM 3 PUBLIC COMMENT - None****ITEM 4 MEETING MINUTES**

The committee accepted the April 2025 meeting minutes.

ITEM 5 2025-2034 SHORT RANGE TRANSIT PLAN (SRTP)/PARATRANSIT INTEGRATION ANALYSIS (PIA) UPDATE

Aubrey provided an overview of the SRTP/PIA. There was a discussion regarding Dial-a-Ride services and fixed route services. Members were informed that presentations and outreach meetings will be made to city councils over the summer regarding the SRTP. The plan is to complete the SRTP by fall.

Victor Kamhi asked questions about Demand Response Integration and Aubrey reported that they are looking into doing simulations of Dial-A-Ride to compare data and will include information in an updated report. Claire reported that there is a fare study component in the SRTP. Aubrey informed the committee that he would have an updated report at the next meeting in September. Chera Minkler voiced a concern about availability of ADA vehicles after 7:00pm. Aubrey said he would include ADA access information in simulations and Claire stated that she will follow up on this.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Government Code Section 54954.2, if special assistance is needed to participate in a committee meeting, please contact the Administrative Assistant at (805) 642-1591 ext. 111. Notification of at least 48 hours (about 2 days) prior to meeting time will assist staff in assuring reasonable arrangements can be made to provide accessibility at the meeting.

Sandra Aldana asked if any free fare programs are available during election time and Claire said she would look into it further.

ITEM 6 TRANSIT AGENCY AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) TRAINING WORKSHOP UPDATE

Dolores informed the committee that in February a workshop was provided to operators on wheelchair securement, ADA compliance and creating discussions, hoping to provide a refresher course in the future.

ITEM 7 AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) PARATRANSIT CERTIFICATION SERVICES CONTRACT

Dolores provided information regarding the ADA certification process with MMP which is for the next three years and an option for an extension of two years. There was discussion among the committee regarding streamlining the process.

ITEM 8 COUNTYWIDE TRANSIT STOPS AND STATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT UPDATE

Aubrey discussed the SCAG funded project through the Regional Early Action Program 2.0 (REAP) program which is making progress to enhance mobility. The deadline for improvements is June 2026. A countywide bus stop inventory of needs and ADA accessibility is being conducted and Dolores is hoping to take to the July 11, 2025 Commission meeting. Staff is also working on an open-loop reader system, Tap2Ride, which is installing payment devices on buses to allow passengers to pay with their debit and credit cards, by tapping their cards or Apple, Android and Google devices.

The system will be launched on VCTC Intercity buses first.

ITEM 9 CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT - None

ITEM 10 MEMBER REPORTS

Victor Kamhi reported that City of Thousand Oaks is leading travel training and is starting their summer bus beach service. He stated that Simi Valley paratransit will have several new electric buses in the next few months.

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Beverly Dransfeldt provided information regarding a CalTrans Draft PCH Master Plan Feasibility Study and that will be sent to VCTC to distribute to committee members.

ITEM 11 FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Ebike safety.
- Overview of transportation programs in Ventura County

**ITEM 12 VICE CHAIR PATTON ADJOURNED THE MEETING AT 2:33PM.
NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING IS TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2025**

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Government Code Section 54954.2, if special assistance is needed to participate in a committee meeting, please contact the Administrative Assistant at (805) 642-1591 ext. 111. Notification of at least 48 hours (about 2 days) prior to meeting time will assist staff in assuring reasonable arrangements can be made to provide accessibility at the meeting.



ITEM 6

September 9, 2025

MEMO TO: CTAC/SSTAC

FROM: DOLORES LOPEZ, REGIONAL TRANSIT PLANNER

**SUBJECT: FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2026-27 TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT ACT (TDA)
UNMET TRANSIT NEEDS (UTN) DEFINITIONS AND SCHEDULE**

RECOMMENDATION:

- Review and approve the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Unmet Transit Needs (UTN) definitions and schedule.

BACKGROUND:

The State Transportation Development Act (TDA) requires that a public hearing be held to discuss public transit, take testimony on local/regional transit needs, and develop findings that ensure that all reasonable transit needs are satisfied before TDA funds can be allocated for street and road purposes. These UTN and Reasonable to Meet definitions were adopted by the Commission in 2009 and reviewed in 2023.

DISCUSSION:

The last update of Unmet Transit Needs definitions took place in 2023. During that process, VCTC hired a consultant to review its existing UTN definitions and confirmed that VCTC's thresholds are consistent with other agencies. In order to incorporate an equity component as part of the UTN evaluation process, VCTC adopted a Median Household Income (MHI) threshold to evaluate service requests in low-income areas. This method is commonly used by State funding agencies to identify disadvantaged communities. While the existing 10 and 15 comment thresholds remain unchanged, evaluating services requests from an equity-focused lens helps to prioritize improvements in disadvantaged communities. For service requests deemed "Unreasonable to Meet" due to service constraints, the responsible agency will now provide a letter of commitment to study the request and/or seek grant funding for a potential demonstration service.

December 15, 2025, marks the beginning of the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Unmet Transit Needs multilingual (English, Spanish and Mandarin,) public outreach process with the online survey and the website landing page going live. Digital and print outreach will be posted on social media platforms and onboard vehicles, with community outreach events planned to engage the public directly. The required public hearing is scheduled for the February 2026 regular meeting of the Ventura County Transportation Commission.

By soliciting input through various formats, residents have several opportunities to be heard. Public comments received throughout the year and testimony received at the public hearing are reviewed against adopted Unmet Transit Needs and Reasonable to Meet definitions. The public hearing is required by the State as part of the TDA process in order to approve the UTN process (Attachment B).

With the Committee's approval of the definitions and schedule, this item will subsequently be taken to the Commission at the December meeting for final approval. The findings from the analysis will be brought back to CTAC/SSTAC for discussion and approval in April 2026 so appropriate action can be taken prior to staff's recommendation to the Commission in Spring 2026. In addition to the staff recommendation, CTAC/SSTAC also has the option of submitting a formal recommendation on or before the June 2026 Commission meeting.

Additionally, staff requests the committee provide any suggestions of agencies and/or locations they feel could help get the word out about the UTN process and increase feedback.

Attachment A: Unmet Transit Needs Definition (Fiscal Year 2026-27)

Attachment B: Unmet Transit Needs Schedule (Fiscal Year 2026-27)

UNMET TRANSIT NEEDS PROCESS

Definitions

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 must 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.

Common examples Include:

- 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

Excludes:

- Operational changes such as minor route changes, bus stop changes, or changes in schedule
- Requests for minor extended hours
- 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

**ITEM 6
ATTACHMENT A**

“REASONABLE TO MEET”

Outcome	Definitions	Measures & Criteria
<i>Equity</i>	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
<i>Timing</i>	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
<i>Feasibility</i>	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?
<i>Feasibility</i>	There are adequate roadways to safely accommodate transit vehicles	Measure & Criteria: Route inspection to determine adequacy of infrastructure to accommodate transit vehicles and passengers.
<i>Cost Effectiveness</i>	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.
<i>Cost Effectiveness</i>	The proposed service will meet the scheduled passenger fare ratio standards described in Attachment A	Measures and criteria described below.
<i>Service Effectiveness</i>	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.*

PASSENGER FARE RATIOS

It is desirable for all proposed transit services in urban areas to achieve a 20% passenger fare ratio by the end of the fifth year of operation. A passenger fare ratio of 10% is desired for special services (i.e., elderly and disabled) and rural area services*. More detailed passenger fare ration standards, which will be used to evaluate services as they are proposed and implemented, are described below. Transit service both in urban and rural areas, per state law, may obtain an “intermediate” passenger fare ratio.

Urban Service	Rural Service	Recommended Action
New Service Performance Criteria: End of Twelve Months		
Less than 6%	Less than 3%	Provider may discontinue service
6% or more	3% or more	Provider will continue service, with modifications if needed
New Service Performance Criteria: End of Twenty-four Months		
Less than 10%	Less than 5%	Provider may discontinue service
10% or more	5% or more	Provider will continue service, with modifications if needed
New Service Performance Criteria: End of Sixty Months **		
Less than 15%	Less than 7%	Provider may discontinue service
15% to 19%	7% to 9%	Provider may consider modifying and continue service
20% or more	10% or more	Provider will continue service, with modifications if needed

**Per statute the VCTC may establish a lower fare for community transit (dial-a-ride) services.*

***A review will take place after 54 months to develop a preliminary determination regarding the discontinuation of proposed services*

ITEM 6
ATTACHMENT B

Unmet Transit Needs
Public Hearing and Process Schedule
Fiscal Year 2026-27

September 09, 2025	CTAC/SSTAC MEETING Review and approve Unmet Transit Needs definitions and schedule
December 5, 2025	VCTC MEETING Approve Unmet Transit Needs definitions and schedule
December 15, 2025	OUTREACH Unmet Transit Needs information and survey posted to digital and print channels
	LEGAL NOTICES FOR PUBLIC HEARING PUBLISHED
January 2, 2026	Local, Spanish-language newspaper of record (VIDA Newspaper)
January 2, 2026	Local, English-language Newspaper of record (Ventura County Star)
February 6, 2026	PUBLIC HEARING VCTC meeting at 9:00 a.m.
April 14, 2026	CITIZENS TAC / SOCIAL SERVICES TAC MEETING Approve Unmet Transit Needs findings and staff recommendation
April 8, 2026	TRANSIT OPERATORS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TRANSCOM) MEETING Approve Unmet Transit Needs findings and staff recommendation
June 5, 2026	VCTC MEETING Staff presents Unmet Transit Needs findings Adopt Unmet Transit Needs Assessment Adopt Fiscal Year 2025-26 Transportation Development Act apportionments
June 10, 2026	SUBMITTAL Approved Unmet Transit Needs Findings are sent to the State of review
August 15, 2026	DEADLINE Deadline to submit findings to the State of California for review



Item 7

September 9, 2025

MEMO TO: CITIZEN'S TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CTAC)/SOCIAL SERVICES TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL (SSTAC)

FROM: AUBREY SMITH, PROGRAM MANAGER – REGIONAL TRANSIT PLANNING
CLAIRE GRASTY, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC TRANSIT

SUBJECT: FY2025 – 2034 VENTURA COUNTY SHORT RANGE TRANSIT PLAN/DEMAND-RESPONSE INTEGRATION PLAN UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION:

- Receive and file

BACKGROUND:

The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC), in partnership with local transit operators, initiated development of the Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) to guide public transit improvements for the timeframe of 2025-2034. A key component of the SRTP has been a robust community engagement effort to ensure that transit planning decisions reflect the needs and interests of both riders and non-riders throughout Ventura County.

The SRTP Project team has also prepared a Partnership Plan to establish a structured, long-term approach for strengthening and expanding relationships between Ventura County's transit operators and a broad range of community organizations, educational institutions, employers, and other stakeholders. The goal is to use partnerships to build transit awareness, increase ridership, and expand the visibility of public transportation as a resource for all County residents.

A high-level summary of what the project team has identified since the onset of the SRTP development process is provided in the subsequent section below.

As part of the Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP), the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) is working on the Countywide Demand-Response Integration Plan to explore how local transit providers can work together to make ADA paratransit service more seamless, efficient, and cost-effective. Staff have prepared the attached draft technical memorandum that discusses potential integration strategies for consideration in the draft Demand-Response Integration Plan.

DISCUSSION:***COMMUNITY OUTREACH SUMMARY***

The SRTP's engagement process was conducted in three distinct phases from December 2023 to May 2025:

- **Phase 1 (Initiation & Needs Identification):** Stakeholder meetings, agency workshops, and community listening sessions identified key transit issues, including poor public awareness of services, gaps in service coverage, and challenges in interagency coordination.
- **Phase 2 (Surveying Riders & Non-Riders):** Approximately 600 valid responses were collected through online and on-board surveys. The surveys explored transit needs, perceptions, and priorities from both riders and non-riders.
- **Phase 3 (Feedback on Service Concepts):** Draft recommendations were presented to stakeholders, local agencies, and the public for feedback. While public participation remained limited, feedback was generally supportive of proposed concepts.

The outreach process identified several key findings:

- **Lack of Awareness Remains a Major Barrier:** Many residents are unaware of transit services available in their community or how to use them. This highlights the need for better marketing, information sharing, and partnerships with local organizations to promote transit.
- **Service Availability and Connectivity:** Riders and non-riders alike identified infrequent service and limited evening hours as major deterrents to transit use, particularly for non-traditional work schedules and regional trips across multiple jurisdictions.
- **Affordability and Accessibility:** Transit remains essential for residents with low incomes, seniors, students, and people with disabilities. Continued investment in programs like Youth Ride Free and better coordination of demand-response (dial-a-ride) services is needed to support these populations.
- **Demand-Response Service Challenges:** Riders of dial-a-ride services reported high overall satisfaction, but emphasized the need for improvements in reliability, on-time performance, and integration between service providers, especially for healthcare trips.
- **Infrastructure and Access:** Safe walking routes to bus stops and improved lighting at stops were frequently cited as necessary improvements to encourage more use of the transit system.

The outreach summary findings will inform the final SRTP document, which will include recommended actions for local agencies, community partners, and the Commission to improve transit service delivery, marketing, and ridership.

PARTNERSHIPS PLAN SUMMARY

The Partnership Plan recognizes that community partnerships are a critical tool for improving transit access and awareness, especially in a region like Ventura County where transit ridership is relatively low and dispersed. It lays out a framework for deepening VCTC's relationships with community organizations by providing clear, useful information about public transit, offering mutually beneficial programs, and leveraging trusted messengers in the community to spread the word about available transit options. The Partnerships Plan highlights the following:

Formalizing a Countywide Network of Partners:

The Plan categorizes potential partners into three tiers:

- **Level I – Resource/Program Partners:** Includes transit agencies, schools, municipalities.
- **Level II – Programmatic Partners:** Includes nonprofits, major employers, healthcare providers, advocacy organizations.
- **Level III – Community Partners:** Includes senior centers, libraries, local businesses, and healthcare clinics.

Actions to Strengthen Partnerships:

- Establishing clear, bi-directional communication between VCTC and its partners.
- Developing promotional toolkits for partners to distribute transit information.
- Expanding awareness of fare programs like Youth Ride Free, College Ride, and VCbuspass.
- Providing training and materials to partners so they can help constituents navigate transit.

Improved Messaging and Communication:

- Continued focus on coordinated, countywide messaging about public transit availability and benefits.
- Building upon successful marketing efforts such as the ¡Buenas con VCTC! campaign.
- Using events, fairs, educational institutions, and social media to connect with new riders.

Building and Maintaining Infrastructure for Engagement:

- Maintaining updated partnership contact lists.
- Supporting outreach with staff resources, marketing materials, and technology.
- Developing user-friendly countywide transit maps and informational materials.

VCTC will continue refining these sections of the SRTP to strengthen how it and its partner agencies manage relationships, improve outreach strategies, and align with existing programs and state and federal engagement requirements. The Outreach Summary and Partnership Plan will support the broader SRTP goal of increasing ridership by making transit more visible, accessible, and relevant to Ventura County residents. The project team is planning to use a variety of outreach methods, such as onboard flyers with QR codes, distribution through social service agencies, local libraries, and community centers, along with email and social media, to help encourage community awareness and participation.

DRAFT DEMAND-RESPONSE INTEGRATION PLAN

VCTC is evaluating strategies for integrating ADA demand-response services across the county. Key discussion points include opportunities for providers to share resources, streamline operations, and create a more seamless system for passengers who rely on these services.

Paratransit provides essential transportation service for riders with disabilities, but today each local operator manages its own system. This can make countywide travel challenging, especially when trips cross city or service boundaries. The integration study examines how bringing services together could:

- Simplify the rider experience with consistent policies and scheduling.
- Improve trip coordination and regional connectivity.
- Identify potential opportunities to achieve cost savings.

- Support more unified data collection, reporting, and planning

The attached Paratransit Integration Analysis will provide a foundation for decision-makers, riders, and local bus operators to consider how best to move forward. VCTC will continue to work with partners and the community to identify the most effective path to improve the rider experience.

The Paratransit Integration Analysis includes recommendations that were included in the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan and Transit Integration and Efficiency Study.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Draft Outreach Summary Report

Attachment B – Draft Partnerships Plan Report

Attachment C – Draft Demand-Response Integration Plan Report

Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan 2025-2034

Engagement and Outreach Summary



Prepared for:

Ventura County Transportation Commission

June 24, 2025 DRAFT

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SUMMARY OF OUTREACH

The Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan (S RTP) conducted community engagement at several stages throughout the project to better understand the issues and needs that people face in using transit across Ventura County. Engagement also sought to gauge reactions to initial concepts for the Plan. This report summarizes the activities and outcomes in engaging the public and key stakeholders. The table below provides an overview of the engagement phases and activities conducted.

The public input and community engagement approach consisted of three phases. Phase 1 began with the goal of identifying specific transit needs, in order to set the direction for the S RTP, to guide the data analysis, as well as to refine targets and topics for additional surveys later on. Phase 2 defined the needs and opportunities to pursue in developing transit improvements. Using input and results from Phases 1 and 2, the consultant team developed initial service concepts, and brought those draft concepts back to the public. Phase 3 gathered feedback on these initial concepts, to help influence the final Plan.

This report provides the greatest detail about the outcomes of Phases 1 and 2. Phase 3 is addressed at a higher level here, but is discussed more thoroughly in the eventual S RTP document alongside the final recommendations specifically shaped by Phase 3 public input outcomes.

Project Stage	Audience	When	Activities
Phase 1 – Initiation, Identification of Needs	Agency staff and Committees: CTAC, SSTAC, HVTAC, HVPAC, staff	December 2023-January 2024	TRANSCOM regular meeting introduction to S RTP process and initial priorities. Workshop session with transportation-related committees
	General public	January 2024	Combined Unmet Needs/S RTP public listening sessions in Thousand Oaks, Camarillo, Moorpark, Simi Valley, Oxnard, Ojai, and Fillmore
	Partner stakeholders	January 2024	Stakeholder focus groups with social services agencies, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), education institutions and employers, and healthcare programs
	Everyone	January 2024	Project website launch and updated periodically

Project Stage	Audience	When	Activities
Phase 2 – Surveying Riders and Non-Riders	Fixed-route transit riders	February-April 2024	On-board surveys distributed to riders across VCTC, Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, Camarillo, Moorpark, and Valley Express routes
	General public	Spring 2024	Online survey promoted through e-blast, social media. Approximately 450 out of about 600 responses were from Ventura County residents.
	Demand-response riders	Summer 2024	Mailed/online surveys distributed countywide to dial-a-ride/paratransit riders
Phase 3 – Input on Service Plan Recommendations	Agency staff	September 2024 -May 2025	TRANSCOM regular meetings, individual community working meetings
	General public	December 2024	In-person and virtual workshops presenting draft service concepts
	Committees: CTAC, SSTAC, HVTAC, HVPAC, staff	November 2024 – February 2025	Updates to committees, staff, and elected leaders on conceptual recommendations

Phase 1: Initiation and Identification of Needs

The first phase of engagement introduced the project objectives to both the general public and direct stakeholders, and sought input on the specific transportation needs that the SRTP should consider. The activities in this phase involved questions about the mobility challenges people in Ventura face, and what features a transit network would require to reduce barriers to accessing jobs, services, schools, or other needs.

The top issues that came up most frequently and across multiple audiences include:

1. **Awareness of transit options is a significant barrier to increasing ridership.** The engagement team received feedback about the general public's unfamiliarity with what services are available to whom, and how easy or difficult it may be for different segments of the public to interpret or trust the information that is available. Core market segments such as college students, seniors, people whose first language is not English, and people with disabilities engage with transit differently, engage with media differently, and would benefit from more directly relevant marketing and promotion.
2. **Span of service and low bus route frequency significantly limit interest and ability for potential riders to use transit.** Infrequent service may result in long travel times for destinations beyond someone's local community. People are often unable to use transit to attend social and cultural events or travel to jobs outside traditional daytime hours, because transit service on at least one leg of the trip ends too early or connections might be missed.
3. **College students and seniors** are at different stages in their life, but often have similar motivations to use transit. These include transit's affordability, disinterest or inability to drive (which may include lack of access to a car), and need to access services, jobs and entertainment/cultural activities. In Ventura County, students and seniors generally live in communities farther from urban centers, where transit service may be less frequent or have limited coverage, leading to longer travel times.
4. **Reaching key Ventura County destinations is (or is perceived to be) difficult and time-consuming.** This is a function of the issues discussed above: public awareness, ability to plan a trip across multiple providers, and the reality that service levels and schedules vary widely and are not coordinated between providers.
5. **Stakeholders and riders identified many desired programmatic recommendations to attract more riders to transit.** Beyond improving availability and coordination of service, improvements to travel training, marketing and promotions, online information, engagement with leadership at organizations and schools, and other improvements will promote the current services and boost ridership.

Phase 1 was successful in engaging and receiving feedback from stakeholder groups, agency staff, and transportation-related committees, and much of the input summarized above was generated by participants from these groups. Unfortunately, Phase 1 was less successful in engaging the general public, including current riders. Seven community workshops held across the county comprised the

primary activities for soliciting input from the general public. Despite the concerted efforts of the consultant team and VCTC staff, these workshops were very sparsely attended.

The following pages categorize the input that emerged from the Phase 1 engagement by themes. The columns to the right show which stakeholder audience raised the issue. **The quantity of marks across audiences is not intended to indicate any level of importance or priority.**

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Communication and promotion					
Awareness of service availability is poor among the general public.		●	●		●
Material online may not be “senior-friendly.” Reliance on the internet may also underserve Spanish-speaking population.		●	●		
Online search functions like Google Maps do not always accurately reflect current service.			●		
Online information should be integrated into one site; riders aren’t concerned about who operates the service, but how to get to their destination.			●		
Travel training is a useful tool and should be extended to key staff at partner agencies like Behavioral Health Services and schools.		●	●	●	
Fare program awareness may be limited; vendors should be prepared to inform riders about the ability to reload online. Initial rollout of the countywide fare media was bumpy.	●			●	
Agencies have limited investment in marketing and promotion while facing shortage of staff and bus operators.	●				
Perception of safety among general public does not reflect actual, positive experience of riders and should be addressed with better communication.			●		
Fixed-Route Network					
Limited route frequency makes it hard to travel between communities.		●	●	●	●
Long travel times are also a significant barrier to using transit.		●	●	●	
Difficulty in planning transit trips (due to lack of coordination between multiple providers).			●	●	
Travel to regional centers – Camarillo, Ventura, and Oxnard – is difficult from most other communities, and involves disproportionately long travel times.		●	●	●	
Focusing improvement on local service will help intercity utility by reducing transfer times between routes.	●			●	
Current route design, service span, and intercity connections may not match post-pandemic travel patterns.	●			●	

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Environmental concerns are not enough to motivate people to use transit; making a more functional service is essential.		●			
Staff are curious about how microtransit is changing opportunity for transit.	●				
On-time performance and reliability are areas for improvement, as is communicating these outcomes to the public.		●			
Bus stop lighting and other infrastructure investments are needed to improve safety.			●	●	
<i>Unserved, underserved, and future destinations</i>					
Currently difficult to use transit to get to Los Angeles County.		●		●	
Bus service coordination with Metrolink could be improved.	●			●	
Requests for service to Kaiser Woodland Hills, but Thousand Oaks past pilot did not generate substantial ridership.		●			
Students have significant travel needs including access to groceries, career support programs, and jobs.			●		
Better access to community cultural events is a need cited by both students and seniors who have more flexibility in their schedule, but transit service typically is not operating late enough to serve these trips.		●	●	●	●
Transit could improve access to low-income housing (existing and planned). Examples include around Moorpark City Hall, Thousand Oaks downtown revitalization, Simi Valley new housing distributed, Santa Paula East Area 1 and 2 (hospital relocation), and Lewis Road developments near Somis.	●	●			
Future developments near transit may have less on-site parking with the intent to support transit use, but it does not necessarily follow that the nearby transit actually serves the development's needs.			●		
County is building senior housing near CSUCI; transit-supportive land use, but otherwise "in the middle of nowhere."	●				
Transit should support farm workers.			●		
Some residents and isolated communities face food insecurity and need better access to grocery stores, including Ojai, Oak View, Casitas Springs, Cal Lutheran and CSUCI students, and Saticoy residents.			●		
Local agency staff typically hear very little request for intercity or cross-jurisdiction transit.	●				
Camarillo: City receives many requests to expand fixed-route service and staff hope this will control DAR costs. Camarillo is difficult to get around by transit when VCTC services aren't running.	●		●	●	
Fillmore / Piru: No specific input received in this phase					

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Moorpark: <i>No specific input received in this phase</i>					
Oak Park: <i>No specific input received in this phase</i>					
Ojai Valley: Need for better access to County services, especially specialty care in Ventura, Oxnard and Camarillo.			●		
Oxnard / Port Hueneme: Ventura County Behavioral Health (Oxnard) is difficult to reach on transit. The Collection is another key destination.		●		●	
Simi Valley: Some underserved areas to the north and south, Madera and Wood Ranch areas. Service is less frequent than desired. City seeks to expand service coverage using microtransit.	●		●	●	
Santa Paula: Service design does not support residents in the north end and along Ojai Road.			●	●	
Thousand Oaks: Cal Lutheran may be underserved. Major employment centers in Thousand Oaks Newbury Park area.			●		
Ventura: VA Clinic is a key destination and a direct shuttle from the Thousand Oaks Goebel Adult Community Center is desired.			●		
<i>Demand-Response and NEMT Service</i>					
Non-emergency medical trips (NEMT) service needed between rural areas and hospitals or specialists. Residents in east end of County often receive medical referrals/providers in Simi Valley, Oxnard, Ventura and need to get across the County for medical trips. Potential users may be unaware of their options through GO Access and ECTA for travel beyond their community.		●			
People don't know what health insurance transportation benefits exist.		●	●		
Many Gold Coast Health Plan members must travel for medical services, and many have young children. The existing benefit covering health care transportation can require reservation a month in advance.		●			
Transfers between dial-a-ride services can substantially increase travel time.		●			
If reaching other communities were easier (better or no transfers), demand might grow but majority of rider trips are within the home community.		●			
Call center staffing shortages were translating into long call wait times and reduced efficiency.	●				
Costs began to jump up substantially as staffing levels and more capacity for DAR service were restored.	●				

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Seniors reporting to staff that ECTA fares for intercity DAR trips are high.	●				
GO Access providing direct service to Camarillo has helped minimize costs. However, requests for direct service beyond that is extremely limited.	●				
Staffing					
Operator training improvements needed for serving people using wheelchairs.		●			
Some agencies still struggling with restoring full staffing levels.	●				
Several agencies were anticipating new technology like RideCo to improve efficiency.	●				
Post-Pandemic trip changes					
Gold Coast ridership is increasing in afternoons and early evenings. Most increases are from students and essential workers, thanks in part to the Youth Ride Free program and restoration of pre-pandemic service levels.	●				
Valley Express ridership on Piru Route has returned to pre-pandemic levels as students have returned.	●				
Intercity ridership has been slow to recover. This is likely due to commute-focused services while many jobs are now partly or fully remote. Metrolink faces similar challenges.	●				
Increasing utilization of private transportation providers (Ventura Transit Services, Help of Ojai) and similar challenges with staff and volunteer capacity.		●			
Gold Coast staff observe less travel to local colleges.	●				
DAR ridership has not fully recovered because past programs like Adult Day Healthcare have reduced their scope.	●				
Policy					
Policies should focus on opportunities to expand access and avoid competing for ridership.	●				
Leverage resources to do more rather than identify new investments.	●				
Cost comparisons between agency operations should be apples-to-apples.	●				
Desire to continue free student fares.	●				
Improving multimodal corridors, especially making biking to transit easier through better bike lanes and storage at transit hubs will improve access.			●	●	

Input	Agency Staff	CTAC/ SSTAC	Stakeholders	Riders	General Public
Alignment on demand-response trip reservation policy and capacity is desired. Can be difficult for riders in some communities to guarantee a trip without several days advance reservation due to constrained capacity.		●		●	
Forcing uniform policy across will negatively affect some communities for other's benefits. For example, requiring weekend service that isn't supported by funding or ridership, or conversely reducing one community's weekend service to expand other services.	●				

Phase 2: General Public and Non-Riders Online Survey Results

The SRTP team conducted several surveys, the first of which was an online survey aimed broadly at anyone who might have a transportation interest in Ventura County. It was designed to capture input from both transit riders and non-riders to help guide the SRTP analysis that followed. Stakeholder agencies and project partners promoted the survey, which was hosted on the project website. The survey was translated into Spanish and Mandarin Chinese, and before publication was reviewed by members of the project team who are native speakers of these languages.

About 600 legitimate responses were received; unfortunately, the survey was disrupted by malicious “bot” activity which generated several thousand additional responses. These responses appear to be illegitimate entries attempting to take advantage of the chance to win a gift card reward. Of the apparently legitimate responses, about half included current or recent past riders.

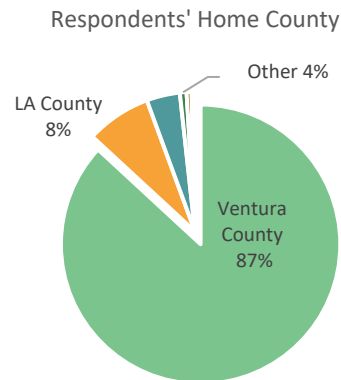


As a group, it is typically difficult to solicit meaningful input on transit from non-riders. They are generally under-informed about the availability of service, and may only think of transit in the abstract. Because of this, the survey design focused on evaluating the respondent’s awareness of the various transit offerings in the County and quantifying what factors most affect their disinterest in using transit.

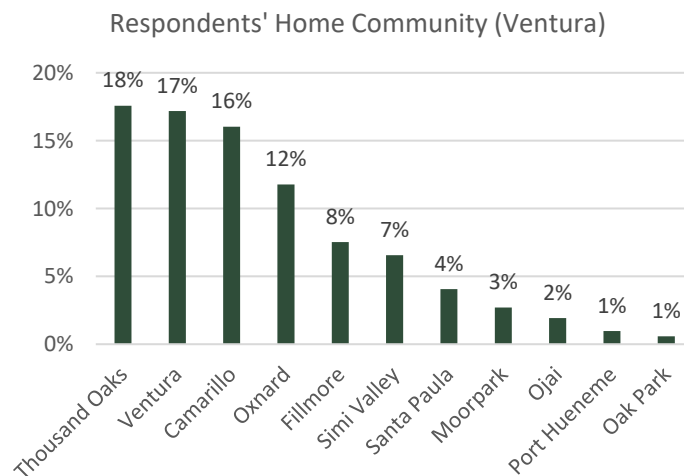
This section begins by reviewing the demographics of all respondents and then focuses on the responses of non-riders. The following section delves further into the transit rider responses and incorporates the results of the surveys distributed on-board the buses around the same period.

ONLINE SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS, ALL RESPONDENTS

The vast majority of respondents were from Ventura County. Despite the Coastal Express and Surfliner connections, very few respondents were from Santa Barbara.

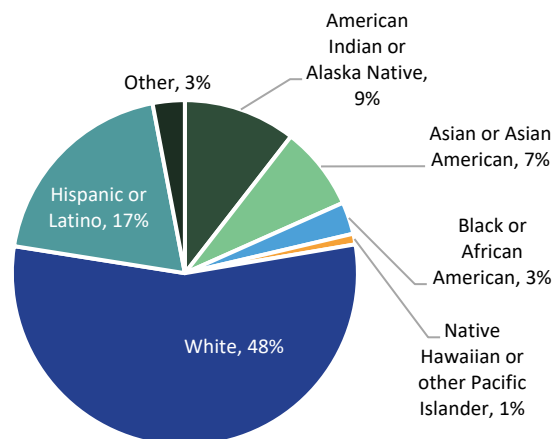


The distribution of respondents did not closely match the distribution of community populations within the County, but generally reflects community size. The exception to this was Simi Valley which was underrepresented compared to its proportion of the county population. Responses were captured from every community.



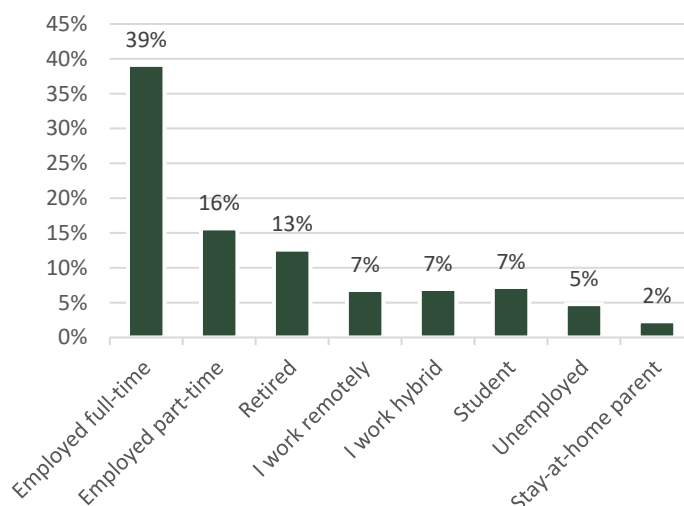
Survey respondents were generally reflective of Ventura County's demographics. The Census asks about Hispanic heritage independently of race, so it is difficult to compare directly, but the survey responses from Hispanic and Latino residents may under-represent the County population.

Race and Ethnicity



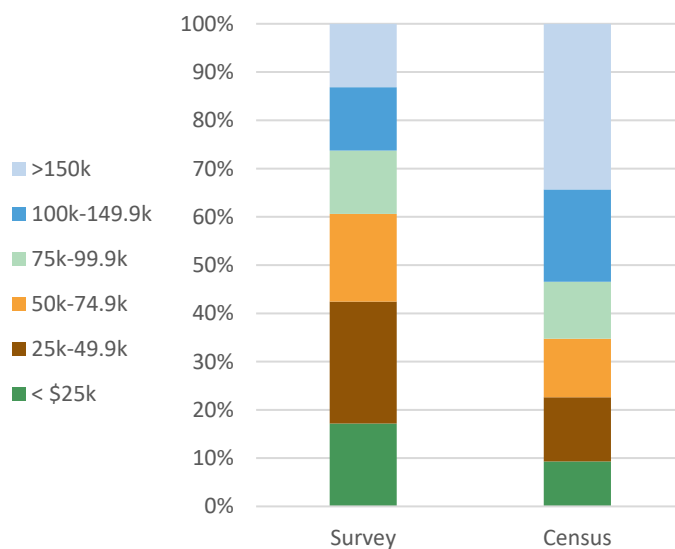
Over 45% of respondents were employed at least part-time. Notably, about 14% of respondents stated they work remotely at least part of the time, which is a key issue stakeholders raised affecting ridership. Respondents could check all that apply, so the 14% who work remotely at least part of the time are a subset of those who are employed at least part-time. Students were under-represented in the overall survey results relative to the proportion of ridership they are believed to comprise.

What best describes your circumstances over the past year?



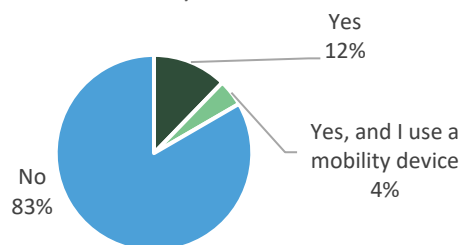
Survey respondents were disproportionately low-income compared to the Census-described County distribution, but respondents were captured across the income range.

What is your household income?



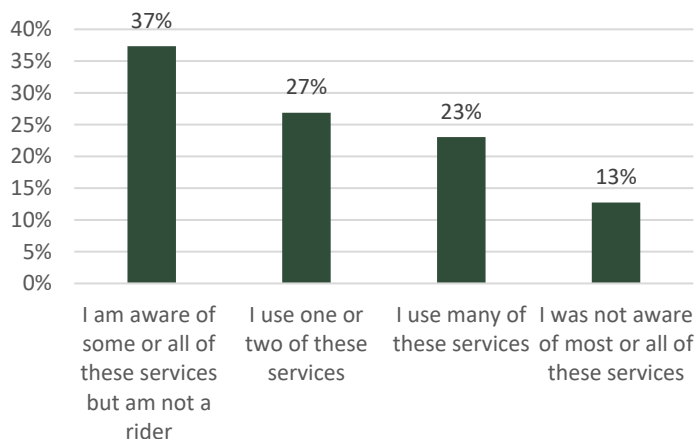
Respondents were marginally more likely to have a disability than the approximately 12% estimated by the 2020 Census for the County population.

Do you have a disability that impacts your mobility?



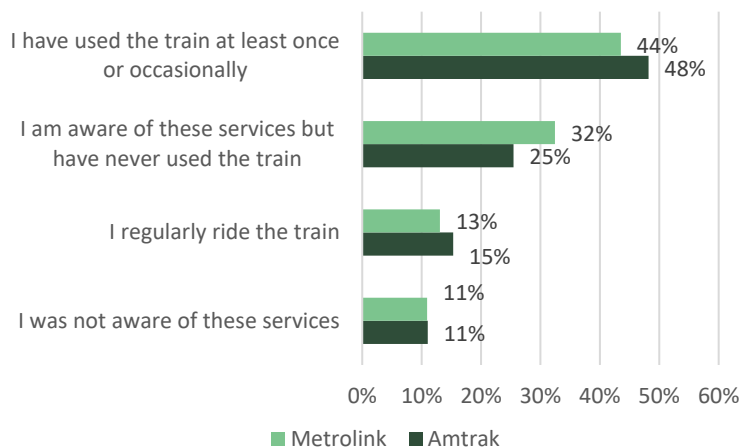
When asked broadly about bus service in Ventura County, 13% responded that they were unaware of most or all services, and 37% had some awareness but did not consider themselves riders. These numbers combined mean about half of survey respondents should be considered “non-riders.”

How familiar are you with Ventura County public transit bus services?



Awareness of the regional rail operations was substantially higher with only 11% claiming no awareness at all, and at least 25% being aware but never having used either Metrolink or the Surfliner. About 57% or more of respondents have used the train at least occasionally.

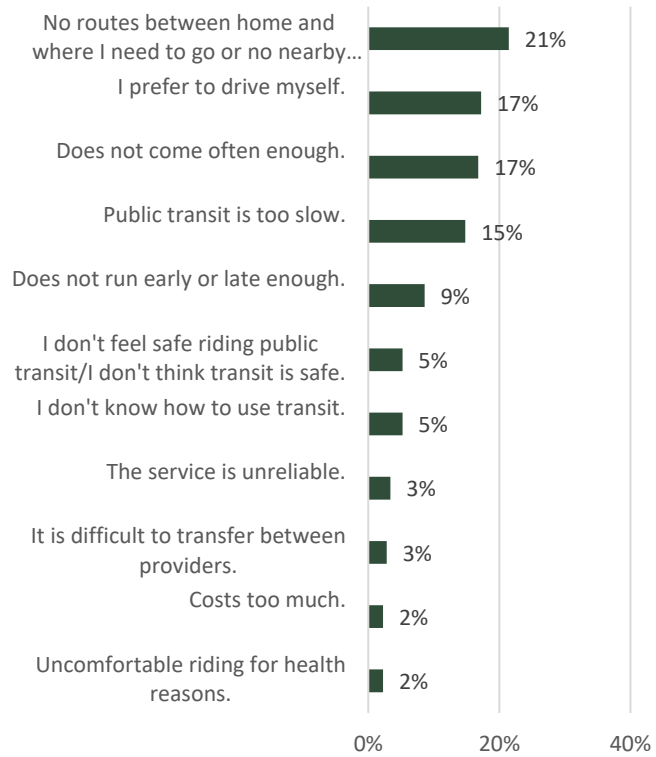
How familiar are you with rail services in Ventura County?



Respondents cited several reasons for not riding transit, with the most common being the perception that no service near them serves their needs, a preference for driving, and that transit is too slow or too infrequent. Several left comments that were supportive of public transit but simply stated they did not “need” to use transit because they have a car.

Notably, very few cited discomfort related to health which otherwise might have suggested hesitation to use transit following the pandemic. Only about 1% of respondents noted that they used to ride transit, but don’t anymore.

What top 3 reasons best describe why you don't ride transit often or at all?



WHY NON-RIDERS DON'T USE TRANSIT

The survey included open-ended responses in which non-riders expanded upon why they don't use transit in Ventura County. Some notable quotes from respondents included:¹

"Seems like too much work to figure out when I can easily drive myself. But---if there was a simple system that could show me all of these options at a glance, I might consider it."

"Transferring is essentially impossible because the frequencies are so low. If your bus comes once every hour or more and the train even less frequently it is impossible to use multiple services."

"Parking is ubiquitous and free in Ventura County which doesn't incentivize taking ... transit."

"Would love to be able to take the train into LA for evening activities such as concerts, sporting events, etc. but the last service back to Ventura County is way too early which forces us to drive."

"Too infrequent. Not aligned with big events"

"As a full-time working parent of two, it's difficult to plan your day around transit schedules relative to all of the places we need to be for our family's schedule. It's too hard to make all of the timing work out with less frequency of transit service."

"The 8:00 bus outside my apartment got cut, so now I get to work too early or too late."

Although stakeholders in focus groups and interviews were highly concerned about the perception of safety or lack of understanding for how to use transit, each of these were cited by only five percent of survey respondents. Regardless, the specific safety-related experiences that discourage people from riding the bus are crucial to address directly, monitor, and message to the public. This is closely linked with awareness and understanding of how to use the system.

"A coworker described some experiences she had on the bus system in Ventura and I was frightened. Unwanted attention by other riders."

"I don't feel safe parking and leaving my car at the train station, especially if I'm getting home late, and it's not convenient to take public transit from my home to the train station."

"I don't have any information about transit, have never heard of friends using it, so I couldn't say whether it is on time, offered often, how much it costs, whether it's safe, or anything else."

"Fear of speaking a foreign language in a transportation context."

"I actually WANT to use public transit, it's just really daunting for me, and it feels like it's really inconsistent. I think the biggest thing is just the education aspect for me. If I knew what was available and how to access it, maybe it would change."

¹ Minor edits to comments were made for clarity, spelling, and grammar.

“Wish I had a Buddy to help me the first time.”

Cost, reliability, and transferring between providers were also not top concerns for many respondents, but some respondents provided comments that were specific to the challenges people with limited mobility experience:

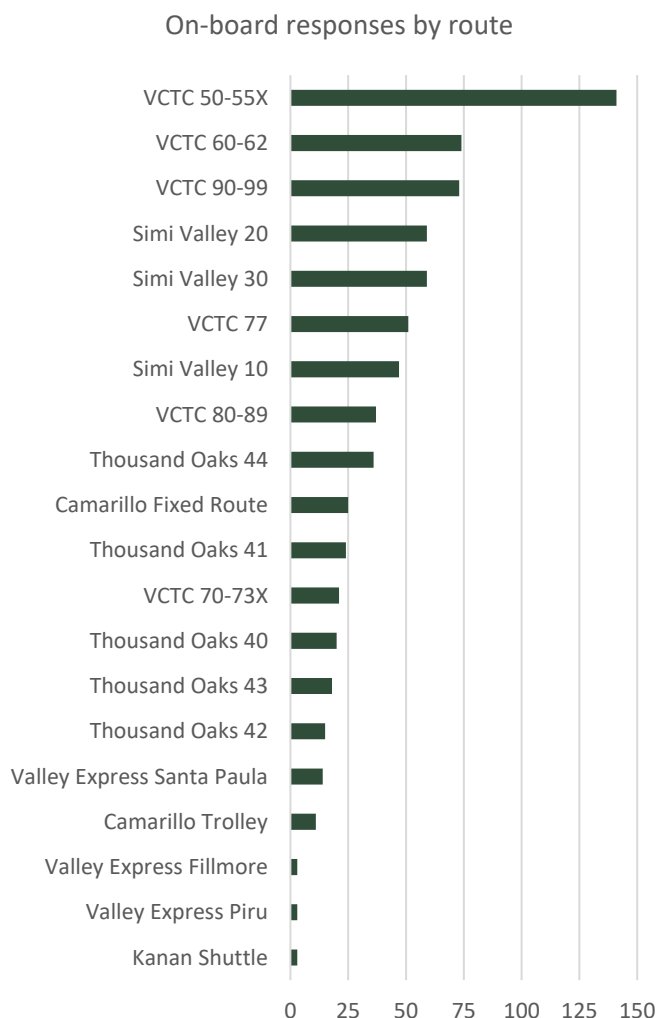
“I would like to use transit but a medical condition requires a door-to-door ride not a curb-to-curb ride. I do not qualify for no or low-cost door to door rides.”

“I have medical appointments outside of Camarillo but public transportation is too costly.”

RIDERS: ONLINE AND ON-BOARD SURVEY RESULTS

The online general public survey received approximately 50% of its responses from people who currently ride transit in Ventura County at least sometimes.² Those in this category responded to questions about their experience with the services, specifically addressing safety and comfort, as well as fare products, which were identified as potentially crucial topics for current riders.

Additionally, an on-board rider survey was distributed around the same period which asked about similar topics, plus additional questions about personal travel patterns and service quality. The on-board rider survey gathered 753 responses across routes representing Camarillo Area Transit, Kanan Shuttle, Simi Valley Transit, Thousand Oaks Transit, Valley Express, and VCTC Intercity. Surveys were also distributed on Moorpark City Transit routes, but no responses were received. Gold Coast Transit was excluded because the agency conducted its own SRTP around the same time. Surveys were made available in English, Spanish and Chinese with translations by native speakers on the consultant team. About 14.5% of on-board surveys were completed in Spanish. Only a few Chinese language surveys were returned. The distribution of responses by route is shown at right, and does not closely correspond to ridership distribution, although most routes had at least some responses.

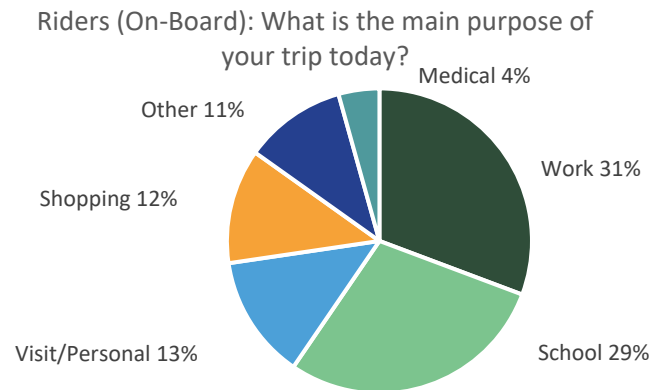


This section highlights the responses across both the online and on-board surveys that directly affect current riders and are relevant for attracting future riders.

² Respondents who selected “I regularly use transit (daily or weekly)” or “I occasionally use transit (at least once a month).”

RIDER DESTINATIONS AND ACCESS TO TRANSIT

Bus riders are using transit primarily for school and work trips: 31% of all trips are work-related, and 29% are school-related. However, this result may also reflect the skew of responses from Intercity routes, which are more likely to serve work trips than local bus routes.



Area colleges, shopping centers, and Metrolink stations account for the largest number of origins and destinations for bus passengers, although origins and destinations are very spread out across the County.

Note that these numbers represent survey responses, not actual boardings. Area colleges are a significant source of ridership in Ventura County.

Top Boarding and Alighting Locations of Survey Respondents

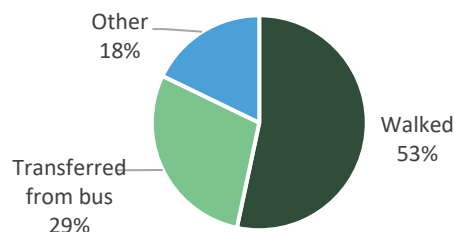
Location	Boardings
Moorpark College	16
CSUCI	15
Ventura College	13
Camarillo Metrolink	8
The Oaks	7
Location	Alightings
CSUCI	50
Camarillo Metrolink	25
The Oaks	21
Moorpark College	17
Esplanade Mall	11
Pacific View Mall	10
Ventura College	10

Approximately half of all riders get to or from the bus by walking, and 29% transfer from or to another bus.

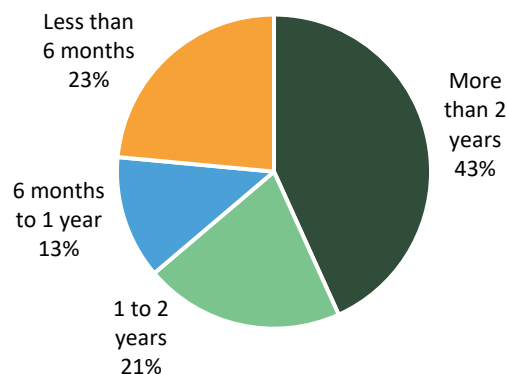
Most respondents have used the bus for at least one year, but 23% began using the system in the past six months. This suggests substantial ridership turnover, and is critically important to consider as total ridership across the county has declined over the last ten years. Ensuring new riders have a reliably high-quality experience is essential to retaining riders long-term. Many general public (online) survey respondents also noted that they were former riders who have since purchased a car, which is perhaps also indicated by only 43% of on-board respondents having been riders for longer than two years. Increasing car ownership has been cited by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)³ as a significant variable explaining transit ridership decline.

Transit ridership is predominantly composed of regular customers. As noted, a significant portion of riders are relatively new to the system. When examining the relationship between whether riders were new to the system and their frequency of use, those who began riding in the last 6 months were slightly more likely to respond, “Less than 1 day per week.” Regardless of how long riders have been in the system, the vast majority use transit four or more days a week.

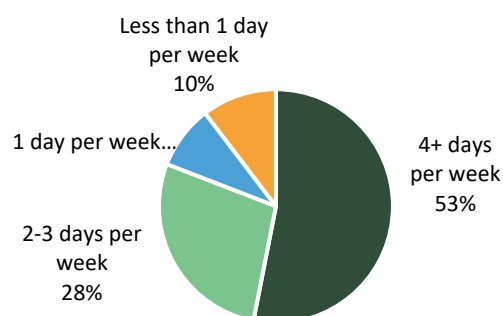
Riders (On-Board): Mode of Access to the Bus



Riders (On-Board): How long have you been riding the bus?



Riders (On-Board): How often do you ride the bus?



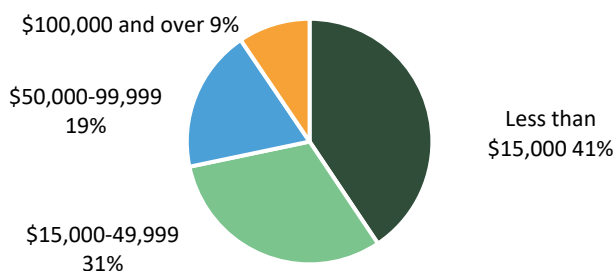
³ Manville, Taylor and Blumenberg. *Falling Transit Ridership: California and Southern California*. UCLA Lewis Center. January, 2018 <https://www.lewis.ucla.edu/research/falling-transit-ridership-california-and-southern-california/>

RIDER INCOMES AND RELATIONSHIP TO FARES

Most riders report low incomes, but over one-quarter of riders have household incomes above \$50,000. According to the on-board survey respondents, 41% live in a household with no vehicle, which is a much higher proportion than the county demographics.

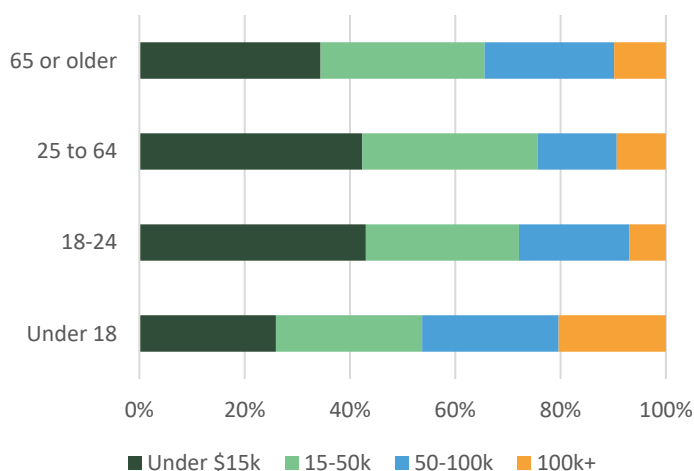
Based on the on-board surveys, transit riders skew towards much lower household income than the overall county demographics, as well as compared to the online survey responses.

Rider (On-Board) Household Income



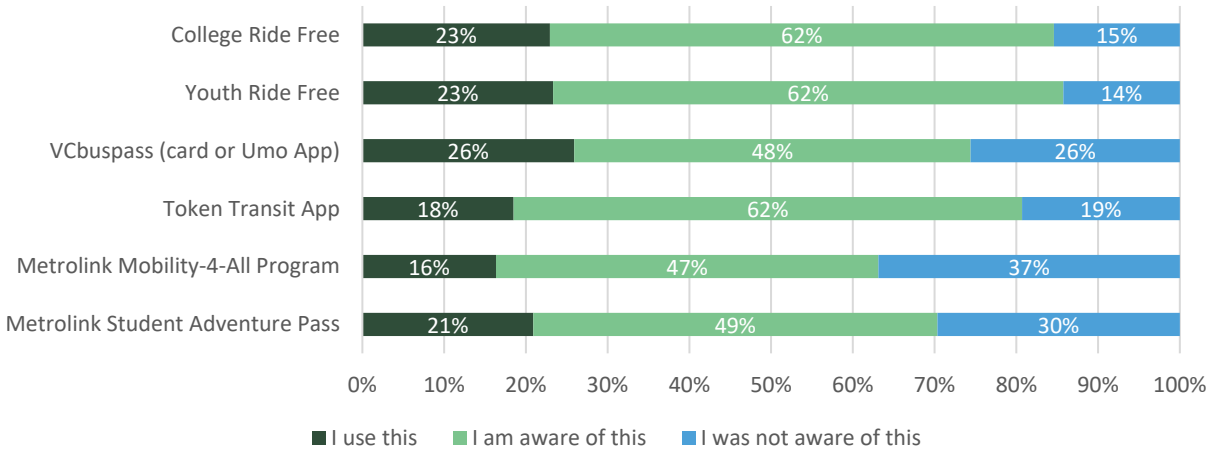
The income distribution is relatively similar across age groups in the on-board survey. When cross-tabulating household income to how often the respondent uses transit, people with household incomes above \$100,000 were significantly more likely to use the bus only occasionally, but even 60% of respondents in the highest income bracket use transit almost daily.

Rider (On-Board) Household Income by Age



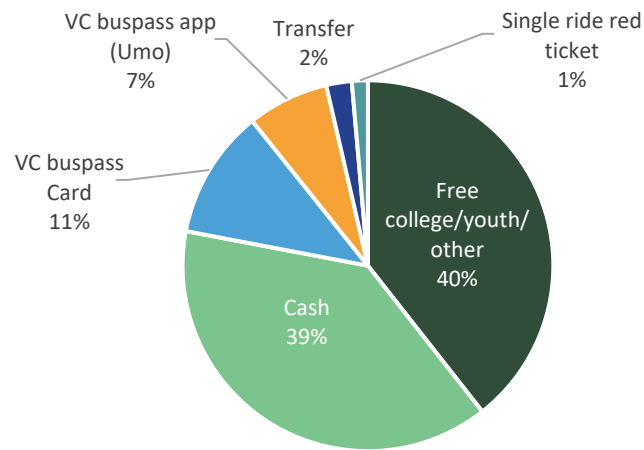
When considering how survey respondent incomes relate to pass availability and awareness of fare programs, we can review both the on-board surveys and the online general public survey. The general public online survey asked all respondents about their familiarity with transit passes and fare programs. Awareness of passes was generally high among those who used transit at least occasionally. Awareness of the Youth Ride Free and College Ride free programs was especially high, but somewhat lower regarding Metrolink discount pass programs. The VCbuspass was the most utilized (26% of current riders) and also had lower general awareness (26%) than the College Ride, Youth Ride, and the Token Transit app. The chart on the following page shows the online survey results for each pass program included in the question.

Online Survey: How familiar are you with transit passes and fare programs in the County?



On board the buses, riders were asked how they paid the fare for that trip. Forty percent ride for free due to their status as college students, their youth, or other reasons (Leisure Village residents ride for free in Camarillo, but represent a low proportion of all riders), while 39% pay cash. The VCbuspass accounts for 18% of all boardings.

Rider (On-Board): Method of Payment



Indications from both surveys indicate that transit riders in Ventura County are disproportionately low-income, but how people facing extreme financial hardship manage their transportation needs is not clear. The online survey responses did not indicate that cost of transportation was a major barrier for most riders, although it was noted by a few individuals who depend on dial-a-ride programs, which are more expensive per trip. It was also not highly ranked as a barrier preventing non-riders from using transit. However, it is hard to say with certainty that these surveys fully capture the perspective of people who are truly facing the choice to pay for a transit trip at the expense of something else, which is something to consider given the proportion of respondents who reported extremely low household income across the age spectrum.

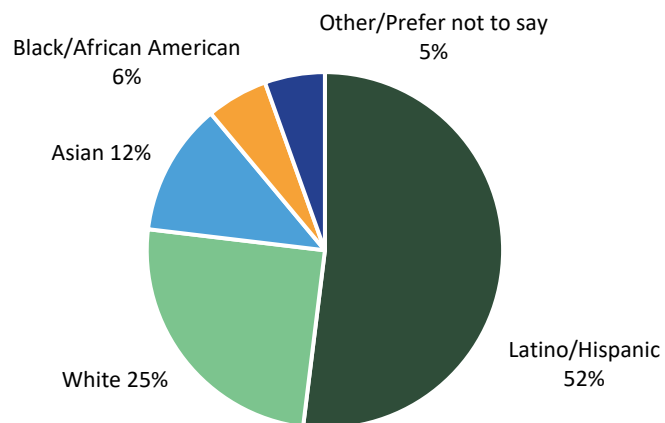
PERSONAL SAFETY ACCESSING AND RIDING TRANSIT

Both community organizations and agency stakeholders raised concern for actual or perceived safety on transit throughout the outreach process. The general public online survey and on-board rider surveys addressed these in several ways. As discussed above, only 5% of general public non-riders cited safety as one of their top three reasons for not using transit.

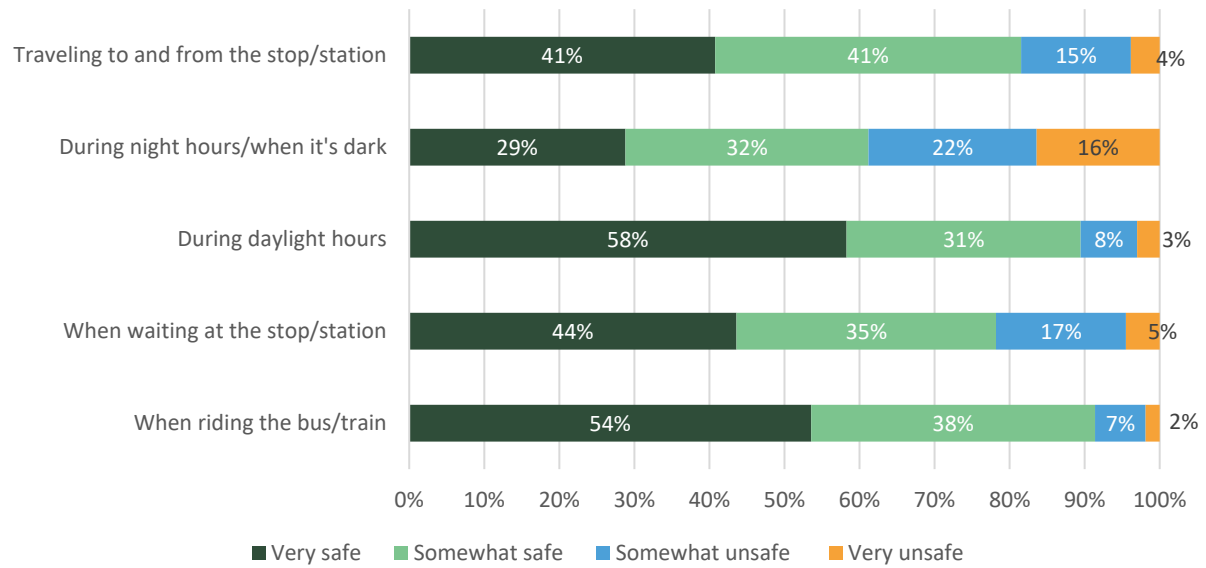
Personal safety is a complex topic and particularly affects some demographics differently than others, particularly women, people who identify as non-binary, and minorities. In the general public online survey, overall response rates were 57% female, with as many as 6% of all respondents also self-identifying as transgender. The on-board survey also received about 6% responses from self-identified non-binary persons, although the proportion of male respondents in the on-board survey was about 51%.

The race and ethnicity of on-board survey respondents was significantly different than that of the online survey. Latinx/Hispanic respondents were by far the largest group, with Asian and Black/African American also slightly more well-represented than the county average population.

Rider (On-Board): Race/Ethnicity



Online Survey: How safe do you feel using public transit

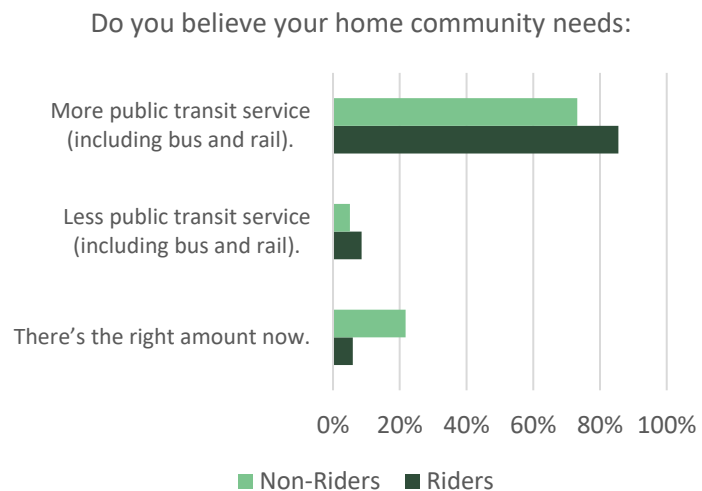


Overall, riders report the highest perception of safety when actually on-board transit, and when waiting for the bus during the day. Unsurprisingly, the perception of safety declines substantially in darkness, and this result is supported by many open-ended comments respondents made about needing improved lighting at bus stops and safer walk access to transit across the county. While only 9% of respondents felt somewhat or very unsafe while riding, such concerns are crucial to address for those riders, and to counter the general narrative that transit is unsafe.

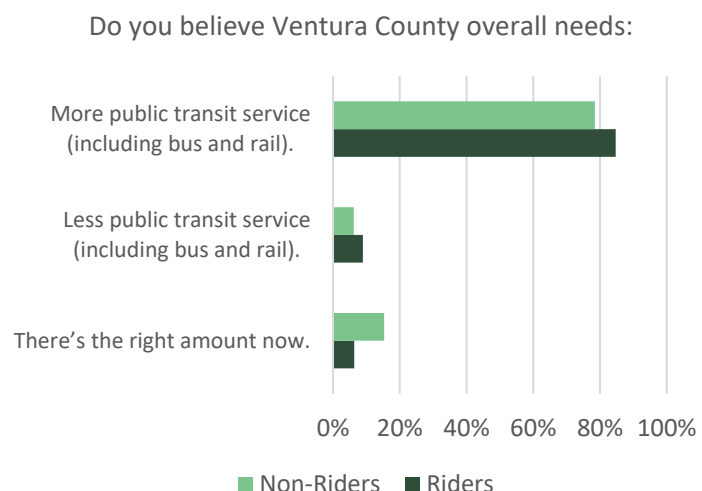
FIXED ROUTE TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS AND TRADEOFFS

Both the online and on-board survey asked all respondents, regardless of their transit use, to consider several questions that would help the SRTP weigh out what improvements are *most* needed given there are limited resources available. In the general public online survey, respondents were asked questions about the level of service and improvements in their own city (implying local travel) and then the same question for Ventura County overall (implying regional travel). The following several charts show data from the online survey.

When asked about their **home community**, the majority of online survey respondents agreed on the need for more public transit, although as many as 20% of non-riders believe there is the right amount today.



When asked about **the County overall**, respondents had similar beliefs about needing more public transit. Notably, slightly fewer non-riders believe there is the right amount today.



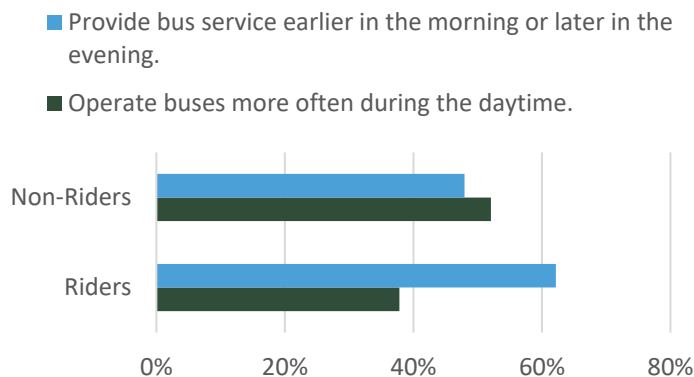
The following series of questions posed a single trade-off to respondents about transit in their home city. These “forced preference” questions help transit planners address the real trade-offs that result from limited transit funding.

First, riders express a clear preference for more peak-period bus service, while non-riders were slightly more likely to favor more frequent service throughout the day.

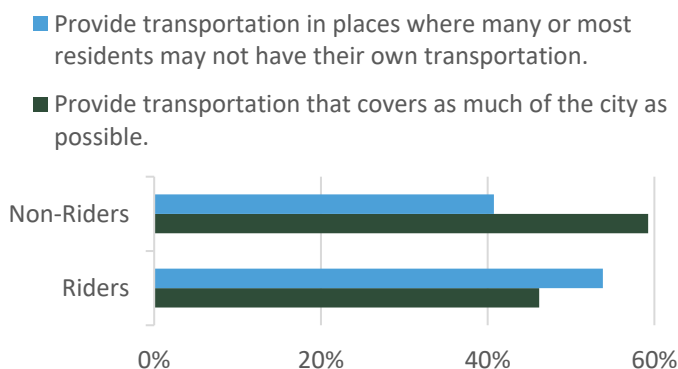
When asked whether cities should focus service in areas where people may not have a car versus greater coverage across the city, respondents seemed relatively split. The open-response comments suggest this question was not useful, because Ventura County is perceived to be so car-dependent that very few people truly have no other option.

In contrast, the following question was very clear that all respondents believe that better bus connections between communities is a greater priority than improved local bus service. This is further substantiated by the many open-response comments focused on the difficulty in traveling across the county on transit.

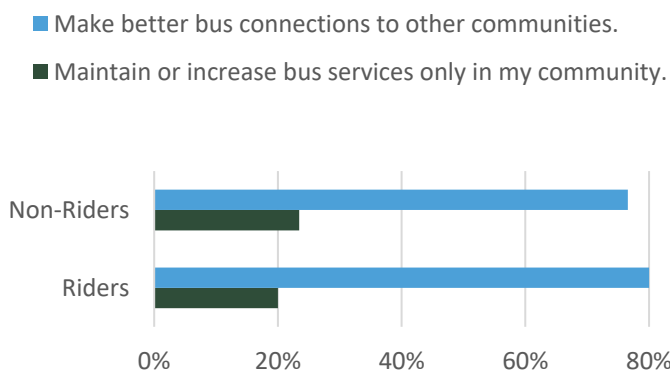
Would you prefer your city:



Would you prefer your city:

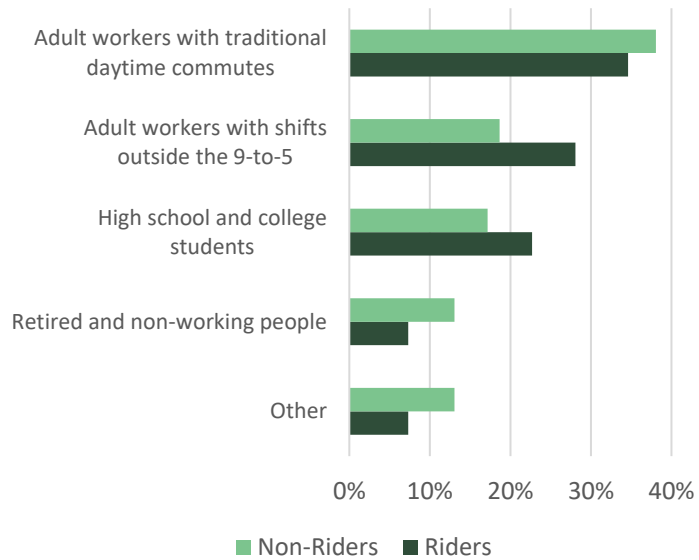


Would you prefer your city:



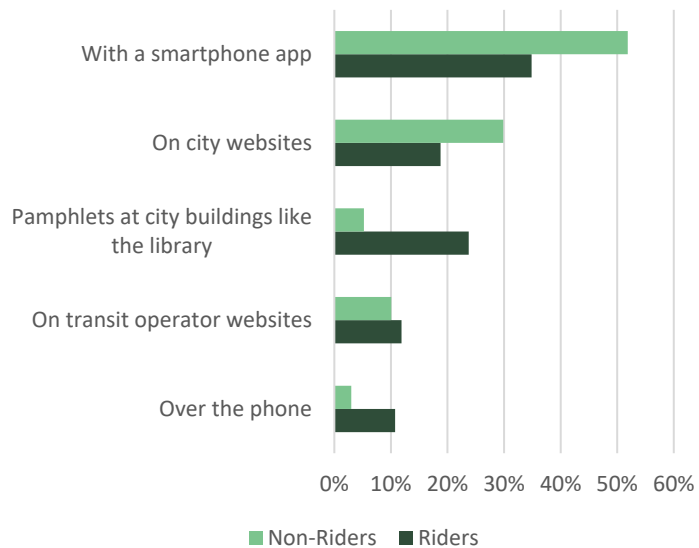
Another theme throughout the project scope and the initial stakeholder engagement is the assumption that travel patterns have shifted substantially following the pandemic and greater ability to work remotely. This question asked respondents to pick one group that was the most important for transit to serve, and although the most common answer still fell along the traditional commute pattern, there were still 20-30% of respondents who believe either better coverage for other work shifts or the needs of high school and college students were the most important. Current riders were notably more likely to focus on workers who have a shift outside the traditional 9-to-5.

Would you prefer bus routes focus MOST on the travel needs of:



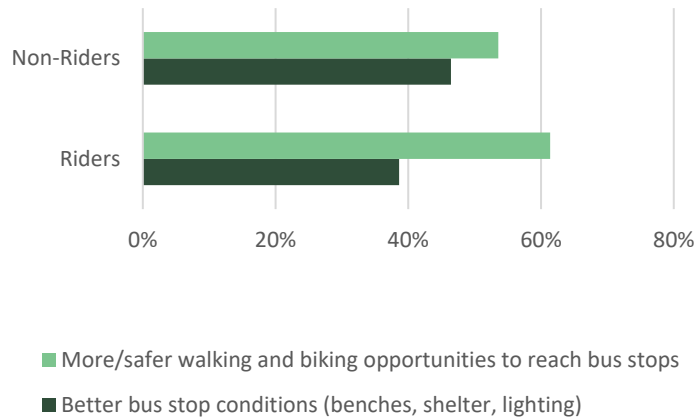
Non-riders were significantly more likely to desire digital information about transit than current riders, who rely on more traditional means, including printed material or the ability to call a customer service representative. Note that a non-rider has to choose (or be inspired) to seek information out regardless of where and how it can be found, whereas riders already know what they are looking for. The Partnerships Plan will address this subject and the importance of motivating non-riders to take interest rather than relying primarily on the existence of the service to attract new customers.

Where would information about using the bus be MOST useful for you:



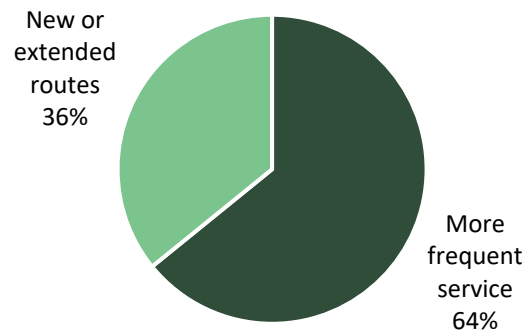
Finally, many areas have bus service but the walking conditions to reach the bus stop are poor, while other areas have a good sidewalk network but little investment in bus stop infrastructure. Both riders and non-riders are more likely to desire better walking and biking conditions to reach transit, but the conditions of bus stops are still highly important.

Which do you believe your city needs MOST:



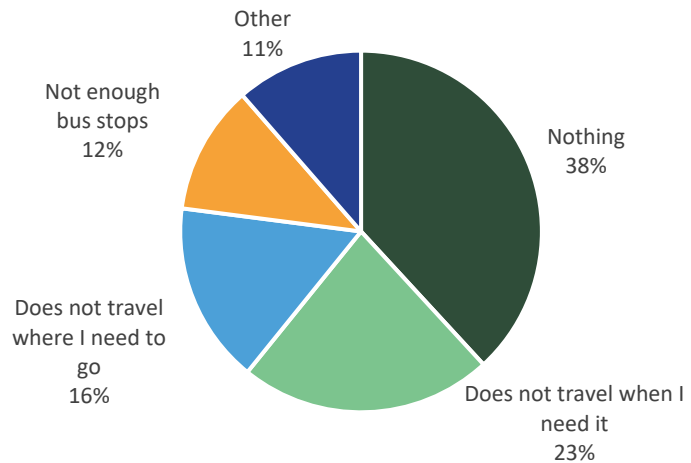
The on-board survey also asked riders to choose among various service improvements. Respondents expressed a strong preference for greater frequency on existing routes (64%) over new or extended routes to new places (36%). Riders' opinions were mixed on service later in the evening (51%) versus more frequent service during the day (49%).

On-Board (Riders): Would you rather have:



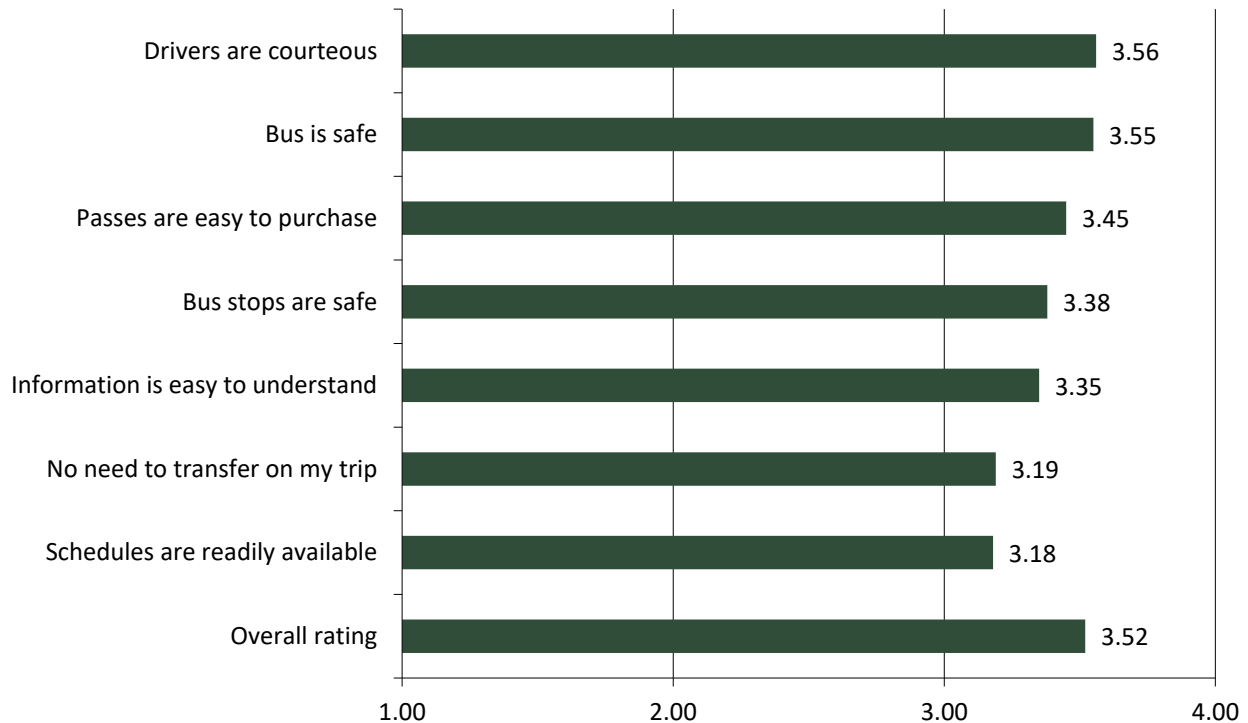
When asked what, if any, factors prevent them from using transit more often, 23% of current riders say that routes do not travel when they need it, and 16% report that routes do not travel where they need to go. However, over one third said nothing prevents them from using it more often, which is likely because most riders are already using the bus most days of the week.

On-Board (Riders): What, if anything, prevents you from increasing your use of the bus?



FIXED ROUTE TRANSIT SERVICE QUALITY

The on-board survey asked riders to rate various elements of service on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 being “poor” and 4 being “excellent,” as well as to provide an overall rating of bus service. The overall score is 3.52, indicating a high level of passenger satisfaction with bus service. The highest rated items are operator courtesy (3.56) and safety on the bus (3.55). The lowest rated elements are availability of schedules (3.18) and no need to transfer on my trip (3.19).



In designing service improvements, transit planners need to know not only the customer ratings on individual service attributes, but also the importance of each attribute in terms of overall satisfaction. We measure the importance of each service attribute by examining the relationship of each attribute to overall satisfaction. The relationship is measured using correlation analysis to estimate the importance of each service attribute; a higher correlation indicates that a given service attribute is more important in determining overall satisfaction. An index score of 100 is assigned to the average correlation coefficient. Service attributes with a score above 100 are more correlated with overall satisfaction (as measured by the overall rating), while service attributes with a score below 100 are less correlated.

This table shows the Pearson correlation coefficient and the importance score for each

Service Attribute	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Importance Index
Drivers are courteous	0.850	112.38

service attribute. **Operator courtesy and safety on the bus are most important**, while no need to transfer and ease of purchasing passes are relatively less important.

Bus is safe	0.831	109.81
Bus stops are safe	0.771	101.88
Schedules are readily available	0.768	101.52
Information is easy to understand	0.744	98.33
Passes are easy to purchase	0.684	90.37
No need to transfer on my trip	0.648	85.71

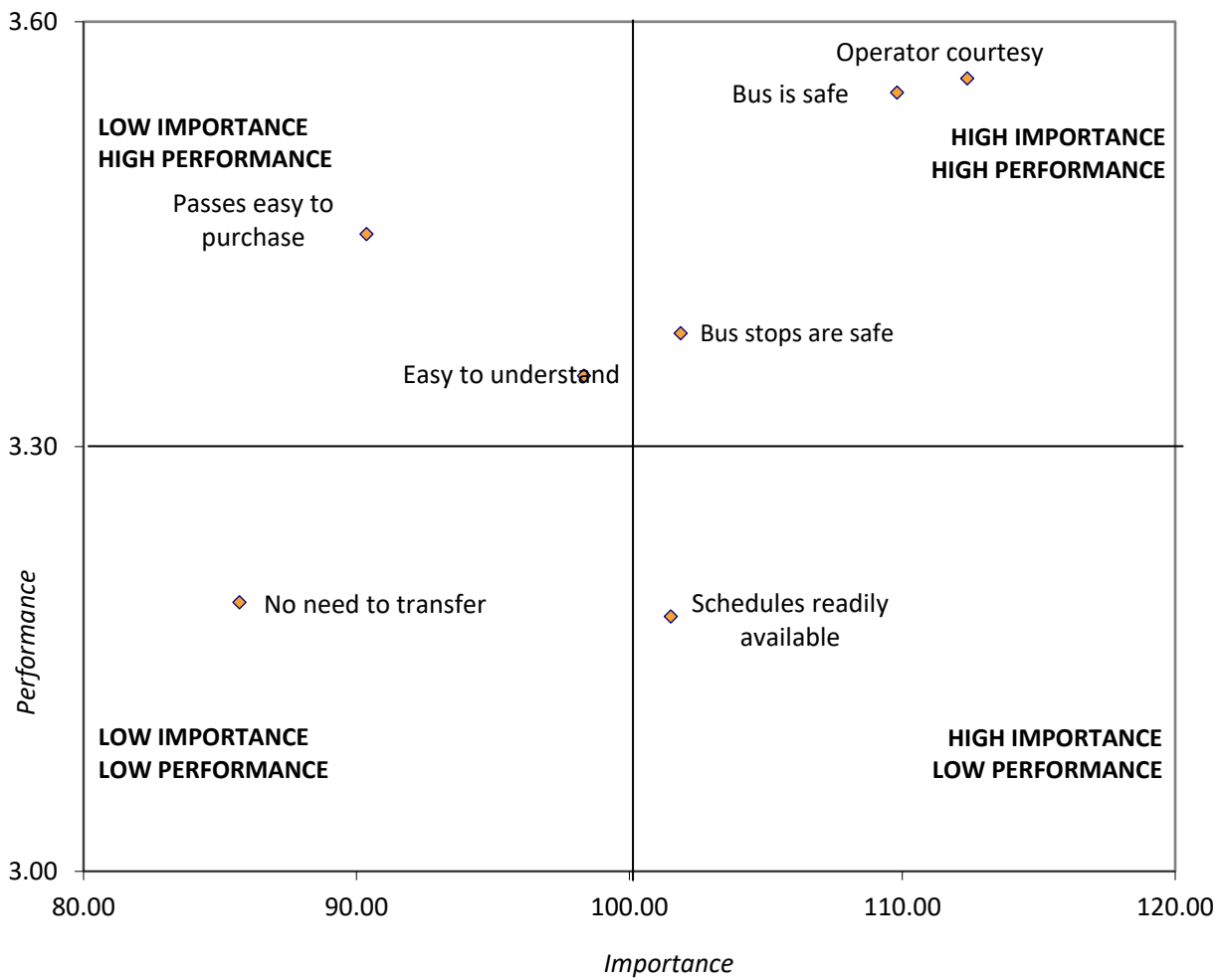
A scatter diagram can visualize the relationship of performance and importance of these attributes, divided into quadrants. This diagram is shown on the following page.

Items in the upper right-hand quadrant represent important attributes with high performance ratings. These are things that bus agencies do well that are important to riders. Agencies should take whatever actions are required to ensure continued high-performance ratings on these attributes. “Operator courtesy,” “safe buses,” and “safe bus stops” are service elements that fall within this quadrant.

Items in the upper left-hand quadrant receive high marks in terms of performance but are relatively unimportant to riders. Often, attributes in this quadrant receive lower importance ratings from passengers precisely because the agency does a good job in these areas. Riders, like everyone else, tend to take areas in which their needs are met for granted. This suggests that agencies needs to continue to monitor service delivery in these areas to ensure high performance, but that these elements of service are not top priorities for improvements. The attributes within this quadrant are “passes easy to purchase” and “information is easy to understand.”

Items in the lower left-hand quadrant are relatively unimportant to riders and relatively low scoring in terms of performance. While performance levels are relatively low for these attributes, these are not strong candidates for improvement due to their low levels of importance to riders. The only element in this quadrant is “no need to transfer.”

Items in the lower right-hand quadrant are key priorities for bus agencies. Riders consider these attributes important, but current performance ratings are less than desired. Only one element is in this quadrant, “schedules are readily available.”



DEMAND-RESPONSE RIDER SURVEYS

Customers of the demand-response programs (typically dial-a-ride in Ventura County communities), which include paratransit-eligible riders, have different needs and context for using transit from fixed-route riders. A survey was mailed to 3,717 of registered dial-a-ride customers in Ventura County (although not necessarily all those registered are active riders) and over 645 rider responses were returned. At least 660 mailers were undeliverable. The completed surveys represent a 21% response rate.

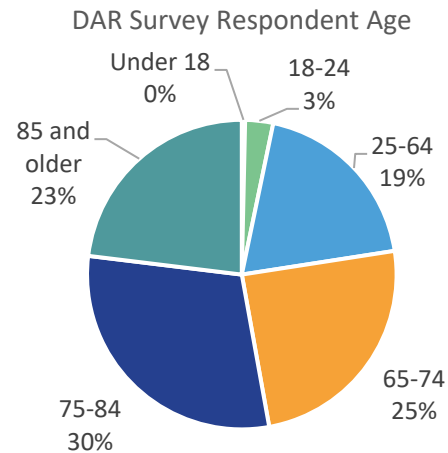
This section summarizes some findings from these surveys, although additional focused analysis will be incorporated into the Countywide Demand-Response Integration Plan. This section will generally refer to “DAR riders” inclusive of anyone who uses demand-response service.

Responses were received for every demand-response program operating in 2024:

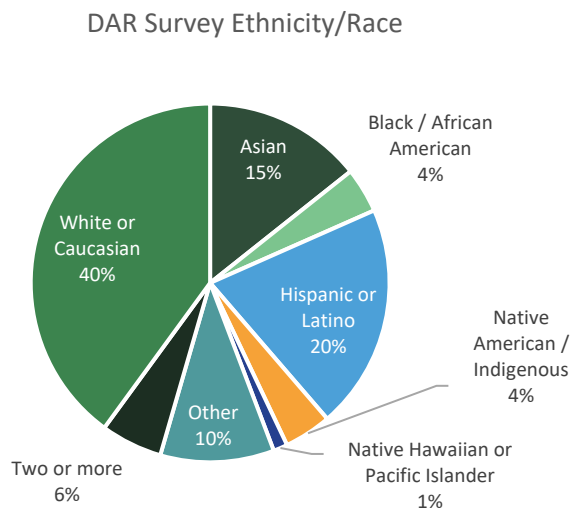
For your most recent trip, which service did you use?	
Camarillo Area Transit Dial-a-Ride	99
CONNECT intercity Dial-a-Ride	16
Gold Coast GO NOW	6
Gold Coast Transit GO ACCESS	163
Moorpark City Transit (MCT) On Demand	13
Moorpark Senior Dial-a-Ride	5
Simi Valley Transit ADA/Dial-a-Ride	112
Thousand Oaks Transit Dial-a-Ride	183
Valley Express Dial-a-Ride	17

Many respondents also use multiple services; for example, residents in eastern Ventura County are likely to have used both a municipal DAR and ECTA CONNECT, and others may have used Camarillo Area Transit and GO ACCESS.

DAR customers are predominantly aged 65 and older. In fact, 77% are over age 65 and so this survey allowed for more granular age data which demonstrates that DAR customers range well into their 80s and older.

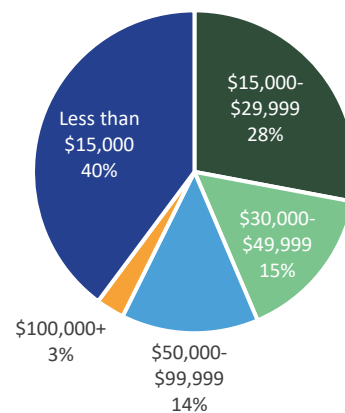


The DAR survey respondents' ethnicity and race distribution is roughly similar to the overall county and to that of the general public online survey results. As with other survey efforts, the DAR survey was available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.



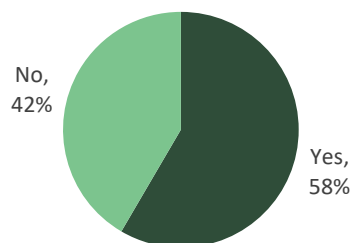
Like other transit riders, DAR customers represent a disproportionate percentage of low-income households. Households earning less than \$30,000 a year in the county are approximately 10%, but almost 70% of riders surveyed fall in this category. Less than 20% of respondents reported a household income over \$50,000. This is also likely reflective of the very high proportion of senior-aged riders who are retired.

DAR Survey Household Income

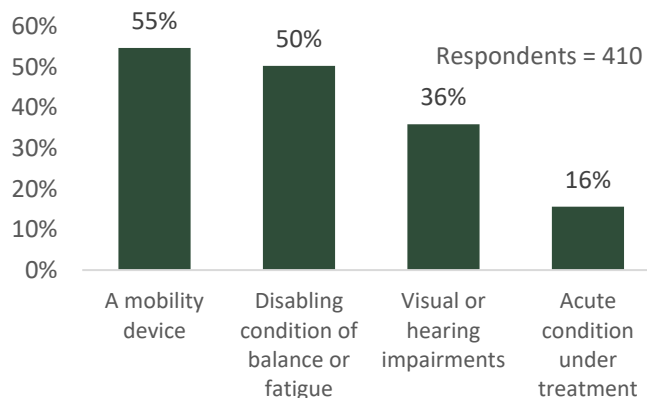


More than 50% of respondents stated that they have a disability. Of those who reported a disability, 55% of those respondents have some type of device they carry with them. This affects the design of the transit fleet to provide sufficient capacity for wheelchair securements, as well as the scheduling appropriate load and dwell times to properly account for mobility issues.

Do you have a disability that impacts mobility?



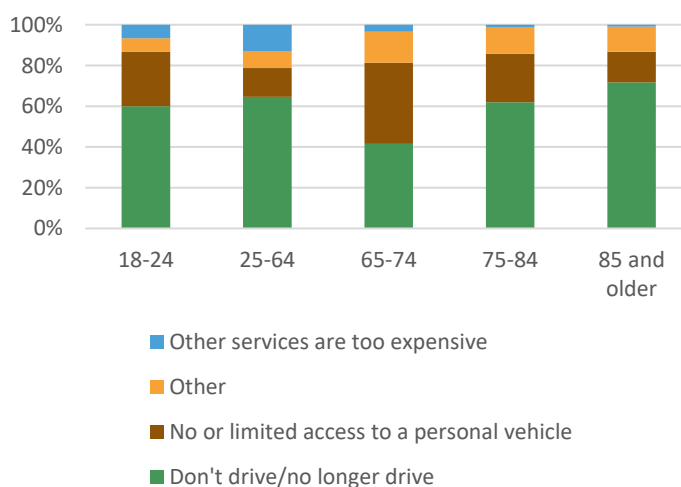
Do you have mobility impacts?



Riders who are under 65 are significantly more likely to have a disability that affects their mobility, primarily because most DAR services are not available to people under 65 unless they have a disability⁴. However, riders over 65 surprisingly were not significantly more likely to report having a disability that affects their mobility; the proportion was about the same in each age group from 65 and up.

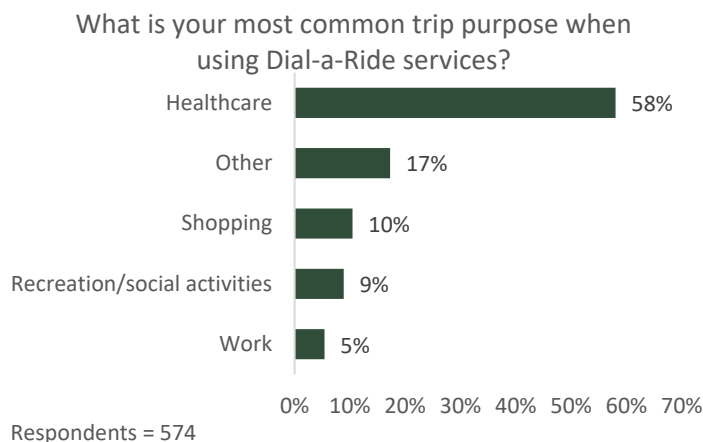
However, ability or comfort with driving is a significant factor. Riders were asked the reason for using the DAR service and the majority across all ages stated they don't or no longer drive, and access to a personal vehicle is also a critical factor.

Reason For Using Service



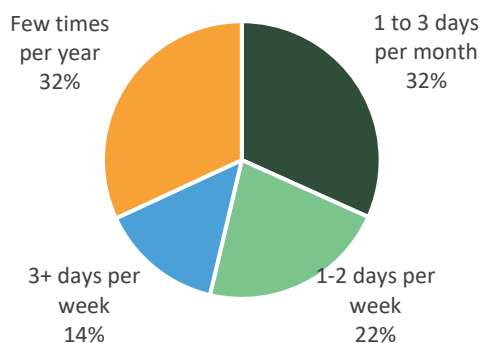
⁴ Camarillo Area Transit offers its Dial-A-Ride program to anyone regardless of age or disability. Valley Express also offers some general public dial-a-ride within its service area. All DAR programs in the County are also open to seniors aged 65 and up, although this is not necessarily required for operating a dial-a-ride program.

By far the most common trip purpose is for healthcare, which emphasizes the critical nature of these services, and how collaboration among agencies, especially for those that transfer, is important. Although healthcare is the predominant trip purpose, riders also depend on DAR for the same variety of reasons others use fixed-route services.



Compared with fixed-route riders, there is a much lower proportion who are riding most days of the week—only 14%—and a high percentage who reported only riding a few days a month. What this may not capture, according to staff, is that a significant portion of the overall trips are made by a relatively small number of very active riders, who sometimes make multiple trips per day.

How often do you use the DAR on which you most recently traveled?

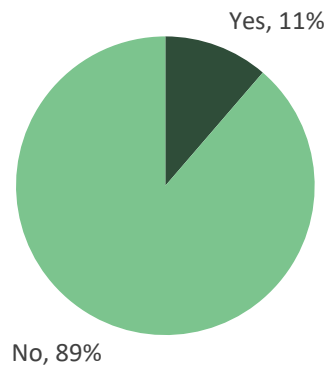


Considering most DAR customers report very low household incomes, price of the service may significantly influence travel behavior.

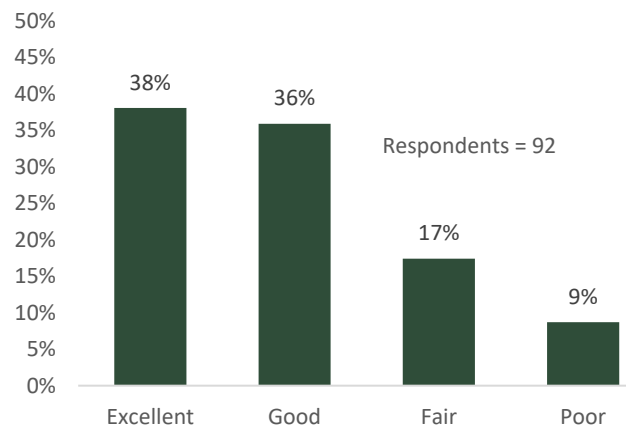
Stakeholders during the initial Phase 1 engagement raised concern that transferring between providers is a greater burden for DAR riders, especially those with limited mobility and people who use wheelchairs or other devices. The survey asked customers if they transfer between dial-a-ride systems. The majority of those who responded do not transfer between systems; however, those who did were mostly happy with their experience. This supports a point raised by staff that very few current riders are making DAR trips that require a transfer.

Although only about a quarter of respondents, approximately 24 individuals, rated the transfer experience as fair or poor, the Demand-Response Integration tasks will consider the specific circumstances and opportunities that integration could offer.

Have you transferred between Dial-a-Ride services?



If yes, rate the transfer experience



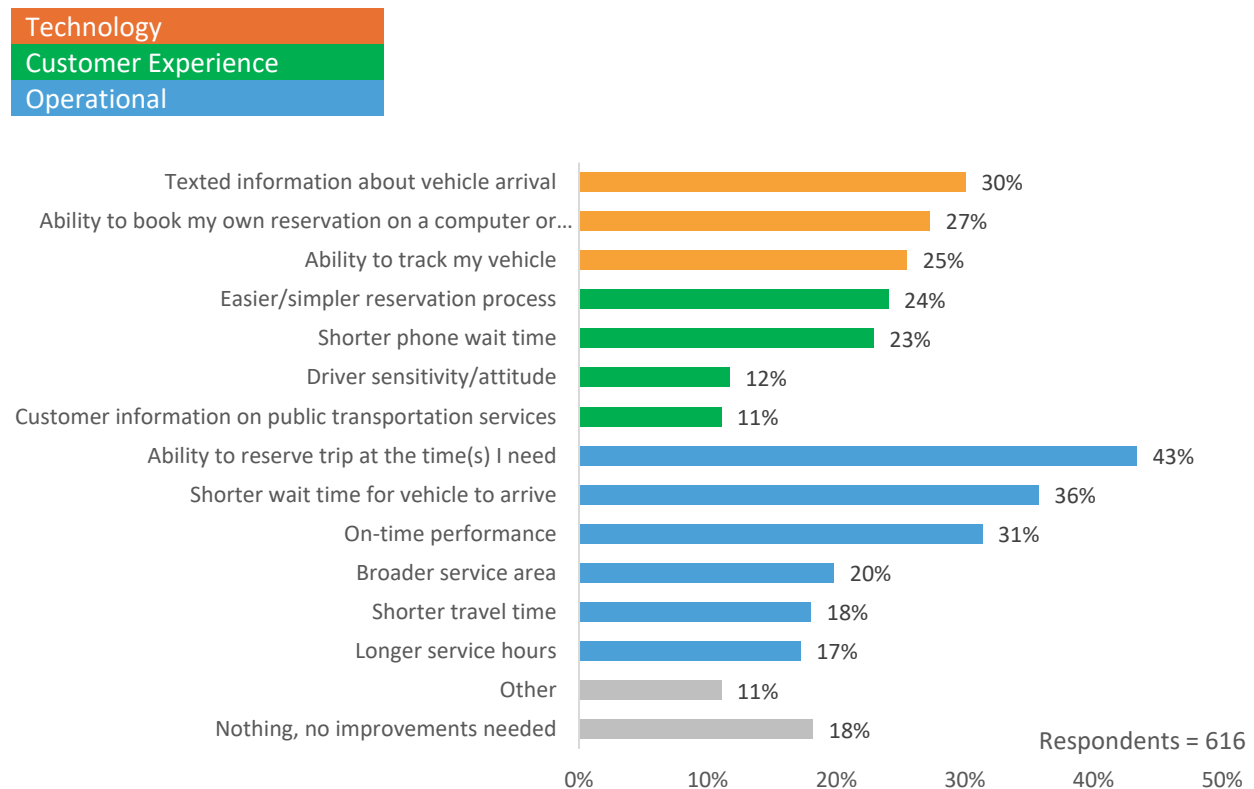
DAR SERVICE QUALITY AND OPPORTUNITIES

DAR riders rated most characteristics of the service highly, although on-time performance was notably lower in satisfaction than all other aspects.

DAR Survey: Quality of Service



Riders were asked what improvements to dial-a-ride services would help them the most. Questions were divided into categories represented by different colors below:



The most prominent responses were related to operations, especially the timing of trips, wait time to be picked up, and on-time performance. Given most riders are primarily using DAR to access healthcare, there is likely significant stress around reaching appointments on time. Respondents were interested in technology, including vehicle arrival notifications, booking reservations online, and the ability to track their vehicle remotely. While these appealed to only 30% of respondents, these results are likely to increase in importance to riders in the future as today's technology will be familiar to future DAR customers.

Overall, relatively few current riders felt that driver sensitivity or attitude needed attention, which further emphasizes that riders highly value and appreciate the high-quality support they receive from the service.

There is more to learn from the DAR surveys that would have implications for the proposed integration of demand-response services in Ventura County. The Demand-Response Integration Plan will delve further into that topic.

Phase 3 Engagement Summary

The first phase of engagement established what transit issues confront staff, stakeholders, and special interest groups. The second phase gathered more details on the issues identified by exploring these subjects with riders and the general public through several surveying efforts. Both phases influenced the design of the existing conditions analysis, and identification of transit needs and opportunities. The project team ultimately brought all of these elements together to develop the Plan's initial transit concepts. These transit concepts are covered in the Short Range Transit Plan – Planning Report.

Phase 3 consisted of multiple in-person and virtual workshops, with the goal of presenting the fixed-route service concepts to the general public. Stakeholder participants and any other contacts from prior phases were invited to participate. In-person workshops were held in Camarillo and Santa Paula, while a virtual public workshop was hosted on Zoom.

Ahead of these public meetings, the consultant team connected with each stakeholder community several times, to collaboratively consider and refine the draft recommendations. Staff input was crucial in focusing several ideas into a more select set of trade-offs to present to the public.

Unfortunately, as with Phase 1, the community meetings (both in-person and virtual) were sparsely attended, despite soliciting participation from a larger stakeholder and community contact list (representing over 140 organizations, businesses and other representatives) developed over the prior year. The few community members who did attend the meetings were inquisitive about the analysis and supportive of the concepts. The team received no feedback that would have significantly shifted or altered the recommendations.

Following this outcome, the consultant team and VCTC staff also reengaged with city staff and County supervisors to solicit further input and direction, primarily regarding the Valley Express service. Specific guidance was needed for Valley Express to support the recommended rebalancing of fixed-route and demand-response services, which would represent a major change in service design affecting several communities. The outcome of these conversations was, again, positive and supportive of the proposed concepts.

FURTHER NEED FOR ENGAGEMENT

Once the SRTP reaches substantial completion, the final phase of public engagement will involve presentations to City Managers and Councils/Boards, and other administrative or advisory committees. This phase will present the final recommendations and educate the general public about the objectives and ideally generate excitement and interest in a reinvigorated transit network.

Following adoption of the SRTP by the Commission, the individual cities, depending on the level and nature of the proposed changes, may need to conduct additional engagement and public hearings to officially adopt and implement service changes.

Following implementation of agency-specific service changes, city or agency staff should continue to engage with riders and non-riders to supplement monitoring performance metrics with qualitative and personal feedback. This helps adjust service as needed and keeps the conversation about transit in the community fresh.

ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

The community engagement for the SRTTP spanned over a year of ongoing outreach with staff, committees, councils, and stakeholder organizations across the region. These efforts were supported by a strong response to surveys directed towards all transit riders and the non-riding public. Specific and detailed input about routes and service design has helped develop new service concepts which are addressed in the Planning Report. Beyond route and service-level details, these top-level findings are essential in directing future improvements for the whole county:

1. **Investment in better promotion, marketing and materials is crucial.** Stakeholder input and survey data underscore that awareness or understanding of transit is poor. Survey responses show that people believe there is no service to where they want to go or perceive that transit is “not for them.” However, there are many reasons people of all income levels and backgrounds may want to use transit at least some of the time, even if they have a car. In fact, even among current riders, almost 60% have access to a car at least sometimes.
2. **Linking promotion of transit to opportunities through stakeholder groups will grow ridership and improve perceptions of transit.** Stakeholder groups passionately emphasized the need to better inform the public about how transit can be used, and to address conceptions (and misconceptions) about safety onboard. This sentiment was reinforced through responses and comments from the general public from those in favor of transit but unsure how to use it, or untrusting that it would be safe. This uncertainty about safety comes in contrast with the fact that most existing riders report feeling safe using transit in Ventura County.
3. **Greater emphasis on regular local service, with predictable connections to other providers** will go a long way towards making the network more useful, recognizing that increasing actual frequency or transit speed is not likely with the current resources. People perceive the transit network to be sparse with poor connectivity between routes, and therefore have the perception of very long travel times to destinations beyond someone’s home community. Survey responses from the general public and riders indicated the greatest interest in this service improvement.
4. **Extending span of service has the potential to both support existing riders and attract new ones.** Surveys suggested that extending evening service was more important than improving midday frequency. Current riders sought better service to support ‘non-traditional’ work hours. Additionally, riders tend to have lower incomes, which are less likely to have daytime office-type hours. Extending service later in the evening will ensure people have a return trip home from jobs that extend past 5PM. Although the highest number of responses supported improvements to service for traditional work shifts, most services are already oriented towards these patterns and expanding evening service would still benefit traditional 9-5 commuters. Many respondents commented that it was hard to participate in community and cultural activities that happen in the evenings because there is no transportation.

5. **Improved walk access to transit should be a top priority for infrastructure projects.** Both riders and non-riders slightly preferred this option over better bus stop infrastructure. While improved stop amenities are important, the ability for people to safely walk (or roll) a short distance to transit will do more to bring more riders to transit, and stop amenities can follow.
6. **Fare policies and programs should support current riders,** who tend to represent significantly lower-income households than the county average. This subject will be explored in greater detail in the fare policy component of the Planning Report.
7. **Dial-a-Ride programs must take steps to address efficiency, reliability, and predictability.** Although these programs are rated highly overall, the majority of riders use DAR service to reach healthcare appointments, and timeliness and predictability are essential. It can be difficult to get appointments with specialists, so any uncertainty about trip availability and on-time performance will generate disproportionate levels of stress on riders. This was the area of greatest need among current DAR riders.
8. **Better availability of fixed-route transit** should help DAR programs free up capacity. Most riders surveyed were well into their senior years, but many did not report a disability that limits their mobility. This suggests opportunity to provide better route service for non-disabled individuals who currently depend on DAR. This strategy can also reduce the fare burden, as DAR riders are even more likely to have very low household income than fixed-route riders.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION

The overall theme throughout the engagement activities and input received was the importance of better marketing of transit service, more robust information, and better connections with organizations that could spread the word. There is no downside to making transit easier to understand and reminding people that it's available for them to use. Failure to address this only perpetuates the problem of low transit ridership.

This point was greatly underscored by the outcomes of the public engagement activities themselves. Despite significant effort on all parts, attendance at the virtual and in-person public sessions was exceptionally low. Consider the following:

1. **Public transit use is low** – because relatively few individual residents use transit locally in Ventura County, it is hard to drum up excitement about engagement. There is simply not a community culture around transit, nor enough people riding regularly to bring up transit in casual conversation the way people do in larger cities. If more people rode the bus, non-riders would be more likely to encounter someone—or several people—who were also riders.
2. **Understanding of transit options is low** – Beyond simply not viewing transit as directly relevant, many people may be legitimately unaware that their community has a transit program. Awareness of Metrolink was notably higher than local bus services. Regardless of general awareness, many people don't understand how it could be useful to them, how to get started using the service, or assume the local transit service they see is only for seniors or people with disabilities. When people are not hearing regularly about transit service and being

reminded of offerings in a way that they can relate to, they can't imagine needing to engage with it.

3. **Central gathering places are few** – Many communities in Ventura County were not developed with centralized downtown-style districts where a project team could effectively conduct intercept surveys and canvassing efforts. “Meeting people where they are” is an effective engagement strategy when communities have a central place with a high likelihood of encountering a broad cross-section of community members at any given time. Given the low density and spread found in much of Ventura County, “meeting people where they are” would be time-consuming and achieve little benefit. The alternative is to host either virtual meetings or in-person workshops that likely require people to drive to them.

The final SRTP will address these issues with actions that agencies, city staff, community organizations, and elected leaders can take. Ultimately, it all comes down to making transit a regular part of the transportation conversation in Ventura County and extending that conversation well beyond the current circles.

Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan 2025-2034

Partnership Plan



Prepared for:

Ventura County Transportation Commission

June 16, 2025 - DRAFT

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INTRODUCTION

The overarching goal of public transportation improvements is to grow ridership by all possible means. Partnerships are one such avenue. This Partnership Plan presents a construct for developing and strengthening partnerships between the County’s public transportation providers and community-based organizations serving a wide range of Ventura County citizens and travelers.

Much of the activity described in this Plan is already undertaken by VCTC but can be strengthened, can be made more visible and explicit and expanded to new partners. All stakeholders in the County have a role in supporting this work. This Plan details the array of partners and activities VCTC, the transit operators and others can address to intentionally and cohesively to carry out and help realize the benefits of increased transit use.

Why Establish a Partnership Plan?

OBJECTIVE

Defining a framework for meaningful and insightful engagement between public transit and non-transit organizations is the primary objective of the Partnership Plan. The Plan addresses three key components:

1. Engaging current and potential partners across multiple sectors,
2. Promoting awareness and engagement around all-things transit, and
3. Systematically strengthening and maintaining relationships among stakeholder partners to enhance and sustain benefits to all parties.

MOTIVATIONS

Enhancing mobility for communities and accessing new riders are key motivations for building strong partnerships between public transit agencies and community organizations of all types. Community-based organizations are often the “trusted messengers” who can pass along information to their constituents on how-to-use and where-to-find public transit services. Such communication sometimes can fall flat when community-based organizations (a) do not feel confident in delivering transit-related information to their constituents; (b) are not aware if services have changed, dissolved or expanded; and (c) do not know where to get information. This Plan intends to alleviate those issues through clear and strategic messaging that is channeled through mutually beneficial relationships.

Strengthened partnerships can improve access. This supports public transit in communicating with individuals that transit staff might not otherwise reach. Through neighborhood associations, coalitions of organizations, community colleges, adult education venues, public schools, libraries, employers and more, there is an opportunity for VCTC and the public transit operators of Ventura County to deepen their communications network. More people can be reached to inform them of new transit services, route changes, improved connections, fare discounts and free fare opportunities. To do so effectively, these partnerships must be bi-directional, offering value to existing and new partners.

This Plan proposes stronger, countywide public engagement processes through a broadened information network that actively supports partnerships. Fundamentally, this will aid Ventura County residents as they seek to discover what public transportation services offer and will encourage new transit ridership. In time, this may also support expanding transit's funding base to increase transit coverage and frequency.

Federal and State Authorizations

The Partnership Plan extends Federal and state requirements, and previously developed local plans, to improve the usefulness of public transit's community engagement.

Federal law, **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**, establishes public engagement requirements on public transit. For example, Title VI standards related to engagement of limited-English proficiency and underserved communities are required of all Ventura County transit operators. Additional rules also apply to the larger operators operating 50 or more fixed route vehicles in peak service and serving a population of 200,000 or more in an Urbanized Area (UZA).

The California Transportation Development Act (TDA), through Public Utilities Code (PUC) Section 99241, requires that counties hold annual public hearings to invite the public to comment on unmet transit needs. Counties then evaluate those public comments to determine if the requests can be reasonably met. VCTC widely notices these hearings in multiple languages and on various communication platforms (e.g. digital, print, etc.) to ensure broad-based input from residents across the County. The process only applies to those cities not spending all of their TDA on transit purposes (Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Santa Paula, Thousand Oaks) but VCTC solicits feedback throughout the county.

Other VCTC planning studies and those undertaken by county's transit operators require public outreach in varying forms. These include **Short Range Transit Plans, Comprehensive Operational Analyses, Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans**, and

others. VCTC and the transit operators can leverage these requirements to strengthen partnerships across the County. These plans are addressed in the SRTP Gaps and Opportunities report.

PARTNERS TO SUPPORT VENTURA COUNTY'S PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMUNITY

Building Partnerships

Two principles are useful to VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators in pursuing future partnerships and strengthening existing ones:

1. The partnership realizes an intersection of benefits; for example, there is benefit to the Ventura County transit operators in securing access to potential riders and benefit to partners in improving mobility of its constituents.
2. The collaborative partnership is cultivated via some level of continuing interaction and exchange of information.

Effective partnerships will recognize the importance of satisfying both principles. Where VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators can offer something of value to their partners, this can promote trust. The value or benefit most readily offered is information. This can include:

- Information about the public transportation network and improvements being made
- Free fare promotions for target groups (e.g., free youth fares)
- Special fare promotions for all ridership (e.g., free fares on Transit Equity Day or Earth Day)
- General information on how to access public transportation
- Specific information on how to use electronic fare tools
- Specific information on how to use trip planning tools (i.e. Google Transit, Transit App, etc.)

Potential partners can be encouraged to see that such information will benefit their students, employees, human services clients and more. Additional benefits outlined for partners could include:

- Availability of FTA Section 5310 grant funding, for private, non-profits and municipalities to support transportation aiding for seniors and persons with disabilities
- Technical support in securing FTA Section 5310 grant funding awards

- Transit agency participation in partner fairs and community gatherings
- Training of agency personnel in how to plan trips or connect with public transit
- Discounted fare packages and subsidized fare opportunities

VCTC's existing working partnerships have focused heavily on collaboration with municipalities, by virtue of VCTC's mission of stewardship of the county's transportation resources. There has been expansion beyond that in VCTC partnership development related focused on youth, related to free youth fare opportunities while outreach and marketing to Spanish-language audiences focused on limited-English proficient contacts and other disadvantaged groups to support equitable access to public transit.

Evaluating the Countywide Array of Stakeholders

VCTC has considerable experience in working with community group and sectors they represent across its diverse County, as do the Ventura County transit operators. These include working with **affinity groups** in past *Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans* and *Comprehensive Transportation Plans* and with **limited-English proficient populations** and **neighborhood groups, with employee transportation coordinators** on transportation demand management initiatives. The Ventura County transit operators have their own, individual relationships with the local community groups.

In evaluating whom to reach out to, VCTC must consider a full breadth of sectors. Table 1 details three evaluation dimensions to consider in seeking or strengthening partner relations: the (a) the sector of representation, (b) demographics typically represented under that sector, and most importantly, (c) the type of outreach and engagement appropriate for the audience. These support outreach and engagement as strategic, not assuming a "one-size-fits-all" approach to participation.

Table 1, Sectors and Purposes-by-Sector for Outreach

Sectors for Representation	Example Demographic	Outreach & Engagement Purposes
Specific Demographic Representation	Low-income Individuals, Veteran, Seniors	Transit-specific service, grant requirement
Disability Representation	Intellectual, Physical, Personal Care Attendants, Homecare help	Transit-specific service, grant requirement
Historically Disadvantaged Communities	Limited English proficient, persons of low-income	Ensuring current information is communicated to less visible groups, re: service change, expansion or reductions, fare changes, free fare days, etc.
Transit Operator Representation	Drivers, Dispatchers, Customer Service Representatives	Boots-on-the-ground perspective that is typically lacking in representation
General Public Representation	Choice riders, may not own a car, cannot drive	Ability to gain ridership outside of vulnerable populations already served
Education	Middle school, high school, community college and university students	Introducing younger demographics to transit, may not have a vehicle or cannot afford one
Employees	Employees who may confront limited worksite parking or long travel times to work	Introducing transportation demand management to employees (i.e. employer transit benefits), ways to reduce congestion, introduce sustainability and reduce parking facility expansion
Public Agency Stakeholders/Construction Updates/Congestion Issues	Public agency personnel with road network responsibilities, whose work may erode confidence in using transit	Understanding impacts of the road network and the built environment on public transit; build detour communication platform

Market segmentation, thinking about these sectors and sub-groups, helps identify the methods and means for reaching different audiences to grow ridership. There are differing motivations for people across any demographic or affinity group who may want or need public transit. These include affordability, convenience, independence and access in reaching both local and distant destinations.

These differing motivations point to different messaging and approach strategies. Partnerships become important to accessing different markets. For example, school systems can help to connect with **young people** regarding their school and after-school trips. Employers can help to communicate with their **employees** and their recurring work trips, encouraging them maximize their take-home pay by relying on transit subsidies and employer-purchased bus passes. Human service organizations' information portals can connect with **seniors** and **persons with disabilities** who have an array of trip needs and special requirements. Similarly, they can reach **caretakers** and the **seniors** under their care to encourage them to leave home without a car.

Partnerships are a means both of accessing these market groups and of honing messaging to connect with key marketing segments. Strong, well-functioning partnerships improve both access to and outcomes with target groups, aiding them in finding and using public transit.

Venues for Partner Strengthening and Partner Communication

VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators use a wide array of venues to get out their messages and now to find and develop partners. The days of simply scheduling meetings and expecting professionals in ancillary sectors to attend are largely past. Venues for cultivating partnership relationships and identifying new ones must be sought in the field. Some of these may be on a regular schedule – such as predictable annual, quarterly or monthly events. Others lend themselves to the maintenance of a community partners’ calendar of special events.

These can include:

- Community fairs and special events
- Community college student and/or administration special events
- Coalition meetings, such as 211 Ventura sponsored for emergency services, youth services
- Library associations, such as County library meetings, gathering branch managers together
- Work fairs and employment-focused events
- Neighborhood councils meetings and working with Chambers of Commerce
- Community-oriented retail settings, such as restaurants or coffee shops,

Mapping Partner Relationships to Target Resources

PRIORITIZING PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES

To build and strengthen partnerships, tools for evaluating the status of partnerships by sector will be useful. Considering past and existing working relationships with stakeholders and prospective partners are critical factors. In which sectors do the Ventura County transit operators have existing working relationships? Where are these lacking or in need of strengthening? Where should VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators start? These questions point to the value of a guiding “map,” a tool to offer direction in considering where to focus agency energies.

A place to begin thinking about partnership strengthening activities is in relation to **service sectors** – and selected organizations – within Ventura County with whom VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators have existing relationships or may desire stronger ones. A three-level *Community Partnership Map* (Table 2) provides a tool to aid VCTC staff in prioritizing activity, in prioritizing organizations in thinking about where to focus partnership-building efforts. Table 2 illustrates the potential partners, relationships, and collaboration opportunities between Ventura County transit services and community stakeholders. This “map” is expected to be flexible and adapt to changing priorities. Its three levels, with strengths and weaknesses of each tier’s partners identified, include:

Level I: Funds and Resource-Sharing Partnerships – largely entities with whom VCTC has regular and recurring contacts and exchange.

Level II: Programmatic Partnerships – some existing and some new entities with whom program-specific initiatives can be built, focused on particular market segments, particular geographies or particular services for program-specific communication.

Level III: Community Partnerships – some existing and some new entities with whom annual contact is encouraged to introduce public transit and promote its use.

Example partners are identified in Table 2 but these are by no means all potential partners within Ventura County.

Table 2, Community Partnership Map for Guiding Agency Partnership Direction – In Three Parts

Ventura County Transportation Commission – Partnership Mapping, page 1			
Level I			
Example Partners - Funds and Resource-Sharing Partnerships			
Transit Agencies/ Transit-Related <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TRANSCOM Members and all Transit Agencies Mobility Management Partners, Inc (MMP) 	Cities/ Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Camarillo Fillmore Moorpark Ojai Oxnard Piru Port Hueneme Santa Paula Santa Rosa Valley Santa Susana Saticoy Simi Valley Somis Thousand Oaks Ventura 	Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> California State University at Channel Islands Moorpark College Oxnard College Ventura College California Lutheran University Ventura County Adult Education Consortium (VCAEC) Moorpark Adult School Oxnard Adult School Simi Institute for Careers and Education Ojai Adult School Santa Paula Adult School Fillmore Adult School Conejo Valley Adult School 	Required TACs/Advisory Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee/ Social Services Transportation Advisory Committee Heritage Valley Policy Committee (HVPAC) Heritage Valley Technical Advisory Committee (HVTAC) 5310 Grantees
Identified Strengths			
Understand VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators' purpose Understand transit operations			
Identified Constraints			
Can lack enthusiasm, resources or support to move new initiatives forward May be more motivated to continue status quo			

Level II

Example Partners - Programmatic Partnerships

Nonprofits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help of Ojai ▪ United Way ▪ Arc of Ventura ▪ Harmony Project ▪ Food Share ▪ Project Understanding ▪ Community Action of Ventura County ▪ CAPS Media ▪ Turning Point ▪ Gold Coast Veterans ▪ A Voice Discovered ▪ A Heart of Angel ▪ Tri-Counties Regional Center ▪ Senior Concerns ▪ Ventura County Community Foundation 	Volunteer Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ventura Land Trust ▪ Schools on Wheels ▪ Volunteer VC ▪ Boy Scouts ▪ Conejo Clinic ▪ Habitat for Humanity ▪ Senior Concerns ▪ Caregivers 	Major Employers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chamber of Commerce ▪ Farm Bureau ▪ Naval Base ▪ County of Ventura and multiple departments within the County ▪ Amgen ▪ Reiter ▪ Common Spirit Health ▪ Procter & Gamble ▪ St. John's Regional Medical Center ▪ Haas Automation 	Spanish-Speaking and other Limited English Proficient-Speaking Agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ El Concilio Family Services ▪ Adelante Comunidad Conejo ▪ Oaxacan community ▪ Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP) ▪ One Step a la Vez ▪ Social Services Coalition ▪ Radio Nueva Vida (KMRO)
Identified Strengths			
Understand how their clients think			
Can help VCTC craft information and messages			
Identified Constraints			
Can lack understanding of how transit works			
May ask for expensive/inefficient services to cater to client needs			

Level III			
<i>Example Partners - Community Partnerships</i>			
Healthcare Entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ventura County Medical Center Community Memorial Los Robles St. John's Regional Santa Paula 	Senior Centers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wilson Senior Center Colonia Senior Center Moorpark Adult Center Simi Valley Senior Center Goebel Community Center Pleasant Valley Recreation and Park District Senior Center Ventura Avenue Adult Center Fillmore Active Adult Center 	Libraries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County of Ventura Library System (13 branches) Oxnard Port Hueneme Simi Valley Thousand Oaks Camarillo Library Blanchard Community Library 	Local Businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-known food establishments Shopping centers Popular retail locations
Identified Strengths			
Ability to tap into new riders and potential riders Build enthusiasm on services of which they may not be aware			
Identified Constraints			
Continued frustration regarding services that may not work for "their" clients, but VCTC can turn this constraint into an opportunity to better understand population needs			

Level I Funds and Resource-Sharing Partnerships – Level I partners are most closely related to VCTC via existing funding, contracts or state/federal required outreach, organizations essential to VCTC's mission and purpose. Failure to keep close contact with these entities could lead to erosion of the overall transit system and potential dissolving of certain programs. Communication with these groups must be (a) transparent, (b) frequent and (c) constructive.

Level II Programmatic Partnerships – Partners and potential partners of Level II elevate the transit system beyond its basic requirements. Special programs developed through these partnerships can (a) bring awareness and increased use of the system, and (b) lead to potential new funding opportunities for growth. It is important to remember that for these partnerships to flourish, they must be bidirectional.

Level III Community Partnerships – Partners and potential partners at Level III represent a spectrum of perspectives to help transit operators monitor public need and may provide rider need input not otherwise heard. They can keep operators accountable for the services they deliver and facilitate insight into riders’ current and future needs. Communication with Level III partners may be annual or, as with Level II, focused at the time of relevant activities or on specific ridership groups.

ADDITIONAL PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Although activities are further discussed later in this paper, some thinking about projects in relation to potential partner settings is useful here:

- *Transit information in passive and active forms:* Sharing via passive forms of outreach through such venues as, for example, local restaurants coffee shops where staff can periodically stop in to refresh transit poster/materials on displays about the transit service or to refill countertop holders of transit brochures. More active education programs, such as travel training or trip-planning support, can aide riders in how-to-use technology to plan trips or pay fares.
- *Technology training:* Recognizing that increasingly fewer individuals are digitally illiterate, some remain so and particularly in relation to how to use transit-related technology of fare payment and trip planning. Projects to address this for targeted markets, such as younger youth and older seniors will have value.
- *Using current riders as communications’ strategies:* Working through community partnerships to build programs with current riders can involve Travel Buddies to accompany new riders or Transit Ambassadors, as with Metrolink’s purple-jacketed Ambassadors, can answer questions and aide travelers at stations and transit centers. These draw upon existing riders’ experiences to encourage new riders from their place of work, their senior center or other community venue. Providing the Travel Buddy or Transit Ambassador with a free bus pass and a button, sash or colorful vest can recognize the contribution of a volunteer while signaling to new riders that this is someone to whom they can look for questions and information.
- *Travel training through community partnerships:* Using actual buses or focused more narrowly on use of technology and training in trip planning and fare payment. These become opportunities to combat potential users fear of transit. Partner-led travel training, for example through a Senior Center or Community Center, can be excellent ways to improve perceptions about transit and remove or minimize fear-based barriers.

COMMUNICATING BENEFITS

At all levels, partner organizations must perceive benefits to their constituents. Such benefits may devolve to the students who want to participate in an after-school program, but administrators struggle to understand if transportation is available and can be aided via promoting local transit routes. There may be seniors may struggle to understand how-to-use transit but senior center program directors don't have access to train-the-trainer activities or don't have a mechanism to encourage transit-riding seniors to help their peers learn Google Transit. Benefits can be identified and continually communicated via testimonial marketing campaigns or in messaging such as "the places you can go" and more.

Institutional partner benefits can also be communicated. These may include documentation for agencies' grant and strategic planning processes. For example, updated Census mapping prepared for VCTC planning studies can be useful to human service agencies in their grant applications and funding requests. Institutional benefits can include fewer missed medical appointments and sustained medical treatment cycles through improved transit access. Employers may realize better work attendance or employee retention. When working with partners who are programmatically focused, benefits may involve promoting senior discount fares or youth free fares, or improved routing to heavily used destinations or focused on target audiences or targeted locales.

MAINTAINING PARTNERSHIP CONTACT LISTS

Contact lists are a baseline tool necessary in identifying, developing and maintaining partnerships suggested by the Partnership Map. Appendix A presents a Spring 2025 list of key contacts for selected sectors, compiled through the year-long efforts of this SRTP. It is important to have an identified place to maintain this list and assign responsibility and methods for updating and maintaining it. Also important are strategies for expanding the contacts list. These matters are discussed further in the final Action Steps section of this Plan.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Understanding Your Audience to Design Effective Communication Tools

This Plan centers on considering rider groups and potential markets mentioned previously with whom respective partners interact as VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators build and strengthen their community partnerships. VCTC is encouraged to continue to think strategically about its communications strategies. Carefully tailored communication strategies that are appropriate to each audience will increase effectiveness and value to partners as they reach more existing riders and potential riders to communicate any number of messages. Table 3 identifies unique ways in which VCTC and Ventura County transit operators can interact with partners and their sectors, through multiple communication strategies and with different marketing tools to convey broad-based transit information.

Table 3, Communication Examples by Sector/Agency Type

Sector/Agency Type	Marketing and Communication Material Examples
<i>Employees/Large Employers</i>	Employee Transportation Coordinator bulletins, service alerts, promotional events, participation in large employee events
<i>Human Services Agencies/Nonprofits/Coalitions</i>	Bilingual brochures, branded swag (i.e., stickers, water bottles, reusable grocery bags), physical schedules, How-To-Ride Guides, Business Cards
<i>Municipality/City/County/Government</i>	Funding briefs and updates, future project discussions, identifying unmet need themes
<i>School/Education/Institution</i>	Transit technology information: explaining how GTFS feeds from transit users aid in trip planning (Google Transit), How to Ride information, use of mobile aps; fare payment information
<i>Advocacy</i>	Press Release information, social media templates and tool kits

General Public	Transit technology information, explaining GTFS feeds from transit users aid in trip planning (Google Transit), How to Ride information, use of mobile app information, fare payment information; participation in community events and street fairs
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BUILDING ON PREVIOUS VCTC OUTREACH EFFORTS

This Plan recognizes that various outreach efforts are currently underway. These activities can be leveraged and built upon, to extend partnerships and reach existing riders and prospective riders. Targeted outreach can encourage the first group to take more transit trips while inviting or supporting potential new users in trying transit. Table 4 identifies four recent VCTC outreach and engagement programs and poses some questions about the potential limitations of each. Notably, these include highly successful countywide initiatives, as with the *jBuenas con VCTC!* campaign winning national attention and an American Public Transportation Association (APTA) 2023 AdWheel Grand Award.

Table 4, Recent VCTC Outreach Programs

Outreach Program	Purpose	Potential Current Limitations/Questions to Ask
<i>VBuspass</i>	Promoting Mobile App for fare payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not available for all Dial-A-Ride users? • Is there a lack of training of app use? • Is there potential for voucher integration where human service agencies' purchase of vouchers can "show up" in fare payment apps • Is Fare Policy easy to understand to those outside of transit operators?
<i>Youth Ride Free Program</i>	Riders who are 18 and under and those over 18 enrolled in high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do school systems promote the program? • Outside of transit operators' website, where else is this program explained? • When surveying, include a question on whether people have heard of this program? • Plan for when program ends in June 2026
<i>College Ride Program</i>	Riders who are enrolled at colleges within Ventura County and select colleges in Santa Barbara County can board public transit buses for free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do school systems promote the program? • Outside of transit operators' website, where else is this program explained? • When surveying, include a question on whether people have heard of this program? • Plan for when program ends in June 2026
<i>jBuenas con VCTC!</i>	Spanish-speaking marketing campaign for transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What measures of success are in place to continue program growth?

TIMEFRAMES FOR CONTACT AND NOTICING

VCTC and its partners need tools that will realize the principles of partnership presented previously and to address the questions raised above. While Table 4 identifies past outreach

program tools, additional tools can provide useful information to VCTC partners. Some high-level suggestions follow, presented across three timeframes (i.e., immediate, periodic and recurring) in relation to certain transit experiences.

Immediate notices are prompted by the introduction of specific actions or opportunities:

- **Major service changes and fare increases** where Title VI requirements kick in.
- **Minor service changes**, where communication with existing riders may be achieved through Rider Alerts but more extensive information distribution through targeted partners may be indicated.
- **Free or discounted fare opportunities**, whether time-limited or ongoing, should be immediately communicated when introduced and with continuing notice to remind people, as appropriate.

Periodic contacts, at least annually, possibly scheduled information campaigns can focus on:

- **Ventura County's network or connectivity opportunities**, presenting Ventura County public transportation as a network of services that can enable cross-county or inter-jurisdictional trips.
- **Start-of-school year** information should be routinely offered, to help connect students and their parents with new mobility choices, including students who could become new transit users as rising students newly attending middle or high school.

Ongoing communication can be offered through various strategies for:

- **Technology training** to help riders and prospective riders develop confidence in electronic fare paying and in using electronic trip planning tools.
- **Travel training** opportunities to introduce prospective riders to transit and build confidence.

Crafting Countywide Transit Messaging

With an understanding of partners' information requirements, VCTC can develop, prepare or promote countywide messaging about transit's value to its partners. VCTC already embraces countywide free-fare policy and Spanish language promotions, with the Partnership Plan encouraging the enhancement and expansion of such messaging.

This Plan presumes that the individual transit operators continue to develop and present their own marketing information – including local schedules and locally oriented promotions. However, VCTC remains responsible for **countywide messaging**. Such countywide messaging considers the county in its entirety, presenting the public transportation system as a network.

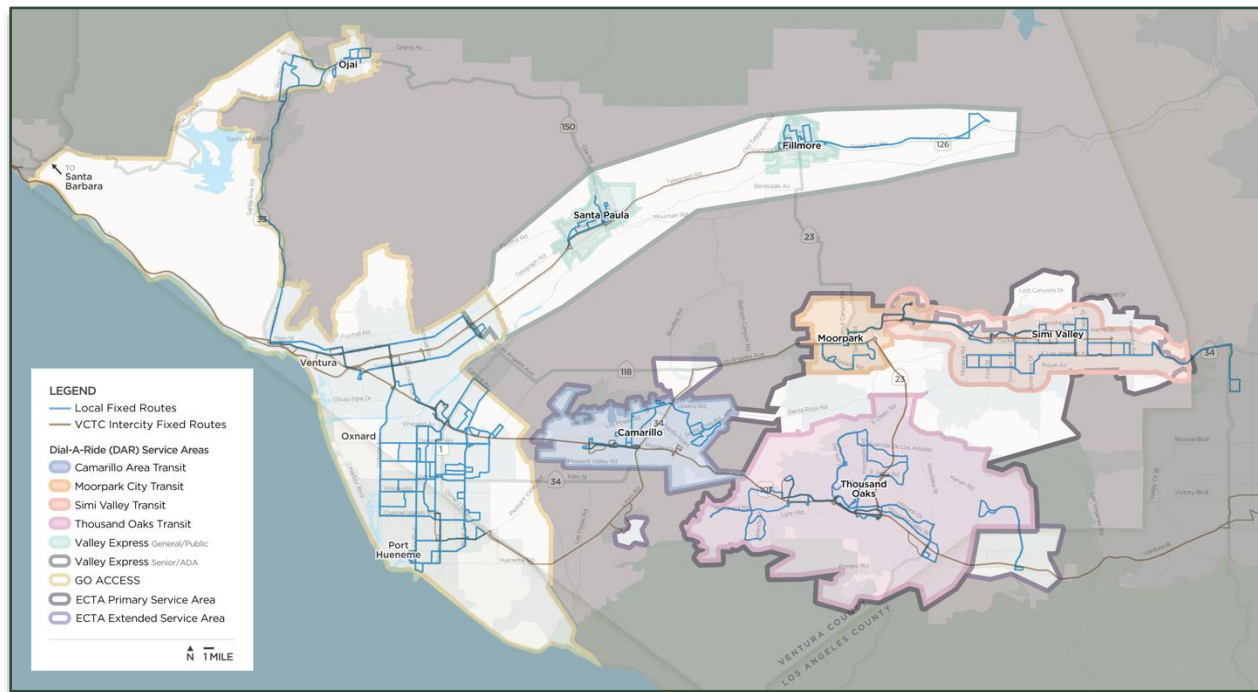
Countywide maps that highlight connections are critical, with attention to Metrolink’s regional network and bus and rail connections. Countywide messaging should continue to focus on VCTC fare policies, such as the free student fare, or the messaging of any rider-oriented policies that become standardized across the County.

A continued focus on countywide messaging of transit benefits is expected to:

- Improve consistency in messaging, by helping the individual cities offer this level of information in a uniform, high-quality formats with little additional effort.
- Support the rider and potential rider in recognizing recurring and consistent transit messaging across the county.
- Reinforce common policies and rider-oriented enhancements, such as electronic fare payment or expanded use of improved “where’s my ride” technology
- Educate riders on technology tools and technology-training in using transit.

In presenting countywide messaging and expanded use of countywide maps to show the entire network in various graphical ways, VCTC will help people envision both **regional trips** they can take and **local transit trips** they may more readily see. Figure 1 presents the SRTP’s version of the current network and provides a starting place from which to develop more graphical illustrations of Ventura County’s public transit systems as an interconnected network.

Figure 1, Ventura County Countywide Transit Network



VCTC can prepare and deploy **informational toolboxes** for use by partners, much as it already does for bicycle campaigns or for Metrolink service initiatives. These enable partners to easily spread countywide messages across their own information networks. Such toolboxes can include:

- Social media messages that can be readily transmitted via Facebook, Instagram and more
- PDFs of posters and banners that can be physically printed and posted or distributed via email
- Language for emails or to include in newsletters to introduce transit initiative

TRANSCOMM may play an important role in identifying what informational pieces and tools will be of value and use to individual members, even as VCTC takes the lead in promoting countywide messaging.

Frequency and Types of Communication

Through many transportation planning efforts, outreach occurs at multiple points but certainly when the federal or state grant and planning processes require. Table 5 suggests how frequently and what type of VCTC should engage in with certain stakeholder types given organizational purpose or mission. For example, for agencies that serve vulnerable populations (i.e., persons with disabilities), communicating major service changes in a one-on-one meeting with a key partner is much more urgent and impactful than perhaps via a local Chamber of Commerce, which may update their transportation information once a year at a very high-level meeting. For large and mid-sized employers, various regular information strategies can be used to connect with new employees or to existing employees to offer alternatives to those tired of long commutes.

The Table 5 list also suggests the *type* of communication VCTC should provide. For instance, multi-modal advocacy groups may participate in a large annual outreach event, whereas for an agency working with seniors, one-on-one or small group conversations regarding travel training may be appropriate.

Table 5, Frequency and Type of Communication by Sector/Agency

Sector/Agency Type	Frequency of Communication	Type of Communication
Employers	Two to three times annually, to capture new employees or address the needs of those whose mobility choices may be changing and/or desire alternatives	Internal communications mechanisms (newsletters and other regular messaging vehicles), bulletin boards in employee break rooms, employee orientation handbooks
Human Services Agencies	Quarterly, emphasis on service changes	Social Media toolboxes communication: how to use the system, how to use transit technology, service change updates
Loosely Affiliated Nonprofits	Biannual/Community Events	Press Releases, marketing tools
Municipal/Government	Annually and during required planning processes	Planning process updates, grant announcements; Social Media toolboxes to communicate with constituents
Education/Institutions	Two weeks before a semester begins (August/December)	Social Media toolboxes communication: how to use the system, how to use transit technology
Advocacy	Biannual/Community Events	Press Releases, marketing tools

These recommended frequency timeframes offer starting-off points with room for discussion, provide changes and/or updates that meet the needs of individual stakeholders, and work with the information tools VCTC has available at any given point.

Understanding Incentives to Invite and Encourage Engagement

Public transit outreach and engagement can be difficult to execute, especially when many transit users are working during the day or have trouble traveling to meetings. Incentives can be an inducement to participate by those who don't generally participate in transit planning processes and who may be encouraged to use public transportation. Understanding the incentive behavior of those who should be engaged needs to come from the agencies that best represent them. When meeting with various agencies, it is important to identify and understand what incentives work best for certain groups. Carrying that information forward within the VCTC organization and the Ventura County transit operators benefits future projects and statutorily required outreach.

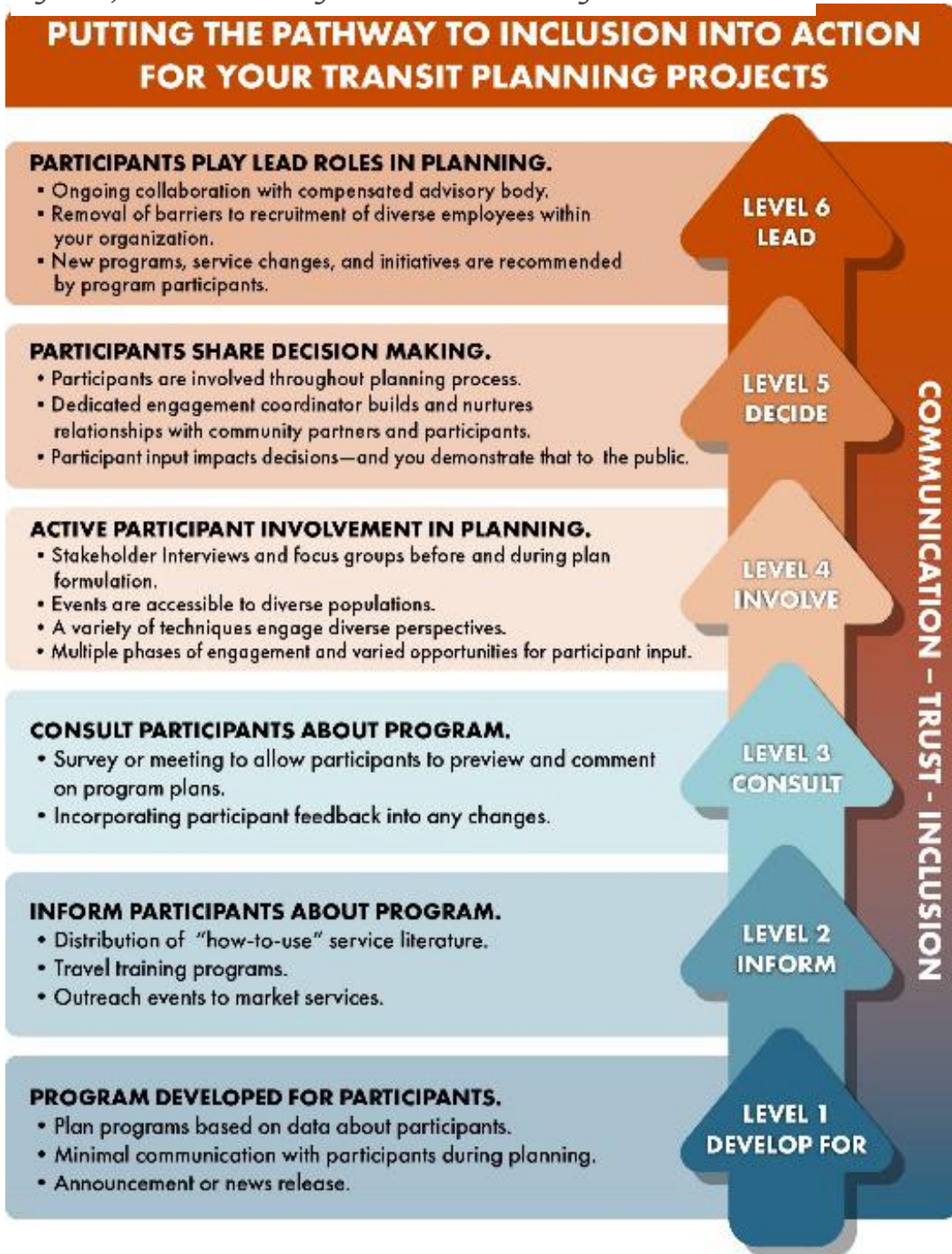
Incentives as motivational tools to encourage the response individual or group of people can range from discounted to free fares, special fare days, special excursions or events, such as transit fairs. Incentives may include some nominal payment for participation of individual or recruited stakeholders in focus group discussions.

Referencing “*Lessons Learned in Inclusive Transit Planning*” (2024) prepared for the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the incentive purposes include:

- Recognizing the value of participants’ time, energy and expertise, lived experience.
- Recognizing that it can be a luxury for people to participate in planning efforts, with real costs to participate, including travel costs, time off work and childcare.
- Encouraging higher response rates or levels of participation.

CTAA’s *Pathway to Inclusion* is an excellent complement to strategic building of strategic partnerships (Figure 2). Such tools will benefit VCTC’s partnership activities. This Pathway identifies various “moments” in the planning process to consider how to involve members of disadvantaged or underserved communities. In the context of this Partnership plan, the Pathway offers ideas for including members of the public as partners.

Figure 2, CTA's Pathway to Inclusive Planning



ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

This final section details starting points to continue moving Ventura County forward - to strengthen existing and build new partnerships between community-based organizations and employers and the county's public transportation network of providers.

Determining Resources to Support the Partnership Function

STAFFING THIS FUNCTION

This Partnerships Plan is only sustainable if a point-person within VCTC is sufficiently resourced to carry the function through. VCTC is a relatively small agency when considering the size (in population and geographic area) of the region it supports. Since at least 2020, VCTC has maintained the current *Program Manager of Government and Community Relations* position, which addresses many of the functions envisioned here. When considering all of the functions that VCTC serves beyond coordinating (and directly operating) public transit service in the County, it is probable that a full-time function could be necessary dedicated solely to the ideas of this plan.

BUDGET ELEMENTS

In addition to labor costs, at the level at which VCTC will determine, there are two further line items that are already within VCTC's budget: 1) a marketing line item that includes both creative development and materials production and 2) a local travel budget to enable staff to attend partner events across the county. Resources sufficient to print bus cards, banners, posters and brochures should also include a social media budget to buy ad time on various social media platforms.

Survey responses, including obtained through this SRTP process, as to "where" people obtain information clearly indicates that use of a broad range of print, digital and person-to-person platforms are all important to getting the word out regarding public transportation and how to use it. VCTC's marketing team must continue to access this full range of informational opportunities, expanded and enhanced by the strong partnerships.

Building Lists and Building Relationships

IDENTIFYING CURRENT CONTACTS

This countywide SRTP has generated list of contacts vetted through the SRTP development process and built up from VCTC's existing organization lists. Provided separately to VCTC, this listing combines internal VCTC marketing lists and those from other study efforts, including the *Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan*. Some additional stakeholders were identified.

Information items within this list can include:

- Agency name
- Sector
- Primary contact name, title, email and telephone
- Engagement history or participation – this can be expanded to identify future participation
- Date last updated

This should be a living list, regularly touched by staff to be updated and amended no less frequently than monthly and more often as information presents. Updating the list should be aided through use of software, such as Constant Contact or MailChimp to enable contacts to remove themselves or unsubscribe as they choose.

Updating or adding to the list is more difficult. Several methods exist. These can include:

1. Ensuring easy access to Contact Us or Subscribe page on VCTC's public transportation webpage to receive updated or Alert transit information.
2. Seeking interested parties through the conduct of survey efforts or other outreach.
3. Using partners' mailing lists. Regarding partner mailing lists, some partners will not provide their lists to third party entities, such as school districts, community-based coalitions, Chambers of Commerce, but may send out vetted information to their constituents, where interests align.

An additional method to add to lists is via attendance at gatherings of potentially like-minded organizations to develop new contacts through those interactions. Traveling with a simple VCTC "postcard" with a QR code can invite individuals to "sign up" for updated transit information and bring in new primary contacts.

THINKING ABOUT TIMING

In considering accessing partner mailing lists, the timing of information-sharing may be very infrequent, one-time or continuing. For example, school districts might be willing to send out transit information to their parents and students only at the beginning of the academic year. Colleges and universities might be willing to resend each semester or quarter. Other entities, such as human services organizations or libraries, may be willing to have transit information presented frequently or even regularly to their client base. Such timing issues were considered in the discussion of the frequency of information sharing but are also of relevance in thinking about access to partner mailing lists.

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION PORTALS

It is useful to identify information portals that exist. These include, for example, **community college student activities associations** have access to student lists. **Secondary school districts** have software that enables information dissemination to parents. **Employer transportation coordinators** have lists of people interested in vanpool, rideshare or alternative transportation modes. Keeping a record of such information access portals, as they are identified, will support accessing these via partner relationships.

BUILDING A CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND CREATING SPECIAL TRANSIT EVENTS

Another valuable list to maintain is that of recurring special events sponsored by partners. These may be special purpose fairs, such as job fairs, or community-wide events. Developing a calendar of events will suggest opportunities for promoting public transportation to partners' audiences.

This calendar, sustained on a countywide basis by VCTC, can track existing occasions and events within local communities, such as annual fairs, back-to-school activities and recurring farmers' markets. Information to feed the calendar can come from partners, with some structured tools used to gather key dates throughout the year. Other creative approaches can include "transit outings" which would pair an organized trip to/from somewhere on public transit.

Creating special transit outings is another activity that an energetic coordinator can undertake. This could entail pairing some activity like an art walk or history tour or similar experience with an organized trip on the nearby public transit route. These have been highly successful for seniors, providing a not-so subtle opportunity to encourage and teach potential new riders about navigating the transit network.

Developing Countywide Informational Tools

VCTC has the 60,000-foot vantage point of presenting information for the County as a whole. Partnerships – and the constituents they serve – will benefit from VCTC-supported countywide information in at least two ways:

1. Maintaining the countywide maps that make clear where local services exist, who is providing them and where connections to other modes and transit services exist; and
2. Developing countywide promotions or campaigns of value individually to the operators.

USING CUSTOMER-FOCUSED MAPPING TOOLS

VCTC utilizes live bus tracking capability that includes all of the County’s fixed route bus operations. Its Live Map is a very useful tool for riders who want to see where the buses are, on any given route. The Estimated Arrival Time tab is useful for riders who know their route, its direction and the bus stop of interest, to determine when the next bus is coming along.



For riders new to transit, and who are unclear as to what service or which route, VCTC’s regional network map is an important informational tool. It enables riders to “pick” their route of interest, from the map. It does require that riders know the route number, direction of travel and the specific bus stop – all pulled from drop-down lists – to show “live” arrival information.

Continuously introducing the transit systems to new riders is important. VCTC can build upon its existing countywide maps in more graphical ways. For example, in San Bernardino County, this regional approach presented a greatly simplified graphical map to depict the overall region across which San Bernardino residents could travel, placing the San Bernardino Transit Center, served by Metrolink and Arrow rail lines and seven bus operators, at the center of such travel.

This was prepared for use in kiosks, websites and other mediums to present greater detail. Figure 3 shows a large kiosk map is shown with the underlying local bus network depicted with intercity connections. This map, both in its simplified and more detailed versions, became the focus of a “Where Will You Go?” campaign that embraced all the Inland Empire region’s public transit operators, providing basic contact information for each. Figure 3 depicts the full kiosk text displayed at the San Bernardino Transit Center, where all these operators converge. It also reduces to a take-away brochure for distribution at fairs and community events, with the map excerpted in more detail (Figure 4).

Figure 3, Take-One/ Kiosk Content Showing Regional Network

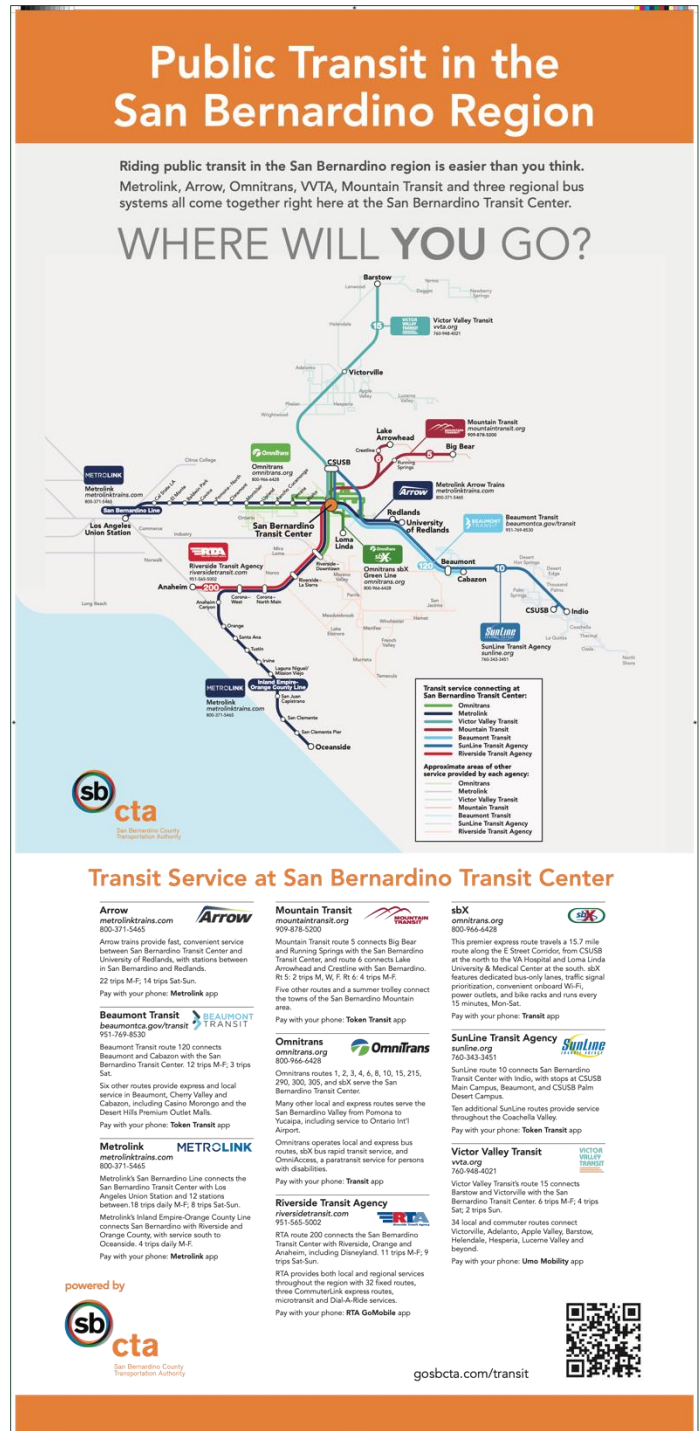
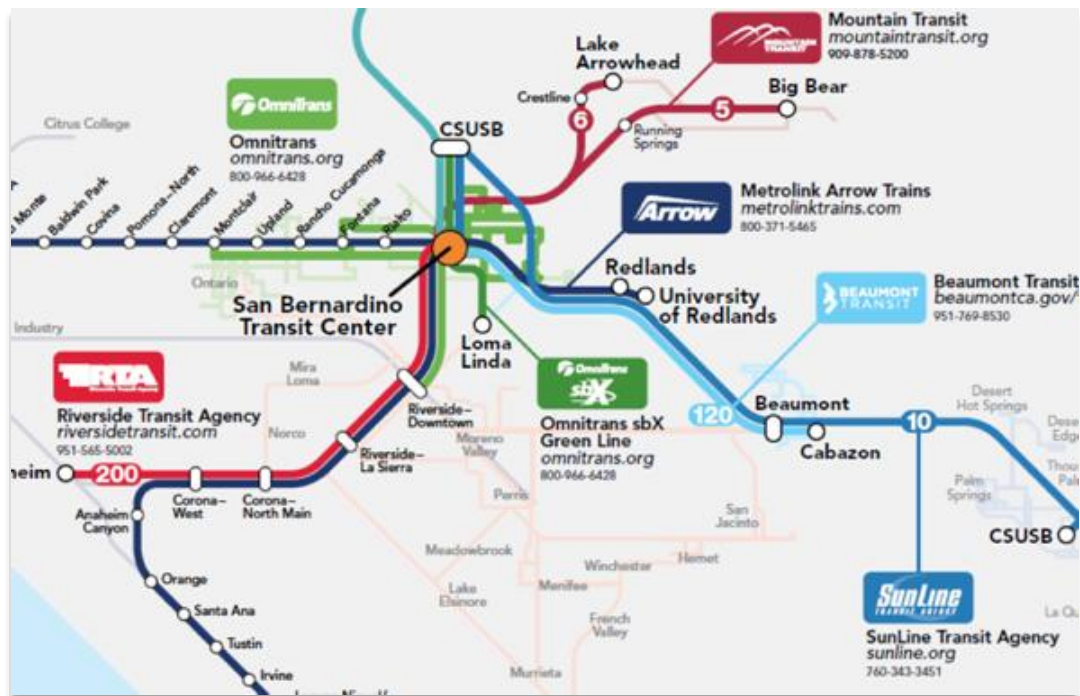


Figure 4, Excerpt of Regional Map Focused on Centralized Transfer Location



COUNTYWIDE TRANSIT PROMOTIONS

Another approach to countywide messaging is to develop campaigns across multiple systems to attract new riders – and for use by willing and able partners. As noted, VCTC has had excellent success with programmatic campaigns such as its award winning ¡Buenas con VCTC!, its Free Fare and Youth Fare promotions (Figure 5).

Where VCTC can support the creative development and the production of these – including social media images, bus cards, kiosk banners, flyers, and website images – it is a boon to the municipal operator. Common messages and recurring presentation of images of the whole system benefits partners, riders and potential riders. Cohesive messaging underscores the concept of a network and a countywide system. It can be easily packaged for use by partners as elements comprising an informational toolkit.

Figure 5, Examples of VCTC Countywide Promotions



Included in Figure 6 below are additional examples from various campaigns in San Bernardino County prepared for use countywide, with all the attendant collateral of bus cards, transit center signage, social media posts and more provided to each system.



Figure 6, Examples of Countywide Messaging for Use by Multiple Operators

Ventura County Demand-Response Integration Plan

Integration Principals,
Governance, and Implementation Phases

Prepared for:

Ventura County Transportation Commission

September 2, 2025 DRAFT

Fehr&Peers
with
AMMA
TRANSIT PLANNING INC.

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VENTURA COUNTY DEMAND- RESPONSE INTEGRATION PLAN

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VENTURA COUNTY DEMAND-RESPONSE INTEGRATION PLAN

This chapter of Ventura County's Short Range Transit Plan (S RTP) addresses the integration of the County's demand-response services as directed by Ventura County Transportation Commission. The Commission's action was the adoption of integration recommendations set forth in the Transit Integration and Efficiency Study (TIES 2023) to integrate the County's nine demand-response programs, which is outlined in Alternative #2 of the TIES study. Integration was nominally defined as operating demand-response services countywide. Integration of services is desirable for reasons of improving customer experience and controlling escalating costs.

A plan for such integration is introduced in this chapter through three sub-sections: (1) functional improvements by which all demand-response agencies can proceed to ensure integration is successful, (2) a governance framework to make integration possible in the near- and long-term and (3) identified phases for how integration would occur over a period of two-to-three years. A later chapter discusses costs, benefits, and provides further implementation detail.

Current Assessments

BASIC STIPULATIONS

Integration of demand-response services must maintain the following stipulations to succeed in Ventura County, as well as to ensure continued compliance with the applicable State and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations.

- Maintain compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and its complementary paratransit rules, ensuring that this civil right of eligible riders is upheld.
- Align with the Commission's goal, adopted through the Transit Integration & Efficiency Study (TIES), to improve intercity demand-response travel.
- Support the TIES "Alternative 2" objective of integrating demand-response services.
- Improve the rider experience, with particular attention to individuals who must transfer or travel long distances.
- Provide a community-level mix of public transportation services that best meets local mobility needs without internal competition.
- Increase the return on public investment in demand-response services by improving performance and cost-effectiveness.

Demand-response systems go by various terms and in Ventura County encompass:

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit – *eligible and certified riders*
- Senior transportation demand-response – *rides for individuals age 65 and older*
- Microtransit – *ability to reserve a ride in real-time through an app within a given service area with rides usually for the general public*

The focus of this integration discussion will be on the County’s ADA paratransit services and senior transportation, which all cities currently provide. There are references within this chapter to microtransit on-demand services, where topics such as their dispatching systems and call centers overlap with the integration of demand-response, demand-response programs.

CURRENT ASSESSMENT OF DEMAND-RESPONSE SYSTEMS

Ventura County’s demand-response services have evolved in response to ADA requirements regarding rider eligibility, improving regional connections and the increasing use of emerging technologies.

All communities comply with the ADA by providing complementary paratransit services to eligible riders, something that must be maintained or replaced with alternatives that meet ADA rules outlined in FTA Circular 4701.1 (42 USC 12101-12213). Additionally, all operators also provide paratransit services to seniors.

Modern technologies have increasingly been implemented. In 2023 new app-based microtransit programs for the general public were introduced by Moorpark and Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD). These services provide real-time, on-demand transit needs in defined service areas. With the implementation of RideCo, a paratransit scheduling software, Camarillo Area Transit (CAT) and Valley Express’s general purpose demand-response service has since become microtransit programs with rides now being available same day and through an app. Additionally, Simi Valley Transit (SVT)’s launched microtransit service in 2025.

As demonstrated in this SRTP’s Gaps and Opportunities report and Outreach Report, Ventura County’s paratransit programs are not performing optimally. Services are complying with law, expanding eligibility to serve more riders, and exploring innovative technologies to serve more people. Yet, services are operating below par and could do better. Integration of demand-response programs seeks to improve customer experience and rise above the status quo by addressing numerous factors. Areas needing improvement are summarized below, drawing upon analyses presented in the previous SRTP chapters.

UNEVEN QUALITY OF SERVICE

Many trips are currently operating either too early or too late, outside of the published pick-up windows. This operational inconsistency can lead to future ADA compliance complaints

and increased inefficiencies in ride scheduling throughout the day. From the customer’s perspective, unreliability erodes confidence in the service and may discourage riders from requesting trips needed. Operationally, when drivers arrive outside the designated pick-up times, overall productivity suffers. Drivers arriving early, before the 30-minute window, may sit waiting for riders who are not yet ready to board, wasting vehicle revenue time. Similarly, drivers arriving late after the 30-minute window have higher rates of no-show trips where uncertain riders find another ride, also wasting vehicle in-service time. The resulting low productivity of fewer passengers carried can prompt reactive cost-cutting measures for reducing vehicle service hours, which further reduces the appeal and effectiveness of the service. This leads to more ride denials and a failure to adequately serve the community who depend on this service for their mobility needs.

RISING UNIT COSTS

The costs of running these paratransit/senior transportation services have risen, as documented in the Existing Conditions chapter. Table 1 below shows the average cost to operate demand-response service per hour in Ventura County. As costs increase, additional funds are needed to support existing service levels, which must come from other areas of the transit system.

Table 1, Average demand-response Operating Cost per Revenue Hour in Ventura County

Fiscal Year	FY 19	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	% Change from FY19 – FY23
Cost Per Hour*	\$78.00	\$94.00	\$150.11	\$131.59	\$140.47	\$62.47
% Change	N/A	21%	60%	-12%	7%	80%

*Figures do not include microtransit

ABSENCE OF NEGOTIATING SCHEDULING TIMES

Negotiating trip pick-times is an area of transit operations that many demand-response agencies struggle to manage¹. It is an established, critical practice in ADA Paratransit service to aid in matching demand with supply, moving rider trip requests from high-demand times to times when there is available vehicle capacity that can better serve that trip. For example, CAT attempts to offer a one-hour window before or after the rider’s request that they cannot otherwise serve, as well as a verbal “apology.” SVT estimates that 1 in 10 rides need negotiation and these are managed on a case-by-case basis. Thousand Oaks Transit (TOT)/East County Transit Alliance (ECTA) reported that some negotiations take place but did not specify what that entailed. Valley Express staff shared that negotiations may occur but there are not enough drivers to meet negotiated times, so it is of limited success. Although slightly different in operational nature, Moorpark City Transit (MCT)’s on-demand

¹ Topic Guides of ADA Transportation <https://www.dredf.org/ADAtg/index.shtml>

microtransit has a 20% “failed search” rate, which shows that riders are not able to get a ride at the time they requested.

Negotiation procedures are inconsistent across the County, if implemented at all, and could further affect riders needing to travel between multiple providers. Although RideCo (the newly adapted dynamic software system implemented by VCTC) helps with dynamic scheduling and moving trips to lesser-demand time slots, negotiating times with riders falls under customer-service training, which should be consistent across all providers.

DECLINING RIDERSHIP AND LOW PRODUCTIVITY

Lastly, demand response ridership significantly decreased after the pandemic and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Adjustments need to be made to reflect the drop in utilization. In addition to lower ridership, productivity dropped, suggesting that operators did not adjust operations accordingly in response to ridership change.

Table 2 below shows productivity (the number of rides served per hour between FY19 and FY23) for seven demand-response programs,. Four systems are declining; one has experienced no change and two have improved, with SVT quite dramatically so.

Average productivity is presented in Table 2 with and without SVT, 2.2 passengers per hour and 1.6 passengers per hour, respectively. SVT transitioned to Ecolane in 2020 and its dynamic scheduling capability enabled them to achieve a dramatic 112% increase in productivity, shifting the countywide productivity average upward. Not reported here are the microtransit services of GCTD and MCT, as these were only implemented in 2024.

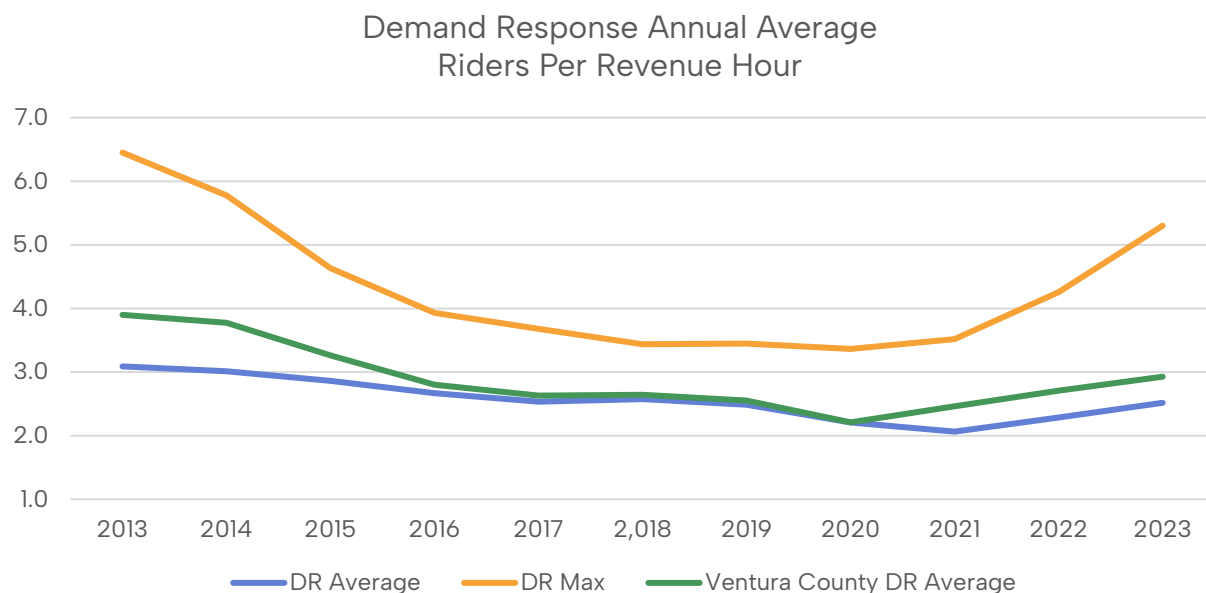
Table 2, Recent Demand-Response Service Productivity Indicators

Rides Per Hour	FY/19	FY/20	FY/21	FY/22	FY/23	% Change FY19 to FY23
CAT	2.9	0.8	2.2	2.1	2.1	-27.6%
Valley Express	2.4	1.8	1.2	1.3	1.1	-54.2%
GCTD	2.3	2.4	2.1	2.2	2.1	-9.5%
TOT	2.0	2.0	1.8	2.0	2.2	10.0%
MCT	0.5	0.4	1.6	1.8	1.6	0%
ECTA	1.8	1.7	2.2	1.4	1.4	-29.6%
SVT	2.4	2.1	3.5	4.3	5.1	112.5%
Average Overall	2.3	1.6	2.1	2.2	2.2	-4.9%
Average Without SVT	2.0				1.6	-21.2%

Figure 1 below shows the average rides per revenue hour for demand-response services in California (excluding large cities) via the National Transit Database (NTD). This provides a benchmark for how similar agencies are performing across the State, revealing that Ventura

County systems, while close to the averages, are well below operating experiences of a decade ago. Note that the NTD results for Ventura County average differ slightly from data provided directly for this analysis because several programs are reported to NTD differently, such as TOT rolling up its data with service provided to other agencies as their contractor for service.

Figure 1, Productivity for California Demand Response Services, National Transit Database



Principles to Establish a Foundation for Successful Integration

VCTC and its operators are strongly encouraged to improve demand-response services in key functional areas that each operator can individually address. This improvement area will achieve the desired results of: (1) improved customer service, (2) increased productivity among services, (3) efficient use of resources throughout Ventura County, and (4) cost control.

Working to achieve the improvements laid out in this section importantly lays the groundwork for integration and establishing a firm foundation for integrated services to be developed. Without attention to these improvement areas, suboptimal outcomes of rapid cost increases and poor customer experience are more likely and will be contrary to the expectations of VCTC policymakers.

These nine functional improvement areas, further detailed in this section, are:

- Improving Rider Experiences
- Shifting General Public Riders Back to Fixed Route

- Expanding Dynamic Trip Scheduling
- Policy Enforcement
- Refining Subscription Ride Policy
- Negotiating Pick-up Times with Riders
- Call Center Consolidation
- Structuring Vehicle Availability and Driver Shifts to Match Demand
- Standardizing Fare Payment Methods

RideCo, the dynamic on-demand scheduling software adopted by VCTC, has already contributed to notable improvements, particularly to increasing rides per hour. However, RideCo's implementation represents just one component of the broader integration effort. While deploying a new paratransit/microtransit scheduling and dispatch system across multiple transit services is a significant undertaking, this document focuses on the challenges that software alone cannot resolve—namely, the operational, procedural, and policy complexities that can impede a county's ability to effectively serve its most vulnerable populations. Subsequent chapters will also explore issues related to funding and cost.

As noted, the following discussion of areas for functional improvement sets the stage for successful integration activities which are discussed in the second part of this Chapter.

IMPROVING RIDER EXPERIENCE

Background – Throughout the SRTTP's public input process in 2023 and 2024 and as detailed in the preceding chapter, rider and public comments were received detailing poor on-time performance with vehicles running early and late, transfer trips where the promised transfer vehicle didn't show, poor attitudes of the transit dispatch and call taker staff – though rarely drivers – and overall concerns about the availability of service to provide needed trips during peak travel hours.

The paratransit focus groups, the 2024 dial-a-ride survey, and the SRTTP review of sample trip logs show that all the County's demand response services struggle with on-time performance. For all Ventura County demand-response operators and guidance from the FTA, "on-time" is considered arriving 15 minutes before or 15 minutes after the scheduled pick-up window. When speaking to the paratransit focus group, a few individuals stated that vehicles often arrive late and when using the service for work, that can lead to disciplinary issues for them. A few members of the focus group participants went as far as to say that operators falsely claim they are "on-time" 90% of the time, when their own, individual experience is decidedly different. This is an opportunity to investigate the disconnect between a performance metric and what the users perceive. There were multiple comments that texts received by the passengers that say, "the bus is coming in ten minutes" are "never right," possibly because the text software corresponds with scheduled times, rather than actual times.

Vehicles arriving late, after the scheduled pick-up time, are hard on riders particularly when they are traveling to a scheduled appointment or must wait outside, in colder or higher temperatures and with limited shelter from the weather. Sometimes, weather or traffic conditions will impact vehicles and trips will unavoidably be late. In the one-one-one interviews, riders mentioned the “inconsistent” nature of the service. Sometimes they can get to their scheduled appointment five minutes early, and other times they may arrive 45 minutes early, and other times arrive late. Late drop-offs may be due to late pick-ups or due to multiple shared-rides that extend the ride-time of the individual.

Enforcing Internal Procedure to Improve On-Time Performance – The SRTP’s pick-up time analyses (detailed previously in the Existing Conditions Report) showed that vehicles sometimes arrive early, *before* the published 30-minute wait time window, which was documented in multiple operator interviews and via system-level trip analyses. Vehicles arriving early, sometimes 20 or 30 minutes before the promised pick-up time, can be stressful for riders, particularly for frail elderly people or individuals with disabilities. Moving quickly is difficult and a vehicle arriving before it is expected can be distressing. Agencies can address the factors that impact early-trip making through a combination of staff training, communication strategies, and technology. demand-response drivers should hear consistent messages about not arriving earlier than the 30-minute pick-up window, just as fixed-route drivers are instructed to never leave a bus stop earlier than the published time.

Role of Technology in Improving the Rider Experience – New scheduling software will play a key role in improving service. With RideCo and Ecolane serving as the software platforms for agencies’ reservation systems, this should minimize pick-ups arriving *earlier than the programmed time window* because such trips disrupt how the software optimizes vehicle tours throughout the day. Specifically, it increases unutilized vehicle service time – something the software is trying to minimize – and reduces the aggregate number of rides that the system can schedule for that day. Also, when a driver arrives early at a pick-up location, there may be another passenger on the bus that now has to sit and wait for this individual to come out at a time other than expected, making the experience unattractive for the seated passenger as well.

The “Where’s My Ride” capability (a notification prompt through Ecolane, a legacy scheduling system) is a valuable tool for providing accurate, real-time information to riders. Equally important, it reduces the number of calls into call centers, requiring less call taker time. Accurate “Where’s My Ride” information will improve rider confidence in the system and let them know when to move outdoors, which can also improve safety by decreasing the amount of time passengers are in the elements. Promoting technology tools, while ensuring estimated time-of-arrival accuracy, will contribute to an improved and safer rider experience, decrease call taker and dispatcher demands, and support improved productivity. With that said, this dated notification tool is not always accurate, causing more frustration with customers. At the time of this writing, four of six agencies with paratransit

service have transitioned to RideCo which provides real time vehicle location information to passengers rather than utilizing the “Where’s My Ride” feature used by the legacy systems.

Addressing Transfers through Procedure – Transfers were another area of concern that can be addressed through both procedure and technology. demand-response users were asked in the survey how they rate their transfer experience if they transfer between services. Ninety-one (91) people responded, and of the ninety-one respondents, 27% said their experience was either “fair” or “poor”, pointing to the importance of improving the transfer experience. Several focus group participants described no-meet experiences, in these cases between GCTD and Valley Express vehicles, where the Valley Express vehicle returned the rider home as the transfer trip was not completed.

Several areas will benefit from firming up operating procedures for transfers.

- Enshrining dispatch-to-dispatch communications so that there is accurate information between two systems as to the actual time of vehicle transfer meetings, to better inform both drivers and the rider at the time of the transfer.
- Clarifying the driver’s obligations to wait with a transfer rider for the arriving vehicle when that vehicle is late. That is the existing policy Valley Express demand-response drivers employ but is not the policy for GCTD drivers. Policies should be uniform between agencies.
- Improving the amenities of the transfer waiting facility to ensure shelter and a safe space with good lighting, seating and a restroom.

Some movement to one-seat ride trip-making – While it is true that the transition to RideCo will streamline transfer timing, the full integration of demand-response services—where fleets are no longer separated by agency—has the potential to significantly enhance the transfer experience by booking one-seat rides and then dispatching that vehicle in-local service. Such integration would enable the provision of one-seat rides for appropriate trips, offering a more seamless and efficient service for riders.

SHIFTING GENERAL PUBLIC RIDERS BACK ONTO FIXED ROUTE

Background – Paratransit services exist for individuals who cannot take fixed-route services, specifically those who are eligible under the ADA and older adults. If local policy softens those requirements and makes it easier for the non-ADA general public to take part in demand-response services, then fixed-route services will lose potential ridership from those who are able to utilize fixed-route services. Subsequently it becomes difficult to justify continuing, competing operations.

Shifting General Public Riders onto Fixed Route Service – This will involve reinvigorating fixed-route services as detailed in the accompanying SRTP. It will involve developing promotional campaigns about the alternatives and benefits of fixed route trips to actively invite riders to consider using fixed-route and to inform them of service improvements. It

will require defining new limits for non-ADA riders using demand-response services. These activities involve:

- Offering regular frequencies throughout the day so people living in these communities can take the bus somewhere and be guaranteed a return trip.
- Keeping the schedule as legible as possible with limited route variations and clockface timing
- Ensuring each operator is part of a cohesive regional schedule with connecting routes and that timed transfers facilitate intercommunity travel that can take place fully on transit.
- Concentrating on fixed-route services in walkable community areas to offer higher quality transit where it makes the most sense and letting microtransit fill in where the land use is not hospitable to transit use.

Fare Policy as Incentive – Revisiting the fare policy is another important strategy to encourage riders to choose more cost-effective services. Wherever possible, fixed-route fares should be lower than on-demand services where both services exist within the same service area. This has not been the case for some early microtransit pilots. This is a key lever available to operators in helping maintain cost control, particularly if general public on-demand service increases while fixed-route service demand plateaus or decreases. Riders generally will go to the lowest fare option, when all else is equal. Promoting the lower fares of fixed route over demand response trips is an important message. Conversely, when microtransit fares are lower than fixed route fares, as has been the case with MCT, it becomes difficult to get people to use fixed route service.

If general public ridership cannot be shifted significantly from on-demand services, both fixed route and on-demand systems will run sub-optimally which will lead to competition for passengers and inefficient use of funds for transit agencies. Underused services risk becoming stagnant and increasingly less useful to all the populations served.

EXPANDING DYNAMIC TRIP SCHEDULING

Background – Dynamic trip scheduling software improves productivity through same-day vehicle scheduling optimization. Dynamic scheduling incorporates a series of algorithms (in real-time), to adjust trip assignments for drivers and vehicles to reflect the most optimal scheduling, thereby improving the use of vehicles and ideally, shortening passenger ride times.

VCTC, through its regional transportation coordination role, established a countywide demand-response scheduling software contract with RideCo. CAT, Valley Express, MCT and TOT (including ECTA) are now using the system, as of this writing, and have seen many

benefits that include increased productivity. SVT is now using RideCo for their recently launched On-Demand service. VCTC is in discussions with GCTD regarding joining as well as with SVT regarding extending the platform to their paratransit service.

Role of Common Trip Scheduling Platform – As noted earlier in this report, an integrated countywide on-demand system will be achievable with one unified trip scheduling platform, which at this time is VCTC’s contractor, RideCo. A critical benefit of a unified software system lies in its ability to capture system-wide data that can lead to operational changes positively impacting productivity and other service attributes, including on-time performance. Importantly, its dynamic scheduling capabilities can improve individual services, while also improving regional demand-response service by increasing regionwide efficiency and on-time reliability.

Additionally, a single software system can improve long-distance trip-making, providing one-seat rides or more effective, on-time vehicle connections. Travel between jurisdictions is improved through dynamic trip scheduling due to the software’s ability to coordinate the “fleet as a whole” in assigning trips. Through continuous optimization, dynamic scheduling matches the best vehicle to perform a trip based on current location and next destination. In addition to more efficient vehicle transfers, the software can pool vehicles across service areas. Instead of having vehicles dedicated to one city (which may be idle at times), the software can reallocate them where demand is higher. This would reduce deadhead miles and time between drop-offs and the next pickup can be optimized across boundaries, reducing empty buses.

An integrated scheduling platform can also improve the transfer trip experience. Customers and dispatchers both spoke of poor vehicle meet-ups with transfer trips between two systems where it was not uncommon for one vehicle to arrive much later than the other. Examples from our public input process include comments that demand-response users will have a friend or family member pick them up outside the boundary, instead of trying to connect to another service. A single software system across the county eliminates this issue. A unified scheduling system can either shorten the waiting time for the rider or eliminate the need to transfer all together.

Concerns About Co-Mingling ADA and General Public Riders – While RideCo is extremely efficient at scheduling rides, it is important to recognize that in co-mingled services with both general public and ADA riders, it will be necessary to continue to educate call takers and dispatchers on the FTA ADA rules and ADA priority requests. In other words, agencies must not lose sight of providing for this Civil Right trip by giving priority to ADA individuals, even if some efficiency in the ride-scheduling is affected.

To address the challenges of co-mingling rider groups, it is recommended that agencies:

- Explore RideCo's capability for accommodating multi-system trip scheduling and dispatch functions, while ensuring compliance with the ADA complementary paratransit rules
- Use RideCo's reporting capabilities to monitor trip demand and vehicle deployment, adjusting driver/vehicle schedules or passenger promised pick-up times to better fit supply with demand.
- Integrate transfer trips into RideCo's multi-system capability, evaluating the potential for a shared fleet.
- Explore RideCo's ability to assign a fund source (responsible city) to each trip and to regularly generate reliable, equitable trip billing amounts to partners using a defensible methodology.

Data Concerns – In terms of data-oriented concerns of the sponsoring municipalities where all cities/operators are housed under one CAD/AVL system, notably the cities/operators will not lose control of their own platform and data. RideCo has the capability of creating segregated systems or zones for each operator's jurisdiction. There is no one entity controlling the parameters within RideCo. Those parameters, such as days and hours of service, can be determined individually by the operator and can be adjusted whenever they choose, while still ensuring that the customer can navigate travel throughout the region using a single RideCo application.

POLICY ENFORCEMENT

Background – Policies in several areas deserving of attention can be standardized in an integrated environment and will help to improve on demand operations. Differing among the operators, policies can be made uniform, establishing a critical foundation to planned integration efforts. These are largely, but not exclusively, rider-oriented policies.

No-Shows and Late Trip Cancellations – Enforcing policies to reduce no-show trips and late trip cancellations will automatically improve trip scheduling and contribute significantly to improved productivity. Enforcement requires clear, consistent, and continuing communication with riders, as well as follow-up by call centers and dispatchers. Abuses to these policies, or even casualness in cancelling un-needed trips, translates into wasted vehicle revenue hours. Although it may not seem like a big issue for any given trip, these continued one-offs accumulate to larger trends of unproductivity. A performance goal of less than five percent (5%) of combined no shows and late cancel trips is a desirable goal. Multiple Ventura County operators are well above this.

Dwell Time – It is strongly recommended that dwell-time policies be consistent across all systems and consistently reported using common definitions of dwell time (the time the vehicle is standing at the curb awaiting a passenger). If there are different dwell times for different operators, this can sow confusion among passengers that transfer or use more than

one system, potentially leading to increased no-shows, lower productivity and more stress for the passengers.

Automated Call Messaging – Most services have automated call messaging about when vehicles arrive, which is a first step in gaining rider confidence. However, ensuring these messages report actual arrival times to the rider (and not scheduled arrival times of vehicles) will further increase confidence and encourage riders to be ready to board when vehicles arrive. Having real-time vehicle information available to passengers is even better.

Advance reservation policies – Most of the demand-response programs in Ventura County allow for trip reservations of up to two weeks in advance. Shortening this to one week in advance is one strategy for reducing no-show and late cancellations as it requires that the trip be closer in time to the making of the reservation. With that said, this strategy may not work for every agency but can be examined at the local level. For some riders, this is difficult where they have medical, dental or therapy appointments that are made well in advance and the rider expects assurance that they have a ride to their appointment, so it is important to balance these needs.

REFINING SUBSCRIPTION RIDE POLICY

Background – Subscription rides are recurring trips where passengers have consistent travel needs at the same time on a regular basis. Subscription rides can create efficiencies in the system. However, in outreach conducted in 2023, some operators indicated that when rides are scheduled two weeks in advance, it tends to lead to an increase in no-shows (as mentioned in the section above). Therefore, striking a balance between efficiencies and enforcement is important to note here. Subscription rides are based on the *appointment* time, not the time that the individual would like to be picked up. Increased productivity can be possible with subscription rides because they provide a scheduling framework around which other, non-recurring trips can be efficiently slotted in.

Recognizing the Value of the Right Balance of Subscription Trips – For riders with recurring medical trips, such as oncology or dialysis, a subscription trip reservation gives the rider confidence that they will have a ride when the appointment arrives. Hence, subscription rides can increase customer satisfaction and increase productivity across the system.

From an operational viewpoint, under the FTA guidelines for ADA complementary paratransit, an agency is allowed to assign no more than 50% of trip capacity to subscriptions at any given time (CFR 37.133). The FTA wants to ensure that there is still a focus on providing flexible, demand-responsive services to meet the needs of the broader paratransit community, not just those with recurring trip needs. These recurring rides often become the framework upon which an efficient tour of trip pick-ups can be scheduled. RideCo software allows for subscription rides, therefore schedulers must monitor the volume of subscription rides to non-subscription rides to stay within FTA's ADA regulations.

NEGOTIATING PICK-UP TIMES WITH RIDERS

Background – There is little evidence that Ventura County demand-response programs, with advance reservation, are consistently negotiating rider pick-up times, at the time of reservation or later up to the day prior to the reservation. Negotiating pick-up times is critical to improving productivity where agency dispatchers spread demand throughout the operating day to the greatest extent possible, given consistent peak travel times. This is particularly important for systems with higher “early” trip arrival experience, where drivers are arriving at pick-up addresses early before the pick-up window has begun. As noted, no trips should arrive earlier than the pick-up window. This is consistent with fixed-route practice that buses do not leave bus stops earlier than the scheduled time. Also, it is important to note, the guidelines about pickup windows for paratransit services under the ADA are outlined in the FTA Circular 4710.1:

Pickup Windows: According to the FTA Circular 4710.1 (dated 2015), Section 5.3 outlines the “On-Time Performance” of paratransit services. The pickup window should be defined as a 30-minute window (15 minutes before or 15 minutes after the scheduled pickup time). This gives both the passengers and the service provider flexibility while maintaining a timely and reasonable service.

Implementing Trip Negotiation Procedures Negotiating different pick-up times than the customer requests are difficult for call takers. It also requires some understanding of real-time vehicle capacity, which is information that may or may not be available to call takers in current circumstances. Both factors are barriers to implementing trip negotiation procedures. However, not negotiating trip pick-up times limits productivity, makes minimal use of lower demand periods and loads up trip requests during higher, peak demand periods.

Failure to negotiate pick-up times for well-known riders who use the system often may, unknowingly, stop new riders from trying the service if they are consistently being denied rides. This informal practice reflects “capture” by a small group of riders and resultant limitations for new riders. New riders who consistently encounter, “there are no pick-ups available during that time,” when popular time slots are captured by existing riders, become less likely to try to use the service again.

Negotiating times requires software that can offer options and direction as to which trips to negotiate and what new times to offer. Negotiating trip times requires procedures that direct staff to take on this task, including scripts as to how to present the negotiated times to riders and how to address their responses. In addition to software aid, call center procedures and Standard Operating Procedures must also be developed for training purposes.

CALL CENTER CONSOLIDATION

Background – Through the process of integration, efficiencies will start to surface, including working through the improvement areas of this list. One of the more structural realizations of integration will be decisions to consolidate call/dispatch centers. Sometimes termed a One Call/Dispatch Center, establishing a single dispatching function through a consolidated call center can result in a spectrum of benefits. This can be achieved even in environments where systems retain separate operating control. Consolidated call center examples and their benefits, some of which have already been mentioned, include:

- Transit and information sharing among call center representatives and dispatchers responsible for serving the whole county who will share facilities and space, instead of siloed into multiple operating environments.
- One phone number for demand response riders to call. When conducting stakeholder focus groups during January 2024, Ventura County's Chamber of Commerce voiced that they did not know who to call or where to start. Human Service agencies voiced that many transfers are needed for their clients that do not know where or how to start that process. Public feedback asked "what phone number do I call to learn about these resources?" Repetitive branding of one number and one website can help gain confidence among the community.
- Reduced personnel or greater coverage of operating hours, leading to either reduced costs or better use of the workforce.
- Better transfer experience among customers where the vehicles "meet" are better timed and will be more effective when done by a single dispatching operation.
- A better understanding of fleet use across the region and potential reduction in deadhead hours.
- Immediate coordinated support to emergency services and future potential for other call center consolidation efforts such as emergency management, and police/fire. This could lead to new funding opportunities outside of transit to support this effort.
- A reduction in difficult and lengthy passenger transfers, improving the customer experience and utilization of vehicle deployments.

Approach – As each jurisdiction's demand response program seeks to improve its operation in the functional areas of this listing – including the continued implementation of RideCo dispatching software. There will be steady opportunity to explore consolidated call operations that may include the following:

- Consider staffing – It will be necessary to clarify the numbers of staff responsible for all or parts of the call taking and dispatch functions. Assignments may change with the introduction of RideCo processes, where the software reduces the need for human responsibilities. It may make sense for remaining tasks to be consolidated or assigned differently among existing personnel.

- Consider facility options – Facilities at GCTD and at SVT each have potential for one large call center. Currently, there are six dispatching facilities for the nine systems, with MCT, TOT and ECTA Intercity demand-response sharing a dispatch center through their contractor. The 211 Ventura/Interface Children and Family Services also has a combined call center facility that has room for expansion. Its managers show some interest in a transportation call center capability as consistent with its mission of linking Ventura County residents with services and currently has some limited unspent FTA Section 5310 transportation funds that could support a startup effort.
- Consider contract implications – During this period of work within existing contract frameworks, jurisdictions should actively consider what level of staffing and resources they might wish to put to the call taking and dispatching activities going forward. That will help to inform upcoming contract changes.

STRUCTURING VEHICLE AVAILABILITY AND DRIVER SHIFTS TO MATCH DEMAND

Background – Matching vehicle deployment to trip demand is important for service quality and efficiency. Establishing driver/vehicle shifts to reflect rider demand patterns is an effective way to increase productivity, thereby decreasing costs per trip. It helps improve on-time performance and the rider’s experience.

Moving Driver/Vehicle Shifts to Reflect Trip Demand – The typical two peaks of late morning and mid-afternoon documented for several systems point to the importance of staggering driver shifts. More resources are needed at times when demand is greatest. This may lead to some split shifts to match predictable demand patterns with vehicle supply, a frequent practice in the delivery of on-demand public transportation. Understandably, with split-shifts, drivers are more difficult to hire than full-time 8-hour shifts. However, as the number of rides increase (under a split-shift model), the overall number of trips *per day* increases, which may decrease the amount of time between shifts making split shifts more attractive to drivers, and most importantly, easier for riders to utilize.

Careful data analyses of trip demand, including negotiated trip pick-up times, will help operators decide optimal scheduling of vehicles and drivers. Matching resources with demand will improve productivity and, importantly, help to control costs.

STANDARDIZING FARE PAYMENT METHODS

Background and Approach – Ventura County transit operators are improving their unified fare payment systems, through VCbuspass/Umo, the implementation of Tap2Ride, an open loop payment system and through RideCo, which is currently implemented by some transit operators. The objective of these payment options is to make it easier for riders to easily pay the fare on Ventura County transit systems. This has positive implications for demand-response users. In participant interviews, Valley Express riders described the benefits of the VCbuspass/Umo fare payment app for demand-response trips, moving away from either the

pre-loaded fare card or cash. Riders pointed to the hassles of securing and carrying cash or traveling to a transit store to put funds onto a fare card or to a bank to secure cash. Integrating into one payment apps will drastically improve the customer's experience. Unifying fare payment options, and promoting these, will help to build confidence among riders and potential riders, making it a better experience for all.

At the time of this writing, VCTC is working with RideCo to implement a point-of-sales system linked to the reservation platform, which will help increase customer satisfaction even more.

Governance in Support of Integration

BACKGROUND

In 2023, VCTC adopted a report titled "Transit Integration and Efficiency Study" (TIES), which looked at the nine different bus transit operations in Ventura County. 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 local routes. The study noted that while the agencies in Ventura County provide high-quality service for local riders, the individual operations do not form an effective regional network. The study articulated three alternatives for improved efficiency. Two of the three alternatives are important to this discussion, which are:

- Alternative 1: Partial consolidation
 - o Subregional Demand-Response (paratransit and dial-a-ride) Consolidation and Increased Agency Coordination.
 - o Consolidate East County demand-response services into ECTA as a new, formalized organization, with all other agency-cities retaining administrative control of fixed-routes.
- Alternative 2: Moderate Consolidation
 - o Countywide Paratransit, and Subregional Fixed-Route Consolidation.
 - o Consolidation of all demand-response (paratransit and dial-a-ride) operations into a new countywide agency. Consolidation of fixed-route operations by geography with Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Moorpark, with VCTC East County Route becoming an east county transit agency, and all other services being consolidated with Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD).

The Commission approved the final draft Transit Integration and Efficiency Study, and approved adoption of Alternative 1 and the continued study of Alternative 2 with incremental

implementation of Alternative 1 commencing after approval. This analysis is the continued study of Alternative 2.

Alternative #1 sets the stage of creating two separate demand-response programs (west-county and east-county), which would be the steppingstone for Alternative #2. However, this portion of Alternative #1 has not yet been implemented, therefore, the following governance assumes the integration of all demand-response programs from independent operations. Specifically, Alternative #2, which envisions improved fixed-route services for each of the cities, but with an integrated demand-response program, was recommended for the future of the County. Alternative #2 provides a synopsis of governance, planning and funding for an integrated demand-response program. This section focuses on the governance requested in Alternative #2 of the TIES study, and suggests strategies for implementing future governance structures that will support integrated services.

TIES Alternative #2 states:

“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.”

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.”

The countywide demand-response agency would follow a similar set of strategies to Alternative 1 for the creation of a countywide call and scheduling center.

Table 3 presents the current governance structures and information about the existing operating responsibility for the county’s nine on-demand services, which is important background to thinking about integrated service delivery.

Table 3, Existing Management Structures of Demand Response Services

CITY MANAGED		
DAR Service	DAR Operator	Notes
CAT	RTW Management	Facilitated by RideCo Software

TOT	MV Transportation	Facilitated by RideCo Software
ECTA	MV Transportation c/o Thousand Oaks	MOUs between Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley and Moorpark, Facilitated by RideCo Software
SVT	In-House	Facilitated by Ecolane Software* <i>*Transitioning to RideCo at the end of the Ecolane contract period 6/30/26</i>
MCT On Demand (Microtransit)	Transdev	Facilitated by RideCo Software
MCT	MV Transportation c/o Thousand Oaks	Administered by City of Thousand Oaks under contract with Moorpark
Ventura County	MV Transportation c/o Thousand Oaks	East County Transit Alliance/MOU
INDEPENDENT AGENCY/ELECTED BOARD		
DAR Service	DAR Operator	Notes
Gold Coast Go Access/Go Now	In-House	Gold Coast is a Transit District Facilitated by Ecolane Software
Valley Express	MV Transportation	Agreement between Fillmore, Santa Paula, the County, managed by VCTC (overseen by a policy board), Facilitated by RideCo Software

FUTURE GOVERNANCE

Developing a new countywide demand-response agency will require legislative changes to current county/state level statutes or rules, loss of local control, a potential elective process, creation of by-laws, and capital and financial resources. Therefore, this report provides a simpler, gradual approach for the beginning stages of integration. However, clear over-arching policy direction, coupled with leadership and strong facilitation will be critical to ensure the phases for integration are implemented properly and desired benefits achieved.

Two options for overall governance are proposed, derived from best practices and peer experiences, and thought to best support Ventura County's integration efforts. 1) a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) process and 2) a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA), are introduced here in terms of activities by general timeframe and counting the pros and cons of each approach. Further implementation details, including some discussion of sequencing these, are provided.

OPTION #1 - MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

VCTC and the nine demand-response programs can enter into one large MOU outlining the responsibilities of each party, which would include the integration phases mentioned in the following pages. In addition to the creation of an MOU, a technical advisory committee (TAC) would be created to facilitate conversation on integration steps and timing (more discussion on the formation of a TAC is proposed in the following pages).

Pros and cons of setting up a countywide MOU to govern integrated demand response service delivery are illustrated below.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow cites/operators to keep control over day-to-day operations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does not involve movement of facilities, maintenance yards, employees, administrative facilities/functions. ○ Easier and faster to come to a consensus between all parties • It is easier to implement once a cost-sharing method is set up and agreed upon. The cost-sharing method must accurately reflect the volume of services each city provides, presumably with more than the per-ride cost factor based on revenue hours of the ECTA cost-sharing method. • Less commitment of time and resources • It provides flexibly to change roles and responsibilities over time. • Provides opportunities for continued collaboration and cooperation. • Provides time to evaluate the success of the implementation items. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not lead immediately to the efficiency gains that would be more quickly achievable through a JPA. • It will require administrative time and leadership from VCTC, given the multiple agencies and contractors involved.

OPTION #2 – JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT

The second option is likely to follow an MOU process. It will involve more highly structured, formalized governance that can evolve as operating experience and trust builds through the MOU process.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides more legal binding/structure/framework for what VCTC and its policy makers are trying to achieve through an integrated on-demand program, serving all of Ventura County. • Provides uniform policy making and implementation across all operators. • Would dedicate transit funding to the new entity by formula. • Could lead more quickly to efficiency gains than an MOU. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation of a JPA requires time, energy, and resources from VCTC and its transit operators. • Existing operating contracts will need to be separated between fixed-route and paratransit services. • Funding must come from existing operators as there are no new funding sources for the agency. * • Disagreements on funding splits and service level equity may stall the process of further integration.

**If additional funding becomes available during the integration process, the funds will be dedicated towards integration and not additional demand-response service hours.*

Governance Recommended in the Short-Term and Long-Term

YEARS 1 – 3

Development of Memorandums of Understanding

This report recommends that VCTC develop a MOU with the demand-response operators in Ventura County, detailing the goals and strategies for integration of services as presented in this report. Currently, there is the ECTA MOU in place between TOT, SVT, MCT, and County of Ventura, with a fifth amendment signed in March 2025 and terms through June 2027.

This report recommends building off the existing ECTA MOU at the beginning stages of integration for the following reasons:

- The ECTA MOU is a successful document already in place with four entities currently integrating services.
- An MOU allows VCTC and the operators time to understand the efficiencies of integration (which may not be seen for another year or two through countywide implementation of RideCo and data collection). These efficiencies can result in economies of scale, resources saving, etc. – all of which can be written legally into a future JPA down the road.
- TRANSCOM should review RideCo data (quarterly) to see why and where the following occur:

- Increases or decreases in passengers per hour per agency.
- Increases or decreases in costs per passenger and costs per mile.
- Increases or decreases in deadhead hours and miles traveled.
- Increases or decreases in passenger miles traveled.
- Service volume by community and by operator.
- VCTC and the cities need time to review contracts, talk to their legal teams, and review their terms with their operators, specifically for those who use the same contractor for both fixed-route and demand-response services.
- VCTC and the municipalities need to understand the funding effects of integration and what additional funding sources may be available, including grant sources or city general funds.

Specific areas of the ECTA MOU that are worth continuing forward and building off include:

The goals listed in the 2013 MOU:

- *Provide public transit services that are inclusive, customer-focused, efficiently operated and financially viable.*
- *Enhance existing transit services and options through a cooperative and collaborative partnership that balances regional concerns with each agency's unique transit need.*
- *Improve local and inter-agency transit connectivity within the ECTA service area and with other transit service providers in Ventura and Los Angeles counties.*
- *Improve coordination of public transit services in the key areas of scheduling, fares, eligibility, marketing and outreach, and policies and procedures.*
- *Establish a single provider for ADA and senior demand-responseservice within the ECTA service area.*
- *Leverage cost efficiencies through coordinated purchases of services and equipment, shared use of facilities and other capital resources, and investments in technology.*

Use of existing Management Committee

- *The existing Management Committee can be built upon as the TAC, who can guide integration.*

The creation of another committee may be understandably unappealing among staff, but using the current Management Committee structure as a starting point may be the best approach to build buy-in. This committee would focus solely on demand-response and would retrieve current employees whose focus is paratransit and senior transportation.

There would be one representative from each city. Year 1 would involve heavy input from its members but could potentially evolve into lighter duties as Year 2 and 3 progress.

Review of Current Contract Terms

At the time of this writing, the operator contracts will end during the following time frames:

CAT	Contractor: RTW Management	2024 Agreement for four years through June 30, 2028, with possibility of up to (3) one-year extensions
MCT	City of Thousand Oaks/MV Transportation	2 nd Amendment extends contract with MV Transportation through 6/30/2025
TOT/ECTA	MV Transportation	5 th Amendment extends through 6/30/27
Valley Express	MV Transportation	2023 Agreement through 6/30/27, with extensions in 2028, 2029, and 2030

With regards to how to phase contracting, it would make sense for CAT and MCT to extend contracts through 6/30/28, then have one unified RFP created in the winter of 2027, with a start date of July 1st, 2028, for all cities going forward.

VCTC's Facilitation and Leadership Options

Although an MOU will articulate guidance going forward, there will still be a lot of administrative guidance required over a one-to-three-year time frame to ease all aspects of a successful integration. Given the sensitivity and complexity of integration, this report recommends hiring of a Client Representative (Client Rep) who can act on behalf of a client (VCTC) for a limited period, but has a narrower scope focused on the objectives of the project, in this case the implementation of an integrated service structure. A contracted Client Rep is a third party who may have more success in encouraging integration initiatives than someone affiliated with a locally known entity. It is expected that this will follow an RFP process, presuming that VCTC wishes to establish a contracted, non-employee-type relationship.

Similar examples of where transit agencies have hired a Client Rep for the purpose of integration include:

- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority – hired a Client Rep to provide oversight, coordination, and integration of transit programs that involved

multiple contractors and stakeholders, specifically for the Green Line Extension project.

- Metropolitan Transportation Commission, San Francisco Bay Area – hired a Client Rep to unify regional services among 27 transit operators, specifically for: regional fare integration, service branding and coordination, and customer experience – all of which are detailed in a document called the “Transit Transformation Action Plan.”
- Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area – Metrolinx – hired a Client Rep to lead service integration across local transit agencies (TTC, Go Transit, MiWay, York Region Transit). Focus areas included: fare harmonization, service planning coordination, and cross-boundary service agreements.

YEAR 3 ONWARD

Revision and elevation of ECTA MOU/or Transition from MOU to JPA Structure

The primary goal of Years 1 – 3 is to gain confidence and filter guidance for the development of an agreement, (built off ECTA’s MOU), with the intention of subsequently developing a JPA from that framework. Afterwards, the secondary goal is to refine implementation activities and evaluate performance.

Once Year 3 is underway, VCTC will determine whether to (a) continue contracting with the Client Rep, or (b) end the contract with the Client Rep and hire a new individual as the FTE to lead the integrated agency, or (c) end the contract with the Client Rep and hire her/him on as the FTE (assuming VCTC and the operators were satisfied with the leadership of the Client Rep).

The key features of the JPA will include:

Collaboration: The JPA will enable VCTC to collaborate on initiatives with all the cities/operators.

Shared Resources: The JPA will detail how operators can share resources (i.e., fleet, CAD/AVL equipment, call center infrastructure, administration and programming).

Legal Entity: Unlike the first developed MOU, the JPA will have legal ramifications for cities/operators that may not meet the performance metrics and aims of integration. Specifically:

- A JPA creates a new legal entity that is distinct from the participating agencies.
- A JPA can enter contracts, own property, and/or incur debt.
- The JPA entity holds legal responsibility for its actions and can extend to the individual agencies involved.

- Regarding budget and/or funding – if one entity does not fulfill its financial obligations, it could lead to a breach of the JPA, which could result in financial penalties or lawsuits.

Governance: The agreement outlines how decisions will be made, how funds will be allocated, and how the operations will be administered.

Phasing for Successful Implementation

METHODOLOGY

The method behind phasing the integration of demand-response services starts with simple actions that include the improvement areas examined at the outset of this chapter and gradually becomes more complex in scope. Starting with less complex activities can increase participation among stakeholders, involves less capital, and resources, creates momentum and provides a foundation to integrate more complex resources down the line. Each phase lists recommendations, immediate actions, timing and resource needs. While these phases are generally sequential, some activities may overlap and not be strictly limited to following the preceding phase. Specifically, Phase 3 is labeled as the “Operator Consensus Process Review” that will be on-going throughout the entire integration process and extremely important for collective agreement on all other phases. In addition to Phase 3, informational aspects of the “final” sixth phase (Branding, Marketing, Education and Promotion) may in fact be introduced at multiple points in the preceding phases.

These six phases are:

1. Customer Facing and Internal Policy Alignment Across demand-response Systems
2. Joint Procurement, Life Cycle Analysis, and Contract Review
3. Operator Consensus Process Review
4. Potential Changes to Existing Call Center/Dispatch Systems
5. Administrative Analysis
6. Branding, Marketing, Education and Promotion

Phases are key building block processes, to set up the basic parameters of an integrated system. These would likely be done under the MOU governance option and supported with leadership from the Client Rep. Phase 3 is an important consensus-building process that will determine whether the system moves forward into a more formalized, integrated JPA. Phase 4 details considerations in building a centralized call center; and Phases 5 and 6 develop later in the process, as performance trends from RideCo become clearer and lead agencies in the right direction. However, many of the actions in Phase 6’s branding will need to be incorporated along the way for information outreach and knowledge of how the revised on-demand systems run.

The Client Rep plays a critical role in moving these phases forward. They will establish a flow and rhythm within each phase and between the phases. The Client Rep will build agendas that help structure the dialogue among the operators and with VCTC in relation to policies and procedural areas. They are expected to work with the operators to problem-solve as issues inevitably present. The Client Rep may have responsibility for crafting selective written products that move the phases forward, such as draft policy statements, working procedures and competitive procurement documents. Importantly, the Client Rep will help resolve the inevitable issues not identified in this initial plan or unanticipated requirements that develop as other consequences of implementing the phased activities occur.

Figure 2, REALIZING INTEGRATED DEMAND RESPONSE SERVICES FOR VENTURA COUNTY THROUGH PHASES



The following tables detail specific activity areas of each of the six phases over a three –year period, consistent with the principles and direction previously discussed.

SIX PHASES

PHASE I

This first phase builds heavily upon the service improvements of the preceding period, moving towards policy alignment in multiple areas. This will follow formal direction by the VCTC policy makers to move forward and by the agreement, tacit or otherwise, of the jurisdictions.

Phase 1: Year 1	
Customer Facing and Internal Policy Alignment Across DAR systems	
Background: This first phase is not capital-intensive but requires earnest conversations regarding policy decisions among the current demand-response systems. The lists below provide a guide for what should be discussed during this phase.	
Customer Facing DAR Policies	Recommendations
Hours of Operations	To be Determined by TAC*
Days of Operations	To be Determined by TAC*
Advance Reservation	No more than 14 calendar days
Same Day Reservation	Yes, only possible with dynamic scheduling software
ADA Eligibility Process	Continuing with ADA eligibility processor
On-Time Window	30 minutes (15 mins before/15 mins after)
No-Show Policy	3 or more will lead to suspension from the program, with proper appeals process in place
Late Cancellation Definition	Less than 2 hours
Dwell Time	5 Minutes
Prioritization of Types of Rides	(1) ADA (2) Over 65 (3) general public
Code of Conduct/Bus Rules	To Be Determined by TAC
Internal DAR Policies/Benchmarks	Recommendations
Determine On-Time Performance Measures	No more than 5 mins early/No more than 10 mins late of ADA window, 95% of the time
10/10 Radio Policies	To be Determined by TAC
Passengers Per Revenue Hour Benchmark	Industry Standard w/software 3.5 rides/hr or more*
Cost Per Ride Benchmark	To be Determined by TAC*
Measurement of Denied Rides	To be Determined by TAC*; Focusing on no denials of ADA certified riders
Percentage of No-Show/ Late Cancel Trips	Goal of < 5%, combined no show & late cancel
Fare Policy (no more than double the cost of fixed route for the same trip for ADA certified riders)	To be Determined by TAC*

Phase 1: Year 1	
Review of Curb-to-Curb and Door-to-Door Policies	Discussion among TAC members on (a) the differences in policy, (b) potential customer services issues with either policy, and (c) best practices that agencies have experienced and shared with one another
Fare Payment Method/Branding/Marketing	To be Determined by TAC/RideCo App
Review of Service Animal Policy	TAC to (a) discuss customer interactions and questions asked, (b) determine what constitutes an animal carrier, (c) share difficult interactions with customers and how best to address them
*Benchmarks do not need to be uniform across each agency, but consensus on what is productive per location is desired. National benchmarks are detailed in an appendix to this document.	

PHASE 2

Phase 2 is likely to commence during year one and may well overlap or be concurrent with activities of Phase I. This addresses the procurement and contracting opportunities of an integrated environment and needs to be mindful of existing contracts' end dates.

PHASE 2: YEAR 1
Joint Procurement, Life Cycle Analysis, and Contract Review
Background: Similar to Phase 1, Phase 2 does not require capital resources, but requires time and energy from agencies' procurement and legal divisions. Below are areas of potential coordination and benefits to economies-of-scale procurement.
Opportunities for Joint Procurements/Areas of Analysis
Demand-Response Fleet Needs
Demand-Response Radio/Communications Equipment Needs
Lifecycle Fleet/Equipment Analysis
Asset Management Software Systems
Insurance Comparisons
Request for Proposals Templates
Invitation for Bid Templates
Review of contractor terms, conditions, and end dates for contracted services
Procurement Evaluation Templates

Regarding fleet procurement, most (if not all) demand-response agencies purchase through the CalAct/Basin Transit Purchasing Cooperative². This is an effective and efficient option for vehicle purchasing, in operation since 2009. However, Phase 2 is asking agencies to go *beyond* just vehicle procurement. There are efficiencies to be gained in the collective procurement process among all the demand-response agencies. Collective procurement could include the purchasing of security equipment, fare-related software and/or infrastructure, signage, shelters, bus parts, mechanical needs, etc. Also, as procurement bids grow, the integrated agency will have more purchasing power, become more attractive to the bidder, and add more choice to choose from.

In addition to the procurement process, efficiencies can be gained in the administrative overhead involved in this effort. Specifically, there is less duplication of effort across agencies, it is easier to track vendor performance, ensure compliance, and resolve disputes; and standardized contracts reduce legal complexity and the risk of inconsistent terms, delays, or unfavorable clauses.

Economically, buying in larger volumes allows for lower per-unit pricing, better service-level agreements from vendors, and bulk discounts on vehicles, fuel, software, and equipment.

PHASE 3

Phase 3 intends to arrive at consensus, through a structured meeting process, and to memorialize that in relation to the review of key functional areas, internal procedures, and communications tools.

PHASE 3: YEAR 1	
Operator Consensus Process Review	
Background: Phase 3 aims to understand the intricacies related to each agency's internal communication culture, as well as the type of communication provided to its most vulnerable populations.	
Internal Operations Process	Outcomes
Agencies to discuss customer service culture and expectations	To be Discussed By TAC
Call Center Training Documents/Videos/Materials	Review each agency's materials and procedures to see what is the most effective for staff training
De-Escalation Training for Drivers, Dispatchers, Customer Service Representatives	Review each agency's materials to see what is the most effective

² <https://calact.org/programs/>

PHASE 3: YEAR 1	
How to Handle ADA/Title VI Complaints and Concerns	To be discussed by TAC; using existing VCTC and operator Title VI Programs as a guide
Agencies to review what classifies as an “incident” and current reporting practices (i.e. extensive list of types of incidents, reactions and protocols); and Agencies to provide chain-of-command for incidents and accidents	To be Determined by TAC; Reviewing past incident reports and best practices to develop response. The FTA Research Report No. 0204 “Effective Practices in Bus Transit Accident Investigations”, could be a starting place for guidance.
Agencies to Create Employee Progressive Discipline Program	To be Determined by TAC; Reviewing existing employee discipline programs to develop; considering the U.S. Department of Labor’s Public Transit Employee Protections 49 U.S.C. § 5333(b) to ensure compliance
Systematic Approach for Reporting NTD Data	To be Discussed by TAC; Using existing NTD reporting protocol by transit operators as a guide and consideration of expanding TransTrack licensing for NTD data submissions

Phase 3 will be revisited throughout the integration process, expected to happen concurrently with various other activities. Agencies are ever-evolving, and the culture of each agency cannot be easily explained in a few meetings, but with time agencies will better understand how their operations work to serve their individual communities through standard operating procedures. thi

PHASE 4

This phase is focused on the call center and centralized dispatching function. It will commence after the bulk of the work identified in Phase 3 has been completed, along with the first two phases. This phase assumes there is substantial alignment of policy and procedure, through the work of the preceding phases. It also assumes a deeper operational understanding of the type and needs of a fully integrated call center and dispatching system.

PHASE 4: YEAR 2
Potential Changes to Existing Call Center/Dispatch Systems

PHASE 4: YEAR 2
Background: Phase 4's integration is complex, time-consuming and will involve time and effort to achieve results.
Dynamic Scheduling Software
Discuss how each agency uses the software and see what trends emerge
Decide what customized fields are needed for integration
Discuss User Management Roles
Integration of customer profiles from other systems
Understand how RideCo will work in one jurisdiction versus another, especially when it comes to transfers and how vehicle use could work across jurisdictions
Integrated Call Center
Earlier in this document, it was mentioned that there may be more space for an integrated Call Center within existing facilities. In addition to space integration, other satellite agencies need to consider the following:
Ensure all computers have Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP)
Uniform messaging system/branding/phone tree
Understand radio contracts/usage across DAR systems/10-10 radio etiquette
Comprehensive Review of DAR Customer Profiles
Review differences in how customer profiles are developed, what do the ad hoc notes written in the profiles mean for each agency?
Understand how phone reservations integrate with RideCo's mobile and online trip requests

Phase 4 will involve a lot of work on the part of the Client Rep to dive deep into the RideCo software to ensure increased uniformity across the system. The Client Rep will also need to connect with RideCo directly, and not just rely on the operators to understand the system.

In addition to gaining software knowledge, it will fall to the Client Rep to examine and catalogue the existing equipment, and future equipment needs related to call centers and dispatching stations.

PHASE 5

This phase is focused on the employee aspects of an integrated demand response program.

PHASE 5: YEAR 3
Background: Phase 5 looks at employee support, roles and responsibilities related to integration and decides the proper staffing and coverage needed to run effectively. Specifically:
Administrative Analysis
Review of DAR roles and responsibilities/job descriptions
Full Time/Coverage and Shifts
Part Time/Coverage and Shifts
Seasonal/Needs?
On-Call Feasibility
Review of Trip Demand Data (i.e., peak times, when more resources will be needed to serve more people)
Review of Dispatch Roles and Responsibilities/Job Descriptions
Shifts/Coverage
Full Time/Part Time
Review of Call Center Roles and Responsibilities/Job Descriptions
Shifts/Coverage
Full Time/Part Time
Review of Driver Turn-over of Each Agency
Agency Hiring Practices and Human Resources Policies

Phase 5 is not about removing positions but figuring out how the current workforce would meet the demand of an integrated service. For a simplistic example, if a call center does not schedule any rides during 12pm – 12:30pm because the one driver is having a lunch break, perhaps it makes sense to look at the number of rides that could be served and determine whether it is feasible to hire a part-time driver, or determine if vehicles from other jurisdictions could meet demand during this timeframe. Another example, if the call center stops taking calls at 5pm, but the agency gets a lot of voice messages after 5pm, perhaps it is time to examine the shifts of the call takers. This phase ensures that demand-response staff meet the needs of the community and do not become resistant to change.

PHASE 6

This phase kicks in when there is a common, shared service to market and promote and around which to provide educational and training opportunities.

PHASE 6: YEAR 3
Branding/Marketing/ Education and Promotion

Background: Branding and marketing will be needed to launch the new agency's system.
Promoting the new brand can be woven into each phone call that comes into the various Call Centers, so repeat customers understand a change is coming. Below are items related to branding and marketing that need to be considered during integration.
Branding and Marketing Considerations
Phone Number Discussion
Develop a phased approach to creating one phone line as integration comes to fruition, keeping existing numbers with referral or transfer mechanisms for some period
Develop integrated service logos for brochures, websites, online reservation portals, and vehicles
Further define VCTC's Role as County Coordinator
Role of Information Technology and where functions exist for updating websites, graphics, and marketing tools
Discussion of whether to advertise demand response services versus advertising more robust fixed-route network, and the trade-off's associated with each approach
Discussion on the difference between education and advertising

Phase 6 may be implemented, in part, throughout the whole integration process as the TAC and Client Rep see fit, as it relates to promoting information about available demand-response services. For example, if it makes sense to brand vehicles at a certain time because one agency is preparing to brand its vehicles, this may offer an opportunity to develop integrated marketing and promotion tools regarding demand response services. This takes advantage of the opportunity to minimize costs, as well as to highlight and build awareness of integrated, improved demand response services.

Summarizing the Proposed Approach to Integration

This report sets forth a framework for the integration of demand response services in Ventura County, detailing expectations necessary for success, presenting early actions to improve services, describing a governance approach and detailing phases recommended for successful implementation.

Key improvements will build a foundation upon which successful integration of demand-response services can be operated. While ideally these improvements are put into place in advance of further actions towards integration, some may be arrived at or implemented as the process unfolds. These include:

- *Shifting general public riders onto fixed route services* – the overall recommendations of the SRTP will improve and enhance fixed route services, explicitly to attract more riders to fixed route.
- *Dynamic trip scheduling to improve productivity* – features of RideCo and Ecolane scheduling software greatly enhance system efficiencies and improved passenger trips per hour.
- *Policy enforcement with riders* – policies, including no-show and late cancellation, when they are not enforced contribute to the inefficient use of vehicle resources.
- *Subscription trip policies enforced* – recurring trips and their efficient scheduling can be the backbone of a demand response system but must be appropriately scheduled by dispatchers to reserve capacity to serve other trips.
- *Negotiating pick-up times with riders* – improved trip scheduling, including improved on-time performance, can be achieved with negotiated trip times, as opposed to scheduling all trips at the times – often peak periods – when riders request; the ADA allows for trip negotiation within one hour on either side of the requested trip time.
- *Structuring vehicle availability and drivers to match shifts* – Effective matching of resources with demand will increase efficiencies and productivity, contributing to decreased costs per trip.
- *Fare and fare payment* – continuing to move to unified fares and fare payment, through electronic means, will benefit riders and contribute to an integrated system.
- *Call center consolidation* – consolidation of trip reservation and trip scheduling functions will have multiple benefits with an integrated system that contribute to efficiencies, reduced costs and management of a coordinated vehicle fleet.

Two governance structures can support integrated delivery of demand response services. An initial MOU is recommended, adapting the general framework of the ECTA MOU, to use this tool to build to a fully integrated program that is governed by a JPA. The previous section examines the constraints and opportunities of both the MOU and JPA.

A phased approach to building an integrated system is proposed, over a general one-to-three-year timeframe. Six phases are presented, which are generally sequential but with some overlapping-activity. Operational components are detailed within each phase, highlighting the integration elements the operator partners will consider at each phase. The resultant integrated program is expected to keep some degree of local decision-making alongside countywide components that are standardized or managed jointly.

Roles of a Client Rep and a TAC are proposed, providing leadership and guidance throughout the integration process.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OF AN INTEGRATED DEMAND RESPONSE PROGRAM FOR VENTURA COUNTY

The integrated program envisioned predicts both benefits and costs, to be further explored in the next chapters. The costs will entail staff time and decision-making around the allocation of resources for demand-response services, both vehicles and revenues. Expected benefits include improved customer experience through improved reliability and on-time service for local and regional trips. The integrated program is anticipated to achieve more efficient service, increase productivity and reduce costs per trip or per revenue mile. This helps to ensure that costs for these essential services are both sustainable and productive.

Some centralizing of demand-response program oversight through a central call center that can eventually use a shared-fleet can free up staff to focus on other transit functions. Through the S RTP process, it was clear that municipal staff must wear many hats and their opportunity to delve into the specifics of efficient demand-response program management necessarily becomes limited. Where this is left to the contractor, the tendency is simply to keep the status quo and not explore modifications or adaptations that may be indicated by dynamic scheduling software.

In recent years, the performance of most of the County's demand-response services has been sub-optimal. This is despite countywide concurrence that these are critical services and a civil right for persons with disabilities. Moving to an integrated service, designed to meaningfully complement the county's fixed route network, is expected to improve regional mobility for select groups or be provided at service levels that can continue running.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATION AND EXPECTATIONS

Naturally, many operators may be hesitant to embrace change and may question whether these recommendations will truly lead to greater efficiency. Research on transit integration, best demonstrated in Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 173 "Improving Transit Integration Among Multiple Providers", is a worthwhile and relatively brief read which documents the challenges many other agencies have faced that are similar to Ventura County's experience, and the importance of building consensus and making small progressive steps as this chapter proposes.

While no single recommendation will dramatically increase the number of people served per hour—and that is not the primary goal of this study—the core purpose of this integration effort is to enhance the customer experience and better serve Ventura County's communities. For many older adults and individuals with disabilities in the County, traveling beyond their hometown is a significant challenge. Reaching medical appointments or

visiting family can be extremely difficult. At the same time, the current system is serving fewer people than it once did, at a much higher cost. If agencies are committed to meeting the evolving needs of their communities, embracing integration and exploring innovative approaches to that process may be exactly what is needed to improve the mobility of Ventura County residents who use demand-response services.

APPENDIX A - GUIDING INDUSTRY METRICS FOR DEMAND RESPONSE SERVICES

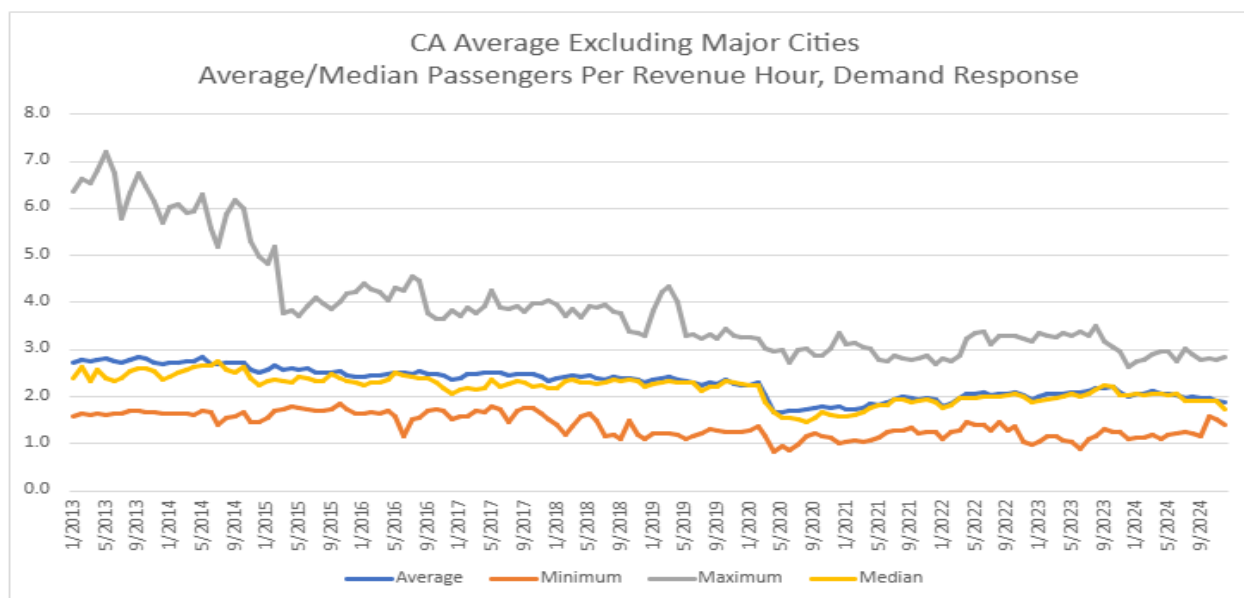
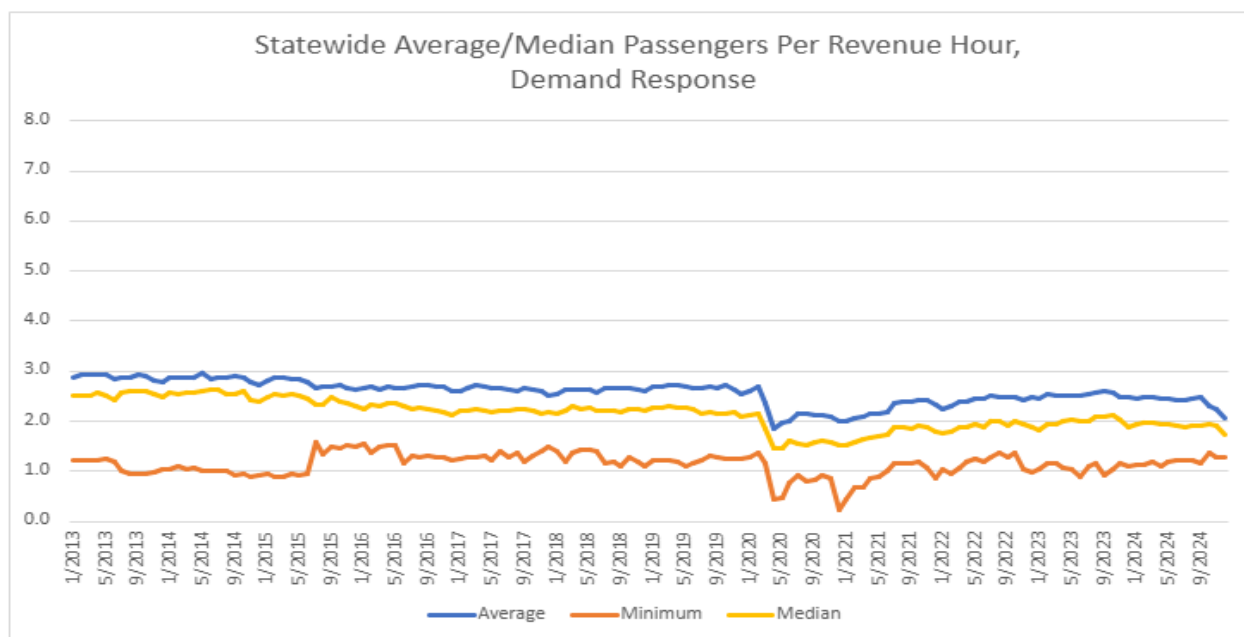
This appendix is a guide for which demand-response operators to reference when creating their own realistic benchmarks for success in their programs. Understandably, one size does not fit all, therefore we do not want to force operators to metrics that do not make sense for them.

However, with that said, these metrics provide a window into what operators are able to achieve, throughout the United States, as well as the State of California.

RIDES PER REVENUE HOUR

- For low-density suburban areas, on-demand services should at least strive for 2.5 – 3.5 rides per revenue hour.
- For higher-density urban/suburban areas, on-demand services should strive for 3.5 – 4 rides per revenue hour.

Below are two charts (1) State of California On-Demand Rides Per Hour Averages, and (2) State of California On-Demand Rides Per Hour Averages Excluding Large Cities. This helps show the minimum productivity that agencies should strive for.

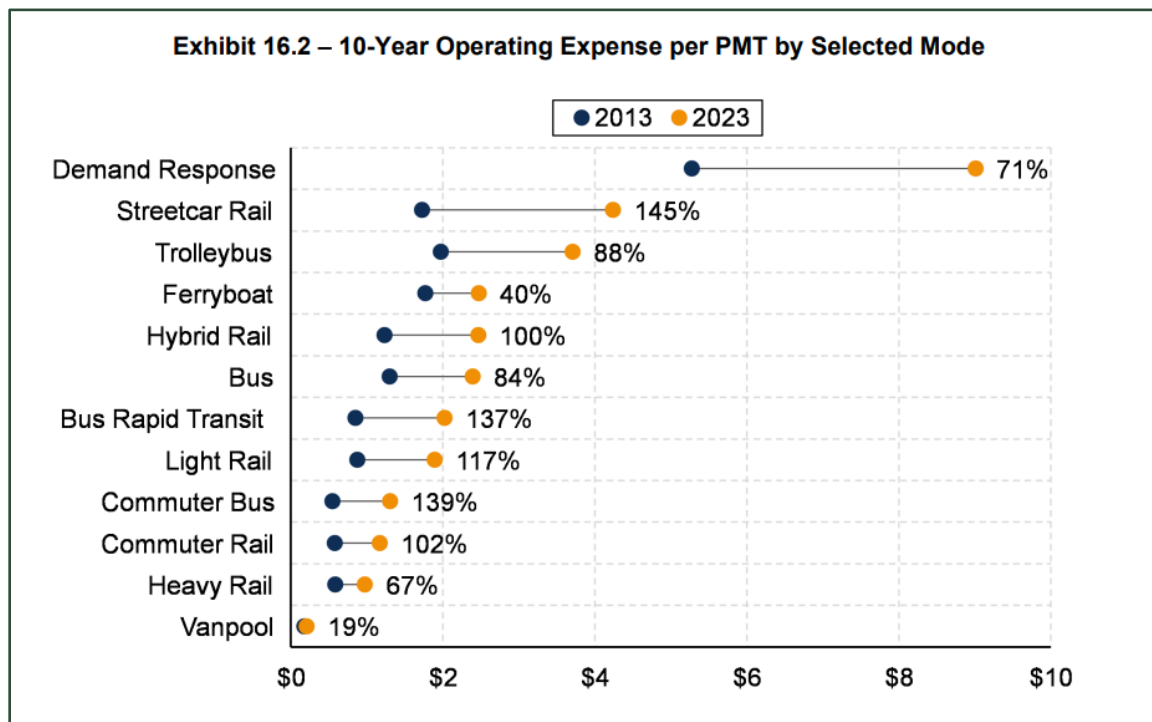


ON-TIME PERFORMANCE

- On-time performance should be met at least 90%–95% each month.

COST PER MILE

Costs for transit services have gone up dramatically after the pandemic, however the chart below from the National Transit Database shows the average Cost Per Mile for U.S. Providers³ by mode. Demand response services should strive to cost less than \$9 per mile.



³ National Transit Database https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2024-12/2023%20National%20Transit%20Summaries%20and%20Trends_1.2.pdf

COST PER HOUR

Below is the current Cost Per Hour for each operator. TAC will discuss realistic goals to set future Ventura benchmarks.

Demand-Response System	Cost Per Hour FY23
CAT	\$148.77
Valley Express	\$90.95
GCTD	\$88.82
TOT	\$181.52
MCT	\$107.72
SVT	\$264.17
ECTA	\$137.37
MCT Microtransit	\$104.40
Current Average	\$140.47