Dial-a-Ride Integration: An Implementation Framework for Sustainable Viability

Prepared for:

Ventura County Transportation Commission

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INTRODUCTION

As supporting documentation for the *Ventura County Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan*, this Integration Conceptual Plan provides background and existing conditions analysis of the County's demand-response services and the implementation steps, should the Commission choose to fully integrate these systems. The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) has explored integrating its nine public transit services, with a focus on coordinating and consolidating demand-response programs, which cost approximately $13 million in FY20/21 and provided roughly 250,000 passenger trips. The Transit Integration and Efficiency Study (TIES) evaluated multiple integration scenarios, and in 2023 the VCTC Board of Directors recommended advancing Alternative 1 with the continued study of Alternative 2, which includes demand-response integration. This plan includes the study of creating a countywide demand response agency that encompasses all existing paratransit and dial-a-ride programs and a subregional consolidation of fixed-route services between east county and west county. This Plan summarizes the background and establishes a path forward for integration, if pursued.

Foundation and Context for Demand-Response Integration

Ventura County's TIES study "identified strategies to improve bus transit throughout Ventura County that most improve passenger experience, reduce operating and capital costs, and better integrate the existing systems" regarding its paratransit services. The TIES study recognized that each community is operating its own distinct transit services, limiting regionalism and connectivity in the transit network. With local demand-response systems experiencing growth, it becomes more difficult to provide interagency service and achieve the greatest level of efficiency across systems. Wide variations in characteristics such as rider policies, fares and passes, program eligibility and operating technology, hinder the rider's ability to navigate transit services across the region.

Integration elements for demand response services under Alternative 2 include the operation of a centralized call and dispatching center with regional vehicle deployment without geographical boundary restrictions to improve service and cost efficiency, as well as facilitate easier long-distance trips throughout the region.

The Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP) and its demand response integration component are the next steps in the integration process, building upon the framework of Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 with implementable strategies that consider the operating and financial implications of integration and the benefits to the county's riders and transit properties.

COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN (COORDINATED PLAN), 2022 UPDATE

The Coordinated Plan is another foundational study besides TIES that defines the need to improve delivery of demand-response services in Ventura County.

TARGET POPULATION GROUPS' OVERVIEW

The Coordinated Plan process focuses on mobility needs and gaps of older adults, persons with disabilities, and persons of low-income, including youth, and military veterans, as well as persons of limited English proficiency. Per the *2022 Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan*, the County's overall population of roughly 850,000 has been steady between 2014 and 2019, growing by just 1%. Projected countywide population growth to 2040 is less than 5%, growing to just under 890,000 residents.

*IN 2019, **SENIORS AGED 65 AND OLDER GREW BY 21% SINCE 2014** (130,000 SENIOR RESIDENTS) TOTALING 15% OF THE COUNTY'S TOTAL POPULATION. **INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES ALSO INCREASED, GROWING 9%** (100,000 RESIDENTS). DECLINING POPULATION GROUPS INCLUDED: YOUTH (DECREASED BY 9%); VETERANS (DECREASED BY 14%) AND INDIVIDUALS OF LOW-INCOME (DECREASED BY 23%). IN 2040, SENIORS AGED 65 AND OLDER WILL BE 25% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION (201,000 RESIDENTS).[1]MOBILITY NEEDS AND GAPS*

Through outreach activities conducted for the Coordinated Plan that included interviews, meetings and surveying, the mobility needs and gaps identified impacting demand response services or riders included the following:

- **Language concerns for Spanish-speaking households** and their reportedly limited access to technology in using public transportation – finding the ride, booking the trip, paying the fare.

[1] California Department of Finance Projections | California Department of Finance

- **Door-to-door assistance** to their front door, more than the curb-to-curb assistance provided by demand response programs, reported as needed by more frail riders.
- **Transferring more seamlessly** across the county with better connections. This is challenging due to long waits, concerns about safety and the reliability of the transfer vehicle showing up.
- **Information dissemination** to better assist target group members in connecting with transit, with people unaware of Ventura County's public transportation network, particularly its demand response services. Information is not always easy to understand.
- **Demand response service improvements** needed (reported by riders) include reducing ride times, trip scheduling that reduces long wait times, and more flexible and efficient trip scheduling processes.
- **More on-demand options**, to provide more flexibility and convenience to riders and prospective riders.
- **Highlighting 5310-eligilble projects,** including volunteer travel training to help connect potential riders with public transportation.
- **Budget adequacy** concerns and difficulty in attaining sufficient passenger farebox contributions.

PRIORITIZED STRATEGIES OF RESPONSE

Recommended strategies, developed through a process detailed in the Coordinated Plan, addressed the three areas of policy, infrastructure, and programs and services. Overall, accessibility documentation, ADA vehicle procurement, and ADA administrative processes are high priorities with medium-level effort for implementation.

Table 1 Coordinated Plan Prioritized Strategies

Strategy	Priority	Category	Level of Implementation Effort
Document accessibility of all stations and stops countywide	High	Infrastructure	Medium
Continue standardizing and regularly updating user information on existing countywide transportation programs and services	High	Policies	Medium
Continue procuring wheelchair-accessible vehicles	High	Infrastructure	Medium
Consolidate all ADA Paratransit Eligible Processes and Rider Databases	High	Policies	Medium
Expand Travel Training	High	Programs/ Services	Medium

Pilot On-Demand Medical Rides	Medium	Programs/ Services	Medium
Study Reduced/ Free Fare Programs	Medium	Programs/ Services	Low
Study Volunteer Driver Programs	Medium	Programs/ Services	Low
One-Seat Demand Response	Medium	Programs/ Services	High
Feeder Services to Existing Regional and Inter-County Transit Hubs	Medium	Programs/ Services	High

SERVICE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

This section summarizes the challenges and opportunities that demand-response integration could address by summarizing the service design in Ventura County. More information on the overall performance of public transit throughout the county, including demand response programs, is provided in the accompanying SRTP. This study was conducted over several years with supporting data primarily from 2023. More recent program updates are described where applicable. This summary is focused on the elements that are most relevant for addressing the Commission direction to explore further demand-response service integration. The complete existing conditions analysis of services as they existed in 2023 is included as an appendix.

Service by Ridership Group

The service areas of seven demand-response operators serving Ventura County residents are presented in Exhibit A (following page). These programs can be categorized based on eligibility policy, and some programs serve more than one category:

- ADA complementary paratransit programs (7 services)
- Demand-response services for seniors, age 65 and older (8 services)
- Demand-response services for general public riders (4 services)
- Microtransit for general public (3 services) - a service that is advertised as a technology-driven flexible-routing service available to the general public, with a slightly higher fare than traditional on-demand services.

Program	Program Type
Camarillo Dial a Ride	ADA/65+
ECTA Connect	ADA/65+
GCTD GO ACCESS	ADA/65+
GCTD SafeRides	ADA/65+/General Public
MCT On Demand	General Public
Moorpark Dial a Ride	65+
Simi Valley Dial a Ride	ADA/65+
Simi Valley Transit On Demand	General Public
TOT Dial a Ride	ADA/65+
Valley Express Dial a Ride	ADA/65+

As a countywide policy, each existing ADA complementary paratransit program chose to accept seniors (ages 65 and older) in their eligibility definition. Generally, these seniors are pre-registered, as are the ADA certified riders.

Demand-response programs serving all general public riders (without specific eligibility processes) include two traditional demand-response services of Camarillo Dial-a-Ride and Valley Express Dial-a-Ride. Microtransit programs also typically serve the general public: Moorpark On Demand, Gold Coast GO NOW, and Simi Valley Transit On Demand.

Service Areas and Transfer Locations

The largest service area is Gold Coast Transit District/Go Access serving multiple communities. The individual municipalities of Camarillo, Thousand Oaks, Moorpark and Simi Valley are served each by their own services as well as East County Transit Alliance (ECTA) provides trips between eastern county communities of Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks and Moorpark with transfer capabilities to more distant areas. The coordinated service of the Valley Express serves Santa Paula, Fillmore and Piru.

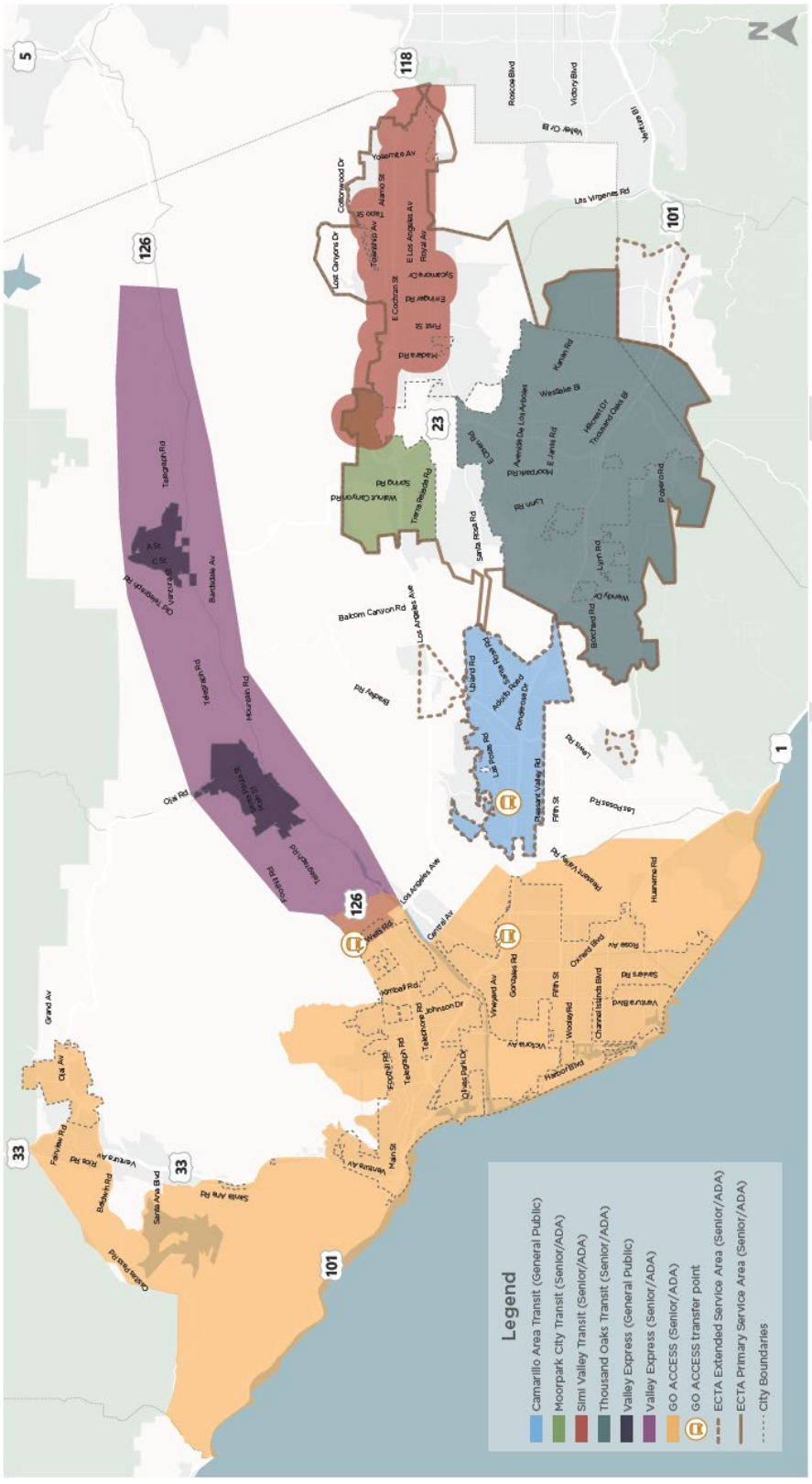
Transfers among the county's demand-response services is of interest to this integration study, given requests from the community over the years about the difficultly utilizing paratransit regionally and overall regional travel demand indicating there is a need to travel regionally. The new RideCo software platform has reduced transfer-related issues and helped speed up the transfer process.

Four transfer locations are identified in the chart below and represented on the map below via the bus icons.

Table 2 Ventura County Dial-A-Ride Transfer Locations

Transfer Location	Notes
St. John's Regional Medical Center	GO ACCESS pick-ups/drop-offs CAT or ECTA passengers here, CAT passengers generally dropped off at home
Camarillo Factory Outlets	GO ACCESS meeting ECTA riders and vice versa
Wells and Telegraph	Valley Express riders transfer to and from GO ACCESS here
Olive View Medical Center	Los Angeles Access riders transfer here to Ventura County operators

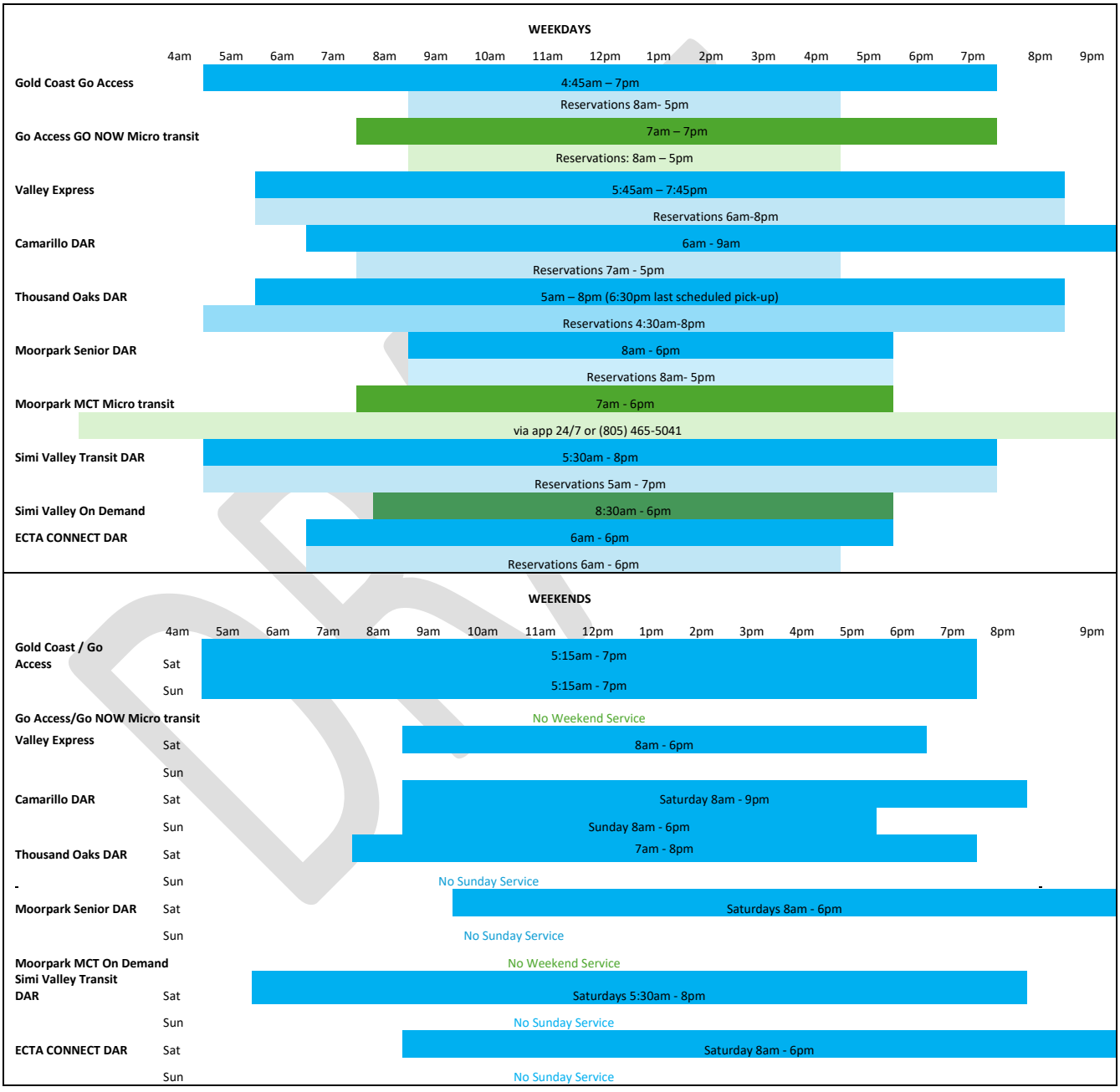
Figure 1 Ventura County's Dial-a-Ride Service Areas



Operating Days and Hours

Operating hours and days vary throughout the nine services. The chart below presents weekday and weekday operating hours for the County's demand response programs, with microtransit programs shaded in green.

Table 3 Demand-Response Program Hours



FARES AND FARE PAYMENT

Fare policies and systems vary across jurisdictions. The chart below describes the fare and payment method for each service. Migration towards RideCo's point-of-sale system for all agencies is occurring in 2026.

Table 4 Demand-Response Fares

Service	Senior/ Disability Fare	General Public Fare	Outside Core Service Area	Means of Fare Payment
GO ACCESS	$4	n/a	$8 outside service area	Exact Cash or RideCo app Fare tickets to agencies
GCTD Safe Rides		$5	n/a	Token Transit e-fare or cash
Valley Express DAR	$3	$3	Free transfers to VCTC 126; VE fixed route	Exact Cash, Umo or Fare Card
Camarillo DAR	$2	$3	$6 on Regional Service	Exact Cash or via RideCo App
Thousand Oaks DAR	$4	n/a	$8 on ECTA Intercity	Exact Cash or pre-paid fare cards, RideCo App
Moorpark DAR	$2	n/a	$8 on ECTA Intercity	Exact Cash or pre-paid fare cards, RideCo App
MCT On Demand	$0.50*	$1	n/a	MCT RideCo App
Simi Valley DAR	$2	n/a	$8 on ECTA Intercity	Exact Cash or Ecolane Electronic Account,
Simi Valley Microtransit	$	$4	n/a	RideCo App
ECTA Connect	$8	n/a	$8 Intercity	Exact Cash or prepaid fare cards, RideCo App

*fare for seniors

CUSTOMER-FACING SERVICE POLICIES

Service policy integration is required to eliminate confusion among passengers and build confidence in a new system. Depicted in the chart below, these policies relate to the advance (or same day) reservation, the definition of on-time performance, dwell time at the curb, and late cancellation definition.

Table 5 Demand-Response Trip Policies

Service	Advance reservation	On-time Window	Late Cancel Definition and Policy	Dwell Time at the Curb
Go Access	Day before (no later than 4:30pm)	30min window 15min before/15min after promised pick-up time	Cancel within 1hr of scheduled trip	2 mins
GCTD Safe Rides	Same day	15 mins	n/a	
Valley Express	ADA (7 days in advance)	30 min window, 30min after promised pick-up time; vehicles don't come earlier than promised time	Late cancel is less than 2hrs before trip	
	General public riders, same day if space is available		Dispatch leaves "Friendly Reminder" tags at the door with repeat no-shows	
Camarillo DAR	24hrs in advance	20min window, 10min before & after promised pick-up time	Late cancel is less than 2hrs before trip	5 mins
Thousand Oaks DAR	Day before, up to 2 weeks in advance	30min window, 15min before/after promised pick-up time	Late cancel is less than two hours before trip	
Moorpark DAR	Day before, up to 2 weeks in advance	30min window, 15min before/after promised pick-up time	Call by 7:30 day prior to cancel	
MTC On Demand	Day of travel	Pick-up time to 10mins after pick-up time	Cancel on the app	
Simi Valley DAR	Day before, up to 2 weeks in advance	n/a		
ECTA Connect	Day before, no later than 6pm, up to 2 weeks in advance	30min window, 15mins before/after promised pick-up time	Call by 7:30 day prior to cancel	

DIAL-A-RIDE SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

The chart below provides a synopsis of how riders rated their most recent ride based on overall service quality questions listed below (conducted through a public outreach plan for this study). Satisfaction is high, with many respondents rating responses as either "good" or "excellent." Areas for improvement addressed through integration include reservations, call

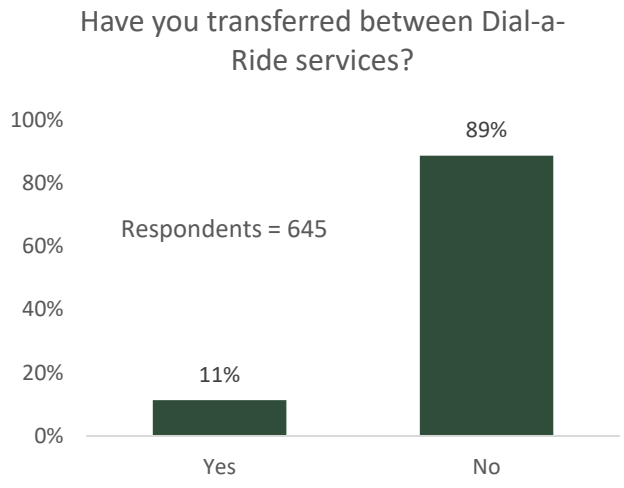
responsiveness, and vehicle on-time performance, which benefits from a coordinated pool of operators and vehicles deployed countywide.

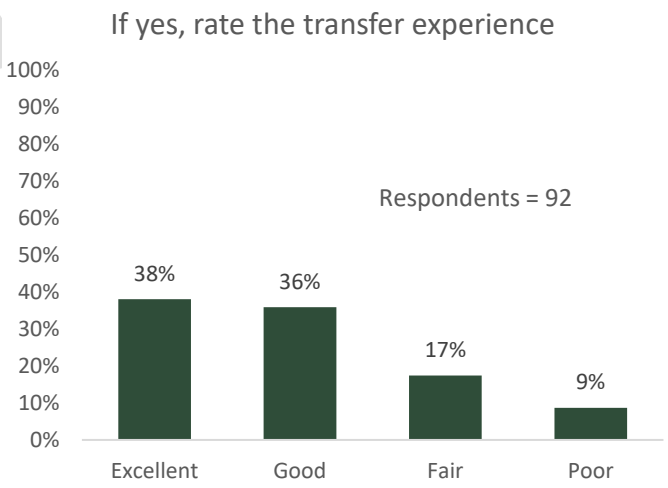
Table 6 Dial-A-Ride Survey Ratings

Question prompt	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Reservationist's ability to reserve a trip near the time you requested	41%	37%	16%	5%
Telephone wait time to speak to reservationists	37%	39%	20%	4%
Vehicle's on-time performance in picking you up	34%	35%	21%	11%
Driver's assistance to you	50%	35%	13%	3%
Safety and driving experience	52%	37%	9%	2%
Value of service you received for the fare you paid	54%	31%	11%	4%

TRANSFER QUESTIONS

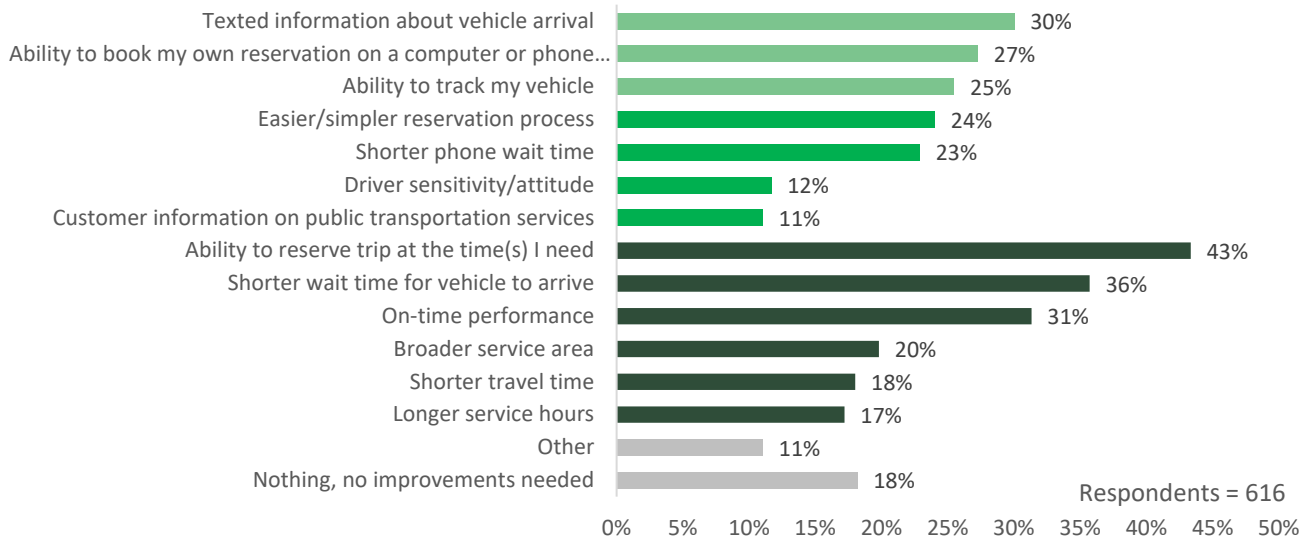
Survey respondents were asked if they currently transfer between dial-a-ride systems. Most respondents stated they do not transfer between systems. While the majority rated their experience as good or excellent, 26% found the experience fair or poor.





IMPROVEMENT QUESTIONS

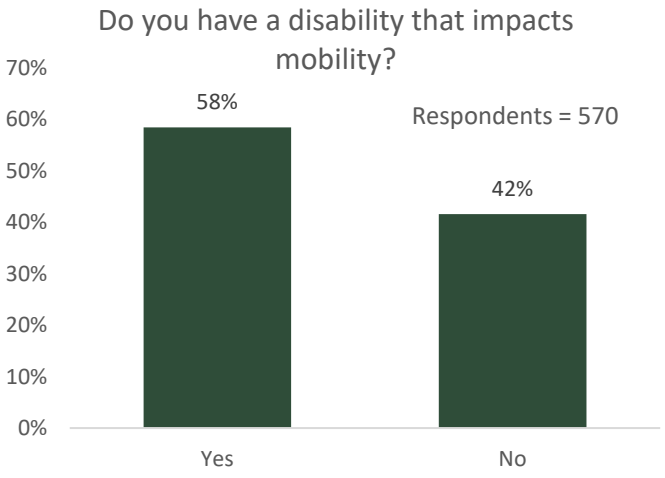
Survey respondents were asked what improvements to dial-a-ride services would help them the most. Questions fell into categories of technology (green), operations (black), and customer experience – (grey).

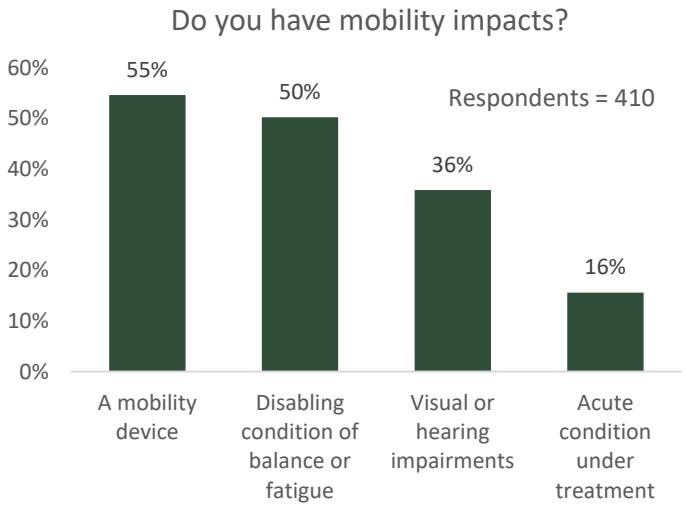


Responses leaned towards operational needs, specifically related to the ability to reserve a trip when they need it, shorter wait times for vehicle arrival, and on-time performance. Desired improvements related to technology included vehicle arrival notifications, booking reservations online and the ability to track their vehicle remotely.

MOBILITY QUESTIONS

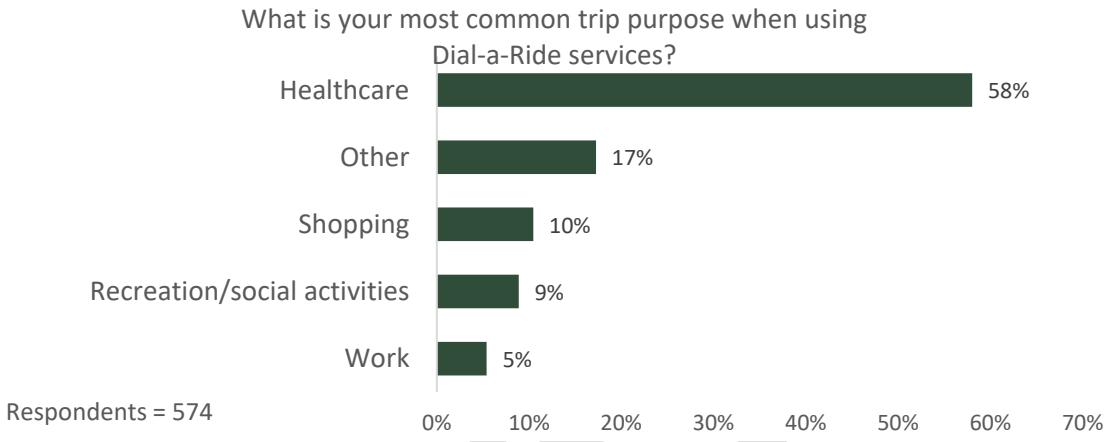
Fifty-eight percent of respondents stated that they have a disability. Of those, 55% have a mobility device they carry with them.





TRIP PURPOSE

Individuals were asked what their trip's purpose was. Fifty-eight percent of respondents stated "Healthcare," 17% stated "Other," 10% stated "Shopping," 9% mentioned "Recreation," and 5% stated "Work."



Productivity and Operations Relevant to Integration

Most of the existing conditions analysis was based on 2023 data, and most of the operations in Ventura County shifted to the RideCo platform during 2024 and 2025 which further improved efficiency and service delivery. While this is a step forward for the County, it does not necessarily address all aspects of a potential future system in which services are better integrated.

PARAMETERS, METRICS, AND PRIORITIES

Across the County, on-time performance, trip negotiation practices, and dispatch discipline remain important operational issues. Trips that are served outside the published pick-up window undermine customer confidence and reduce productivity. When vehicles arrive early, drivers may wait while riders are not yet ready to board; when vehicles arrive late, no-shows and missed appointments become more likely. The resulting low productivity prompts reactive cost-cutting measures and reducing vehicle service hours.

UNIT COSTS

The costs of running paratransit/senior transportation services have risen significantly since 2019. The full Existing Conditions analysis by operator details the variation by operator; the table below provides a high-level illustration of how much operating costs have grown since 2019, although the exact costs continue to vary by agency and are somewhat affected by the volume of service operated.

Table 7 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

RIDERSHIP AND PRODUCTIVITY

Demand-response ridership significantly decreased after the pandemic and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, as is true of productivity. Table 8 shows productivity (the number of rides served per hour between FY19 and FY23) for seven demand-response programs. Four systems' productivity declined; one has experienced no change and two have improved, with SVT increasing productivity substantially.

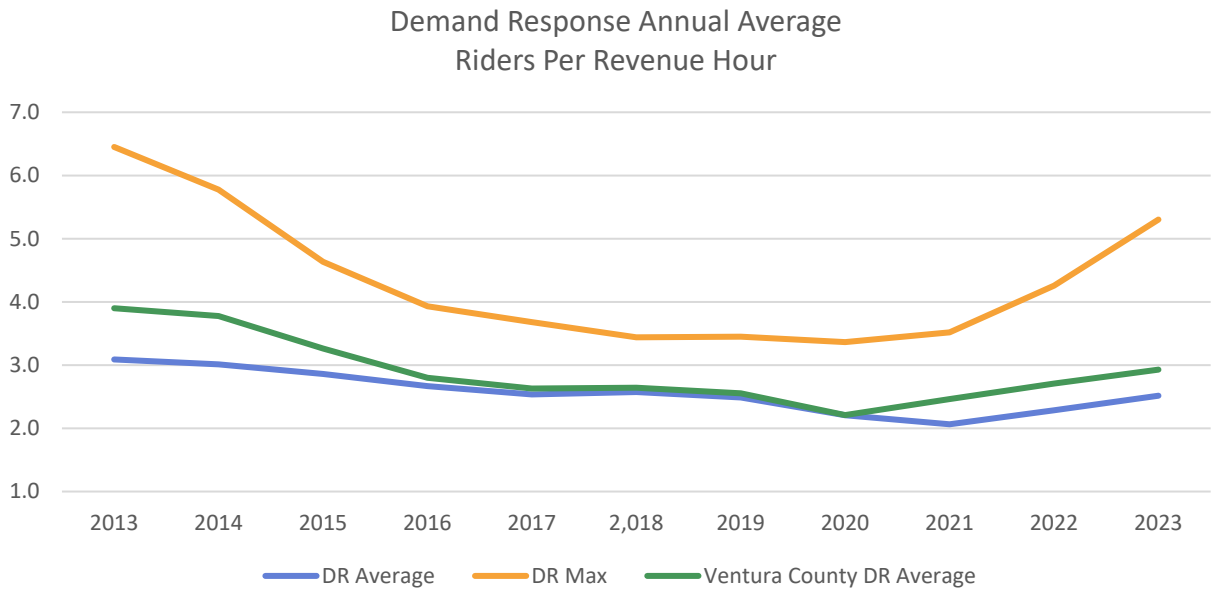
Table 8 Demand-Response Service Productivity Indicators

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**	220.0%
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 2 shows the average rides per revenue hour for demand-response services in California (excluding large cities) via the National Transit Database (NTD). The higher end average for the State is 5.4 rides per hour, and the low-end average is 2.5 rides per hour. Ventura County operators average around 2.9 rides per hour.

NTD results for Ventura County average differ slightly from data provided directly for this analysis because several programs report to NTD differently, such as Thousand Oaks Transit aggregating its data with service provided to other agencies as their contractor for service.

Figure 2, Productivity for California Demand Response Services, National Transit Database



INTERAGENCY TRANSFERS AND LONG-DISTANCE TRIP-MAKING

Interagency trip-making exists today, but the available data indicates that a small percentage of trips on any given day fall into this category. The demand-response rider survey found that most respondents do not transfer between dial-a-ride systems, and TIES similarly concluded that relatively few individuals currently use paratransit trips across multiple providers. The Existing Conditions work quantified one of the county's main transfer points at Wells Road and Telegraph, where GCTD reported an average of only 5 to 6 transfer trips *per month* with Valley Express.

Even so, the riders who do make these trips often face the greatest inconvenience because a transfer between vehicles can be time-consuming, unreliable, and particularly difficult for riders using wheelchairs or other mobility devices. While most riders rated their experience as good or better, 28% felt less positive about the experience which is notably higher than agencies would typically accept for customer satisfaction in other areas.

Some direct-service arrangements have already evolved specifically to reduce these forced transfers. ECTA provides intercity trips within the east county cities, GCTD provides direct service for its passengers to and from Camarillo, Camarillo provides direct service to Simi Valley, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks, and Valley Express coordinates transfer activity with GCTD.

INTEGRATION STRATEGY

This chapter identifies (1) basic stipulations for providing service, (2) functional improvements demand-response agencies should proceed with to ensure integration is successful (specific customer service improvements are detailed in the Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan), (2) a governance framework to make integration possible in the near- and long-term and (3) identified phases for how integration would occur, and (4) future funding options.

Basic Stipulations

It is important operators first agree on the following goals and stipulations, while also ensuring compliance with regulations established by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA):

- **Enhance the overall rider experience**, including for those who may need to travel regionally or outside of their hometown.
- Maintain full **compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act** (ADA) of 1990 and its complementary paratransit requirements.
- Deliver a coordinated, community-level mix of public transportation services that meets local mobility needs while **avoiding duplication or competition among providers**.
- Improve the return on public investment in demand-response services by **increasing productivity and cost control**.

All transit providers in Ventura County comply with the ADA by providing complementary paratransit services to eligible riders, a service that needs to be maintained or replaced with alternatives that meet ADA rules outlined in FTA Circular 4701.1 (42 USC 12101-12213). All operators also provide paratransit services to seniors as well.

Principles to Establish a Foundation for Successful Integration

The *Ventura County Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan* highlights the principles needed for increasing customer experience; this Integration Conceptual Plan, however, provides principles needed for *full* integration of services.

Role of common trip scheduling platform **-** An integrated countywide on-demand system will be achievable with one unified trip scheduling platform, which at this time is VCTC's contractor, RideCo. The 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. Its dynamic scheduling capabilities can improve individual services, while also improving regional demand-response service by increasing regionwide efficiency (in terms of utilization of transit funding and staff resources) and on-time reliability.

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. The next pickup can be optimized across boundaries, reducing empty vehicles.

Movement to one-seat ride trip-making - The transition to RideCo streamlines transfer timing. Full integration of demand-response services—where fleets are no longer separated by agency—has the potential to enhance the transfer experience by booking one-seat rides and then dispatching that vehicle in local service.

The existing conditions analysis found that the travel need and potential volume for direct dial-a-ride trips across jurisdictions is relatively small and already being served by existing agreements. However, these existing agreements require these trips to meet at transfer points that are not necessarily the most efficient or effective way to serve riders. Sufficient trip request data across providers were not available for the 2023 data to link the interagency/transfer trips and evaluate the potential for direct efficiency. The subsequent transition to RideCo allowed a simulated analysis for integration of services through the platform which is addressed later in this chapter.

Regardless, the intention of **this strategy is not to open up a new long-distance dial-a-ride service in the county** and promote it as such; the intention is to use the available data and interagency coordination (or, later, an integrated operation) to simplify these trips and maximize improvements for the riders already taking these trips.

Concerns about co-mingling ADA and general public riders - While RideCo is extremely efficient at scheduling rides, it is important to remember 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 prioritize ADA requests, even if efficiency is affected.

To address the challenges of co-mingling rider groups, agencies should:

- 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.

CALL CENTER CONSOLIDATION

Establishing a single dispatching function through a consolidated call center can result in many benefits. 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** – mentioned in detail in the Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan, one phone number reduces confusion among rides and is easy to educate the public.
- **Reduced personnel or greater coverage of operating hours**, leading to either reduced costs or better use of the workforce.

- 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**.**

Elements to consider for a consolidated call center include:

- **Staffing** - It will be necessary to clarify the number 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.
- **Facilities** - 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 2-1-1 Ventura/Interface Children and Family Services also have a combined call center facility that has room for expansion. Its managers showed interest in a transportation call center capability as consistent with its mission of linking Ventura County residents with services.
- **Contracts** - 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.

Governance in Support of Integration

BACKGROUND

The 2023 TIES report studied all 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, seamless 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

- Subregional Demand-Response (paratransit and dial-a-ride) Consolidation and Increased Agency Coordination.
- 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

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

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 additional study. Within the TIES, 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 9 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 9 Existing Management Structures of Demand Response Services

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES		
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* **Transitioning to RideCo in 2027. Microtransit facilitated by RideCo currently*
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
DAR Service	**DAR Operator**	**Notes**
Gold Coast Go Access/Safe Rides	In-House	Gold Coast is a Transit District Facilitated by RideCo 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

Establishing a new countywide demand-response agency would involve a fundamental restructuring of the existing service delivery framework. This process would require amendments to county and state statutes or regulations and could entail a reduction in local jurisdiction control as governance is consolidated. Additional steps may include an electoral or formal approval process, the development and adoption of governing bylaws, and the identification of sustainable capital and operating funding sources. Collectively, these actions represent a significant investment of time, financial resources, and institutional coordination.

With that said, the Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan provides a more immediate and practical pathway toward regional integration. Rather than creating a new agency at the outset, the plan emphasizes incremental improvements through the establishment of uniform policies, coordinated service standards, and enhanced customer experience initiatives across participating providers. As part of *this* effort, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed through the *Customer Experience Plan* can be built upon to further articulate roles and responsibilities. Several implementation considerations to be further evaluated and coordinated, include:

- The potential future procurement of a single, regionally coordinated transit contractor (depending on the agreed upon service model)
- The development of lease agreements, asset transfers, or other arrangements for the existing dial-a-ride fleet
- The establishment of a uniform procurement strategy for future dial-a-ride vehicles
- The planning and phased implementation of an integrated, countywide call center

As coordination deepens and the MOU evolves to address more complex operational and governance issues, transitioning to a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) agreement may become appropriate. A JPA would provide the legal and institutional structure necessary to formalize a new regional entity, including clearly defined governance, funding mechanisms, and decision-making authority to support a fully integrated demand-response system.

SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION

This chapter explores the viability, best practices and strategies, and cost factors relevant to integration. In addition, this Plan reviews multiple scenarios under the shared computer-aided-dispatch software platform, RideCo. Each scenario presents a distinct set of variables to demonstrate metric outcomes such as rides provided, revenue hours, and rides per hour. Following the scenarios' analysis, the chapter identifies potential funding sources and proposes a framework to guide future funding decisions.

Defining Sustainability

Earlier stages of this countywide SRTP process examined the financial outlook of the demand-response programs, both individually and collectively. While results vary across operators, overall costs have been rising while productivity and total trips have been plateauing, or declining—an unsustainable trend. With little likelihood of substantial new funding, these programs will eventually face significant service reductions if costs cannot be contained. In this section of the document, the concept of *sustainability* is defined as ensuring that program costs are balanced with the benefits provided, measured through approaches such as maintaining reasonable unit costs and improving productivity. Indicators of sustainability include:

- **Organization Credibility** – strong, effective governance; successful management of funds
- **Strategic Alignment** – aligns city missions, VCTC goals, and recognizes matters of equity in addressing mobility.
- **Funding Diversification** – mix of federal, state, local and private funding sources
- **Stakeholder and Political Support** – endorsement from city councils, advocacy groups, and alignment with VCTC Board policy direction.
- **User Satisfaction and Community Value** – favorable user satisfaction, community-based organization's support and general positive awareness of public transit by the community
- **Adaptability** – scalable and responsive to change.
- **Capacity** – ability to cost-effectively manage demand, e.g. in trip requests, provision of trips, complaints/comments.

Best Practices and Strategies

JOINT PROCUREMENT

Certain procurements will eventually need to be joined under integration. As existing contracts expire, is there an opportunity for joint procurements? This requires time and energy from agencies' purchasing and legal divisions to develop joint procurements where applicable. Although this will involve heavy lifting in the beginning, streamlining procurements will be extremely beneficial in the long term and create a sense of organizational credibility and strategic alignment for the County.

Except for GCTD and Simi Valley, all Ventura County cities contract the private sector for their transit services operation. The primary reason for outsourcing is cost savings. Contractors may pay lower wages and offer fewer benefits than municipalities do. Many contractors operate across multiple jurisdictions, reducing per-unit costs, and may operate reduced overhead through streamlined management. In addition to cost savings, contractors' personnel tend to have more operational experience and be familiar with regulatory compliance, vehicle procurement, scheduling, and paratransit requirements than their municipal counterparts.

Best practices can start with developing one transit provider RFP with employee-based performance incentives, standardized vehicle specifications when applicable, align replacement schedules, include 'whole-life' support for vehicle and equipment procurement, and plan for alternative fuel compliance. The standards represented in the RFP may be translated into a future, JPA-governed consolidated service.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office published a study titled *Public Transit: Transit Agencies' Use of Contracting to Provide Service*. Specifically, the study cited[2]:

- According to GAO's survey, paratransit (services for people with disabilities), demand-response (also known as dial-a-ride), and commuter rail service are most often contracted out, and fixed-route bus, heavy rail, and light rail service are most often operated by the transit agency. Operations are most frequently contracted out, followed by maintenance services.
- Transit agencies most consistently cite reducing costs as a factor influencing their decision to contract. Contracting can reduce costs because the contractors' workforces are more flexible, with more employees working in part-time positions, and lower insurance costs, among other things.

[2] https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-13-782?utm_source

- Transit agencies also frequently cited starting new services, improving efficiency, and allowing for more flexible service as reasons for contracting.
- Specifically, transit agencies GAO interviewed, and the literature cited benefits to contracting, which vary based on the individual needs and circumstances of transit agencies. For example, transit agencies that use contractors view contracting as advantageous when starting or expanding services in order to avoid start-up costs--such as the large capital cost of acquiring new vehicles and hiring new staff.
- Contractors reported they could improve transit agencies' operational efficiency by providing the latest technologies, such as routing systems, and lower costs by providing more affordable insurance on vehicles.

Given the difficulties of contract oversight, consolidating to one transit operator, when the Client Rep (described in the *Demand Response Customer Experience Plan*) determines the timing is appropriate, is beneficial. There is operational efficiency gained from a single provider. Centralized management reduces duplication of efforts in planning, scheduling, dispatching, and maintenance. Shared resources (drivers, vehicles, road supervisors) can be deployed more flexibly across jurisdictions and respond to disruptions. And the county may see some amount of administrative cost savings due to economies of scale.

From a **customer service perspective**, there should be consistency of service. Riders will experience a uniform level of service—regardless of which city they are in.

From an **accountability perspective**, the countywide agency can dedicate specialized staff to monitor performance, enforce contract terms, and evaluate outcomes more rigorously than smaller city staff might be able to. Cities can focus on local priorities while the County handles transit contract management and compliance.

From a **reporting perspective**, a unified system improves data collection and analysis, leading to more informed decisions about service expansion and funding decisions.

The Regional Transit Authority in Chicago, IL recently consolidated all its dial-a-ride operations to one provider, countywide[3]. Specifically, they stated:

> *Residents in need of paratransit services have one number to call, 1-800-201-6446, to enable them to travel anywhere in the county. Riders schedule their trips from seven days to just two hours in advance, and the vehicles provide curb-to-curb service. Riders can schedule a trip any day of the week from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with*

[3] https://www.rtachicago.org/blog/2022/05/13/ride-lake-county-launches-introducing-borderless-countywide-paratransit-service

the exception of certain holidays.

"Everyone's been so excited about this," said Kevin Carrier, Director of Planning and Programming for the Lake County Division of Transportation. "Everyone across the board is saying this is a long time coming and that now they or their loved ones are going to be able to get to doctor's appointments or places they couldn't before, and that this is a game changer for them."

In summary, joint procurement that moves towards a single contract for demand-response services across the county ensures standardized service quality and reliability. Enforcing the contract holds the transit provider accountable for meeting performance standards—such as on-time performance, vehicle cleanliness, driver professionalism, and service coverage. This ensures the public receives safe and dependable service. In addition to quality and reliability, monitoring service contracts protects public investment. And lastly, contract enforcement provides leverage for continuous improvement in service delivery. With a well-managed contract, cities can use performance metrics, penalties, and incentives to drive improvements over time. It allows cities to negotiate better service outcomes without necessarily increasing costs.

CURRENT GROUND LEVEL INSIGHTS

For a few agencies, contract oversight should be improved. Operators are often focused on immediate priorities like vehicle safety, fulfilling reservations, and ensuring adequate staffing to keep services running. Cities, which may lack the resources for in-depth oversight, often trust the operator to manage day-to-day operations. As a result, long-term contract goals and enforcement tend to fall by the wayside.

Insights related to contracting and contract enforcement are detailed below for each of Ventura County's *contracted services*:

- **City of Camarillo** – The City's contract with the provider establishes metrics the operator must meet monthly, with liquidated damages for when they are not met. However, for several years (both under the old provider, as well as the new contracted provider) these performance measures were not met nor were liquidated damages assessed. Staff shortages on the operator-side and vehicle issues on the city-side hindered the ability to meet performance standards. In the wake of the pandemic, there was a general reluctance to implement contract penalties. Also, with a new contractor on board and a new scheduling software system implemented (RideCo), the

enforcement of performance metrics was put on the backburner. However, very recently, RideCo has been able to provide metrics more easily for the staff to digest.

- **City of Thousand Oaks** – The provider contract has witnessed considerable turnover among general manager and supervisory positions, which makes meeting performance targets difficult. The city continues to hope for better customer service, such as shorter call times but sees difficulties when the staff turnover is frequent.
- **City of Moorpark** – The City contracts its dial-a-ride program through the Thousand Oaks prime contract. As such, it has experienced personnel shortages, as has many agencies in the public transportation industry. In Moorpark's TDA 2023 audit, partnering with Thousand Oaks and the current ECTA contract, it was noted as "important" to reduce risk of staffing issues that may affect ADA paratransit services.
- **Valley Express** – VCTC contracts its dial-a-ride services, operating from a different subdivision than that of Thousand Oaks and Moorpark to operate transit service in the Heritage Valley area. The contractor has a good working relationship with the VCTC, however the contractor mentioned that fleet needs to better fit the appropriate service area and vehicle utilization can be better optimized with an integrated dial-a-ride agency (instead of trying to transfer onto multiple systems, which the ADA/senior population does not want to do). Though there have been improvements with the addition of RideCo, aligning driver shifts with the demand of the services, could be improved.

Insights related to contracting are detailed below for the two *directly operated* services in Ventura County:

- **Simi Valley** operates service directly to have better control over its service staff. The city went out to vote in 2017, and the public supported keeping operations in-house, even though it would cost the city more. However, driver turn-over remains a concern, with many drivers moving on to other city positions.
- **GCTD's** Board of Directors decided to take operations in-house in the fall of 2024. This has allowed the agency to "look behind the curtain" to see how operations are working and to identify opportunities for improved service or greater efficiencies. The disconnect between management and operations is dissolving but will take time to settle into an operational routine.

COST SHARING OPPORTUNITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOINT PROCUREMENT

- Potential reduction of high-level supervisory positions
- Potential reduction in administrative duplication of National Transit Database (NTD) and Transit Asset Monitoring (TAM) reporting.

- Potential leveraging of matching funds.

Cost Implications

- Potential cost increase to fixed-route operations

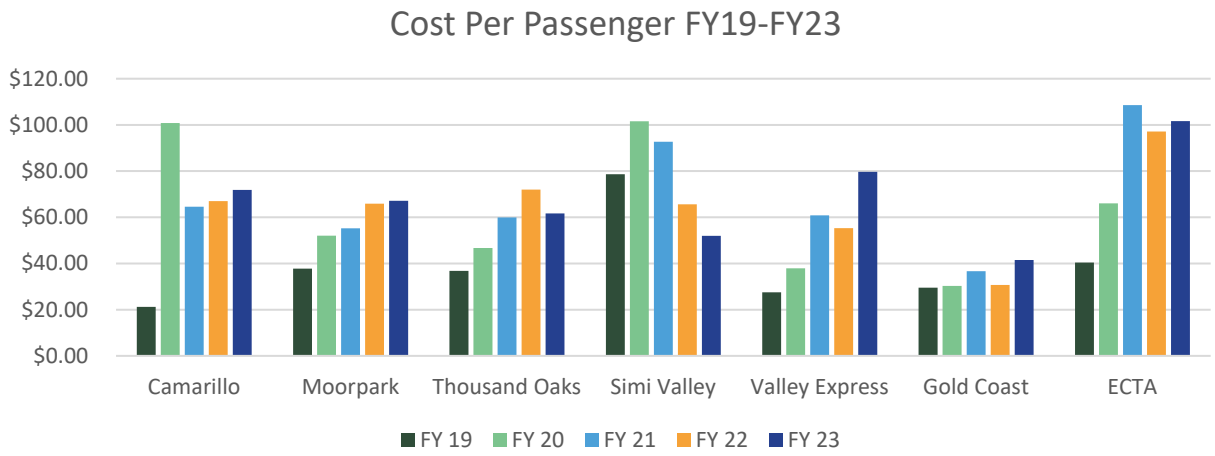
Integrated Call Center for Call Reservation and Dispatch Functions

Assuming a one-phone number is implemented through the *Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan*, and if full integration were to occur, the call centers would be consolidated to one location, as well as dispatching functions. The benefits of this phase will be both immediate and long-term; as well as demonstrate the county's ability to be adaptive.

Integrating call center and dispatch functions is presumed to achieve efficiencies. Dial-a-Ride inherently has low passenger density compared to other transit modes. This lower efficiency drives the cost per passenger. It's a personalized service that picks up and drops off each passenger at specific locations, requiring more time per trip and more stops and starts. Because service is personalized, drivers spend more time driving fewer people, increasing labor costs per ride. Dial-a-Ride uses wheelchair-accessible vans which cost more to buy and have lower fuel efficiency. Therefore, dial-a-ride programs never bring in enough fare revenue to cover costs, a fact which is also true of most fixed-route operations. However, Figure 3 illustrates a *wide* range in Cost per Passenger among agencies over the past five years, with values ranging from $21 to over $100 per passenger trip. Given the size of the County and the consistent cost of living across its regions, such significant cost variation is difficult to justify and suggests that these figures should be more closely aligned. For a nearby comparison, the City of Los Angeles reported a paratransit cost of $58.29 per passenger in FY23.[4]

[4] https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2023/90147.pdf

Figure 3 Cost Per Dial-a-Ride Passenger by Agency by Fiscal Year (Existing Conditions)



One of the most impactful steps Ventura County has taken to establish sustainable demand-response programming by improving cost control and productivity is the transition to a single dynamic scheduling platform—RideCo. A compelling example of RideCo's capabilities in managing high-volume, wide-coverage operations is its recent partnership with SEPTA (Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority). SEPTA's paratransit system spans five counties and delivered just under one million paratransit trips in FY23.[5] After implementing RideCo in February 2024, utilizing 411 vehicles, SEPTA achieved a $5 million cost reduction within just four months. The agency also experienced a 7% increase in daily passenger pickups, a 62% decrease in annual overtime hours, successful reallocation of personnel, and a 7% reduction in cost per passenger—from $55.13 to $51.40.[6]

In addition to leveraging RideCo to optimize ride efficiency and reduce inefficient routing, integrating call center operations is also a key strategy for controlling costs, improving service delivery, and promoting sustainable programs.

CURRENT GROUND LEVEL INSIGHTS

When asked about the concept of a shared or integrated call center, cities and operators voiced a range of concerns. Camarillo expressed apprehension about losing the personal touch, fearing that calls would no longer be answered by a "live" person and that artificial intelligence (AI) would take over. Similarly, Moorpark emphasized the importance of maintaining human interaction for their on-demand service, making integration less appealing. Simi Valley showed willingness to support call center integration but emphasized a desire to remain the "frontline"

[5] https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2023/30019.pdf
[6] RideCo Case Study SEPTA https://docsend.com/view/fizge3kids43wgs7

for customer interaction. ECTA shared frustration that their existing call center has not improved customer service outcomes and expressed uncertainty about how to enhance its performance. GCTD mentioned that they are 'future-proofing' their facilities for expansion of service, while Valley Express's operating team viewed any move toward integration—particularly for dial-a-ride—as a step forward for the rider experience.

All transportation operators and public service agencies recognize the critical importance of human interaction—especially when serving some of the most vulnerable and transit-dependent populations. While artificial intelligence has not been proposed as a replacement for human-staffed transit call centers as part of this process, what has been emphasized throughout, is the clear need to enhance customer service, improve community outreach and marketing of available services, and better meet the growing demand for transportation, particularly among those who rely on transit to access essential destinations such as medical appointments outside of their hometowns.

Since the implementation of RideCo in 2024, Camarillo has observed a significant increase in reservations made through the app—now accounting for approximately 50% of bookings. This growing adoption may lessen the need for a large call center over time. The City of Moorpark also noted that approximately 90% of its on-demand trip requests are now submitted via the RideCo app, underscoring a broader trend toward digital booking among riders. The City of Thousand Oaks is actively collaborating with its operator to investigate the causes of extended call waiting times, despite data showing that only 1 to 3 calls are being answered per hour.

It is recommended that agencies continue to pool resources and consolidate operations into one center to reduce costs and make it easier for riders to plan multi-agency trips. The intent of this recommendation is to take coordination and integration to the next level, making the entire transit experience more seamless for riders. When consolidating a call center, it is also important not to lose sight of performance metrics that can measure future success.

Call center metrics to consider can include:

- Call Volume by Call Type
- Booking Conversion Rate
- Missed and Abandoned Call Rate
- Same-Day vs. Advance Booking
- Call Hold Time

COST SHARING OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential reduction of high-level supervisory positions

- Potential reduction in number of customer service representatives

Cost Implications

- Potential cost increase to fixed-route operations

Single CAD/AVL Platform

The consulting team partnered with RideCo to simulate the impacts of an integrated dispatching platform under a range of operating conditions. Though they have now, at the time of this analysis, GCTD had not yet joined the RideCo platform; therefore, all scenarios were developed to reflect that constraint.

Six scenarios were modeled to illustrate the potential outcomes of varying levels of system integration. As summarized in Table 10, the analysis is based on actual completed trip data provided by each participating agency for the week of March 16, 2025. The dataset includes only completed trips; cancelled trips and no-shows were excluded from the simulation.

It is important to note that, while these simulations are analytically robust, their methodologies and outputs can be complex and inherently rigid. Accordingly, this report attempts to translate the findings into practical, real-world implications to support clearer understanding and decision-making.

Below is an explanation of the acronyms in the scenarios.

- Rides = Number of Trips
- Riders = Number of People
- Pickup OTP = On-Time Performance rate when picking someone up
- Dropoff OTP = On-Time Performance rate when dropping someone off
- PVH = Passengers Per Vehicle Hour
- Demand Response PVH = General On-Demand Passenger Per Vehicle Hour
- Onboard Time = Time someone spends on the vehicle
- Est Deadhead Miles = How many miles a vehicle spends not transporting someone
- Rev Hours = Hours in revenue service
- Demand Response Rev Hours = Hours in demand response revenue service

Table 10 RideCo Simulations in Six Scenarios

Scenario	Rides	Riders	Pickup OTP	Dropoff OTP	PVH	Demand Response PVH	Onboard Time (mins)	Shared Rides (%)	Est. Deadhead Miles	Rev Hours	Demand Response Rev Hours
VCTC Total Scenario 1 (Gold Coast & Simi added with same hours)	4964	5618	93.1%	95.9%	2.05	2.56	17.5	54.40%	822.5	2740.5	2194.5
VCTC Total Scenario 2 (Gold Coast & Simi added with cut hours)	4964	5618	92.8%	95.7%	2.19	2.6	17.5	54%	813.5	2565.3	2160.8
VCTC Total Scenario 3 (No Boundaries)	4964	5618	95.5%	99.4%	2.05	2.38	18	53.2%	1293.4	2740.5	2360.5
VCTC Total Scenario 4 (No Boundaries - General Fixed Route Rides)	4553	5086	94.4%	99.3%	1.86	2.55	17	55.2%	1311.0	2740.5	1994.5
VCTC Scenario 5 (Scenario 3 with cut hours)	4964	5618	90.5%	97.9%	2.3	2.81	21	53.80%	928.8	2442.6	1999.3
VCTC Scenario 6 (Scenario 4 with cut hours)	4553	5086	90.6%	98.0%	2.08	2.52	18	54.80%	1151.5	2439.5	2018.3

Scenario #1 – GCTD and Simi Valley join the RideCo platform. All other inputs remain the same.

Scenario #1 is the first step towards software integration. At the time of the simulation, Gold Coast and Simi Valley were on the Ecolane platform. Scenario #1 presumes these two providers switch over when their Ecolane contracts expire.

Under this scenario, overall productivity is lower because the RideCo algorithm prioritizes as many rides as possible *per* the hours scheduled. In other words, unproductive revenue hours are not removed; meaning, nothing changes in terms of how the operators provide service.

Scenario #2 – GCTD and Simi Valley join the RideCo platform. Non-productive service hours are removed from service.

Scenario #2 builds on Scenario #1 but with non-productive revenue hours removed from service. Table 11 shows the same number of rides served (rides given during the week March 16th, 2025), but with unproductive revenue hours removed from GCTD and Simi Valley's driver shifts. GCTD can reduce their revenue hours by 16.7%, and Simi Valley can reduce their revenue hours by 14.9% and serve the same amount of people.

Table 11 RideCo Simulations, Gold Coast and Simi Valley

Scenario	Rides	Passengers	Pickup OTP	Dropoff OTP	PVH	Demand Response PVH	Onboard Time (mins)	Shared Rides (%)	Avg Weekday Hrs	Revenue Hours
Gold Coast Scenario 1	1677	1868	98.9%	98.5%	1.39	1.86	21	53.8%	252	1343.88
Simi Valley Scenario 1	710	871	91.7%	97.0%	1.98	2.91	16	64.6%	92	439.90
Gold Coast Scenario 2	1677	1868	98.1%	97.9%	1.67	1.92	21	52.2%	204	1118.56
Simi Valley Scenario 2	710	871	91.4%	96.9%	2.3	2.92	16	65.5%	79	378.70

Scenario #3 – All providers are on RideCo. Service boundaries are removed to allow fleets to travel across jurisdictions.

Scenario #3 builds on Scenario #1 and removes service area boundaries allowing vehicles to traverse between jurisdictions. This means that if a vehicle from one agency can better serve a ride in another jurisdiction (due to its location) it will do so.[7] Under this scenario, non-productive revenue hours remain, which is why productivity is low compared to the other scenarios.

The metric that improves under Scenario #3 is on-time performance for pick-ups and drop-offs, presumably because more vehicles become available to serve rides more effectively.

There is no data on cross-jurisdictional trip demand; therefore, this scenario cannot predict that information.

[7] In opening jurisdiction service areas (and use of the entire fleet), RideCo considers the efficiency of vehicles returning to their home yard at the end of the shift (dispatching vehicles to trips while taking their home yard assignment into consideration).

Scenario #4 – All providers are on RideCo. Borders open to allow fleets to travel across jurisdictions. Certain rides are pushed onto existing fixed-route services.

Scenario #4 builds on Scenario #3 with rides that have the ability to go onto fixed-route services are removed from the on-demand data. Meaning, general public on-demand trips that are within a ¾ mile boundary of existing fixed-route services (with similar appointment times of fixed-route services) are "placed" on fixed-route and taken out of the on-demand system. Productivity decreases because revenue hours remain the same, while fewer rides are provided.

Scenario #5 - Scenario #3 with reduced service hours.

Scenario #5 builds on Scenario #3 with non-productive hours removed from driver shifts. **Under Scenario #5, productivity is highest among the scenarios, and deadhead miles are second lowest.**

Scenario #6 – Scenario #4 with reduced service hours.

Scenario #6 builds on Scenario #4 with non-productive hours removed from driver shifts. Productivity is low, due to lower rides in the scenario. Deadhead hours are higher, due to the lower rides in the scenario.

RESULTS OF RIDECO SIMULATIONS

Among the scenarios evaluated, Scenario #5 stands out as the most promising in practical terms. It shows that the system can maintain the current level of service—serving the same number of trips riders rely on today—while operating more efficiently overall. **In this scenario, providers collectively use about 11% fewer billable service hours, largely due to improved productivity and reductions in time spent driving without passengers.**

In addition to productivity and service hours, Table 12 shows how other specific metrics, such as Direct Passenger Miles and Rides Serviced (number of one-way rides) are calculated for each agency under each scenario. This information does not provide insight into integration, but provides baselines for developing a cost allocation model, which will be discussed subsequently.

Table 12 RideCo Scenario Simulations by Agency

Provider	Direct Passenger Miles Scenario 3	Direct Passenger Miles Scenario 4	Direct Passenger Miles Scenario 5	Direct Passenger Miles Scenario 6
Gold Coast	17381.36	16823.72	18058.7	16917.41
Simi Valley	4944.72	4581.62	5137.39	4724.61
Valley Express	1936.66	1639.63	1662.43	1881.7
Camarillo	6805.65	6478.41	6590.61	6201.77
Thousand Oaks / ECTA	6699.21	6474.53	6156.1	6476.8
First Transit - Moorpark	2834.03	2753.8	2996.4	2549.42
Total	40601.63	38751.71	40601.63	38751.71

Provider	Rides Service By Agency Scenario 3	Rides Service By Agency Scenario 4	Rides Service By Agency Scenario 5	Rides Service By Agency Scenario 6
Gold Coast	2196	2029	2262	2040
Simi Valley	645	622	648	624
Valley Express	236	200	203	215
Camarillo	789	674	761	652
Thousand Oaks / ECTA	729	680	689	677
First Transit - Moorpark	369	348	401	345
Total	4964	4553	4964	4553

Taken together, the RideCo simulations suggest that coordinating trip scheduling across agencies can lead to meaningful improvements in how service is delivered. However, realizing these benefits in day-to-day operations would require some adjustments behind the scenes. Agencies would need to better align revenue service hours with actual demand throughout the day, which in some cases could involve revisiting driver schedules—such as introducing split shifts where appropriate—to better match peak travel times.

At the same time, it is important to approach these findings with a degree of realism. While modeling provides valuable insight into how the system could perform under more integrated conditions, it cannot precisely predict how much regional travel demand might grow—or what the exact cost implications would be. Instead, this effort is best understood as a way to explore what is possible. It highlights opportunities to make regional trips easier for riders, particularly by reducing delays associated with transfers and making better use of vehicles already in service, especially near jurisdictional boundaries.

The simulations also offer a useful glimpse into how performance could improve if service areas were less constrained by existing boundaries. As transfers are reduced or eliminated, it is reasonable to expect that more riders may choose to make trips that cross jurisdictions, further increasing demand for regional travel.

With that in mind, the following section turns to cost allocation approaches—tools that will be essential to ensuring that, if integration is desired and if regional demand does grow, the costs of providing service are shared fairly and transparently among participating agencies.

COST ALLOCATION AND REIMBURSEMENT ASSUMPTIONS

This component represents a critical element in planning for the potential regional integration of dial-a-ride services. It is essential that participating jurisdictions clearly understand the financial implications of an integrated service model. Cost allocation models are fundamental to this effort and should be designed to:

- Equitably distribute costs among jurisdictions;
- Accurately reflect actual service utilization; and
- Promote transparency and long-term financial sustainability in operations and budgeting.

An effective cost allocation framework typically integrates operational data, financial data, and established policy objectives. The following section outlines a recommended approach for developing cost allocation methodologies in the context of consolidating Ventura County's dial-a-ride services under a single entity. If the Commission chooses to select a different service model for *regional* rides, cost allocation models are detailed separately.

Table 13 presents three potential cost allocation models using data from a standard operating week in March 2025 (from each provider). Revenue hours were the hours served during that particular week in March. Revenue miles were not available, therefore Direct Passenger Miles (DPM) from RideCo's Scenario #5 modeling were pulled into the allocation model.

Table 13 Cost Allocation Models

Baseline: Rides Per Agency (March 16-22, 2025)								
Operator	**Rides**	**Riders**	**Revenue Hours**	**Pct of Hours**	**Total Monthly Expenses**	**Divided into 4 weeks**	**Direct Psgr. Miles Scenario #5**	**Pct of Hours**
Camarillo	1,062	1,188	424	15%	$239,697	$59,924	6,590	16%
ECTA	200	206	102	4%	$56,880	$14,220	2,462	6%
Thousand Oaks	488	503	156	6%	$84,123	$21,031	3,613	9%
Moorpark	506	604	140	5%	$19,396	$4,849	2,996	7%
Valley Express	321	378	134	5%	$169,865	$42,466	1,662	4%
Gold Coast	1,677	1,868	1,344	49%	$85,391	$21,348	18,058	45%
Simi Valley	710	871	440	16%	$637,805	$159,451	5,137	13%
Totals	4,964	5,618	2,740	100%	$1,293,157	$323,289	40,518	100%

Cost Allocation Model A Based on % of Revenue Hours							
Jurisdiction	**Camarillo**	**ECTA**	**Thousand Oaks**	**Moorpark**	**Valley Express**	**Gold Coast**	**Simi Valley**
Percentage of Revenue Hour	15%	4%	6%	5%	5%	49%	16%
Weekly Operating Cost Allocation	$50,067	$11,998	$18,451	$16,504	$15,832	$158,542	$51,896
Yearly Operating Cost Allocation	$2,603,491	$623,881	$959,439	$858,220	$823,253	$8,244,185	$2,698,577

Cost Allocation Model B Direct Passenger Miles/Scenario #5							
Jurisdiction	**Camarillo**	**ECTA**	**Thousand Oaks**	**Moorpark**	**Valley Express**	**Gold Coast**	**Simi Valley**
Percentage of Direct Passenger Miles	16%	6%	9%	7%	4%	45%	13%
Operating Cost Allocation	$52,581	$19,644	$28,828	$23,905	$13,261	$144,083	$40,988
Yearly Operating Cost Allocation	$2,734,212	$1,021,492	$1,499,045	$1,243,050	$689,569	$7,492,321	$2,131,358

Cost Allocation Model C Combination of Revenue Hours and Direct Passenger Miles							
Jurisdiction	**Camarillo**	**ECTA**	**Thousand Oaks**	**Moorpark**	**Valley Express**	**Gold Coast**	**Simi Valley**
Percentage of Revenue Hours/Direct Passenger Miles Combined	16%	5%	7%	6%	4%	47%	14%
Operating Cost Allocation	$51,324	$15,820	$23,639	$20,204	$14,546	$151,312	$46,441
Yearly Operating Cost Allocation	$2,668,852	$822,686	$1,229,242	$1,050,635	$756,411	$7,868,253	$2,414,967

Of the three potential models, Model C (combining both Revenue Hours and Direct Passenger Miles) into a cost allocation model provides the most balanced and equitable approach for distributing costs across agencies. This model captures both supply and demand, balancing the obligations of each jurisdiction in relation to its anticipated utilization. Revenue Hours represent the *supply of service*—how much driver and vehicle time is devoted to serving each area. Direct Passenger Miles reflect the *demand for service*—how much passengers actually travel. By including both, the model accounts for what it costs to provide service and how much that service is actually used. It also balances efficiency and equity. Revenue hours ensure that agencies contributing more operating time (e.g., longer driver shifts or lower-density areas) pay their fair share. Direct passenger miles reward areas where service is efficiently used (i.e., more passengers traveling per hour). This prevents either high-demand or low-density areas from being unfairly over- or under-charged. In addition, it reflects real operating conditions.

Some costs (driver wages, fuel, dispatching) scale with time in service, while others (maintenance, wear and tear, fuel consumption) align more closely with distance traveled. Using both metrics mirrors the actual cost structure of demand-response transit operations. This model encourages service optimization. Agencies are incentivized to reduce empty time (non-productive hours) and increase passenger utilization (miles with passengers). Over time, this leads to more efficient regional operations and better coordination among agencies. And more importantly, as integration is still relatively new to the agencies, this model supports transparency and defensible cost sharing. Stakeholders can see that costs are distributed using objective, measurable data tied to both service provision and passenger benefit, making it easier to justify funding decisions to the cities they report to.

REGIONAL TRIP MAKING

Cost allocation for regional trip-making will ultimately be shaped by the service model selected. The Demand Response Customer Experience Plan includes a comparative framework outlining how costs may be distributed under each potential model, as summarized in the chart below.

To provide an order-of-magnitude estimate of potential regional service costs, existing system data can be used as a baseline. Based on data collected in November 2023, approximately 18 percent of completed trips occurred outside of a rider's home jurisdiction. When annualized, this suggests that roughly 22,000 trips could be classified as regional on a yearly basis for Ventura County.

Using FY23 cost data across participating agencies, the average operating cost was approximately $10.40 per mile. If regional trips are assumed to be longer in distance—approximately six miles one-way compared to an average local trip length of three miles (double the distance of a local trip)—this results in an estimated cost of approximately $62.40 per one-way regional trip.

While this estimate is necessarily simplified, it provides a reasonable planning-level approximation and helps illustrate the potential cost implications associated with expanding service beyond jurisdictional boundaries.

Table 14 Cost Model Concepts

Service Model	Cost Model	Cost Details	Explanation
Regional Trip Brokerage	Trip-Based Cost Allocation	Cost = fully allocated cost per trip x number of regional trips provided	Pay for what is delivered, easy to track, transparent
	Passenger Time/Mile Allocation	Adds weight for long distance/high-cost rural trips	Prevents agencies with long trips from being undercompensated, addresses equity
Regional Overlay Service	Regional Pool Funding	All agencies contribute to a shared regional service budget	Overlay is a shared regional asset. Allocations based on population and ridership
	Zone-Based Cost Sharing	Costs allocated by service hours or miles	Reflects geographic usage of overlay service
	Per-Trip Subsidy Contribution	Agencies pay a set subsidy per trip origination in their area	Pay for what is delivered, transparent
Lead Agency/ Contracted Fleet	Fully allocated cost recovery	Leady agency calculates cost per hour, mile, trip	Predictable budgeting, easy to administer contractually
	Minimum Guarantee + Variable Cost	Agencies pay a base contribution plus variable cost per trip	Covers fixed costs and reflects actual usage

FARE COST ALLOCATION MODELS

The SRTP provides specific recommendations on dial-a-ride fares for both local and regional trips. However, this Plan also discusses what other agencies (with a countywide service area) are doing in terms of fares.

WHAT OTHER CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL AGENCIES ARE DOING

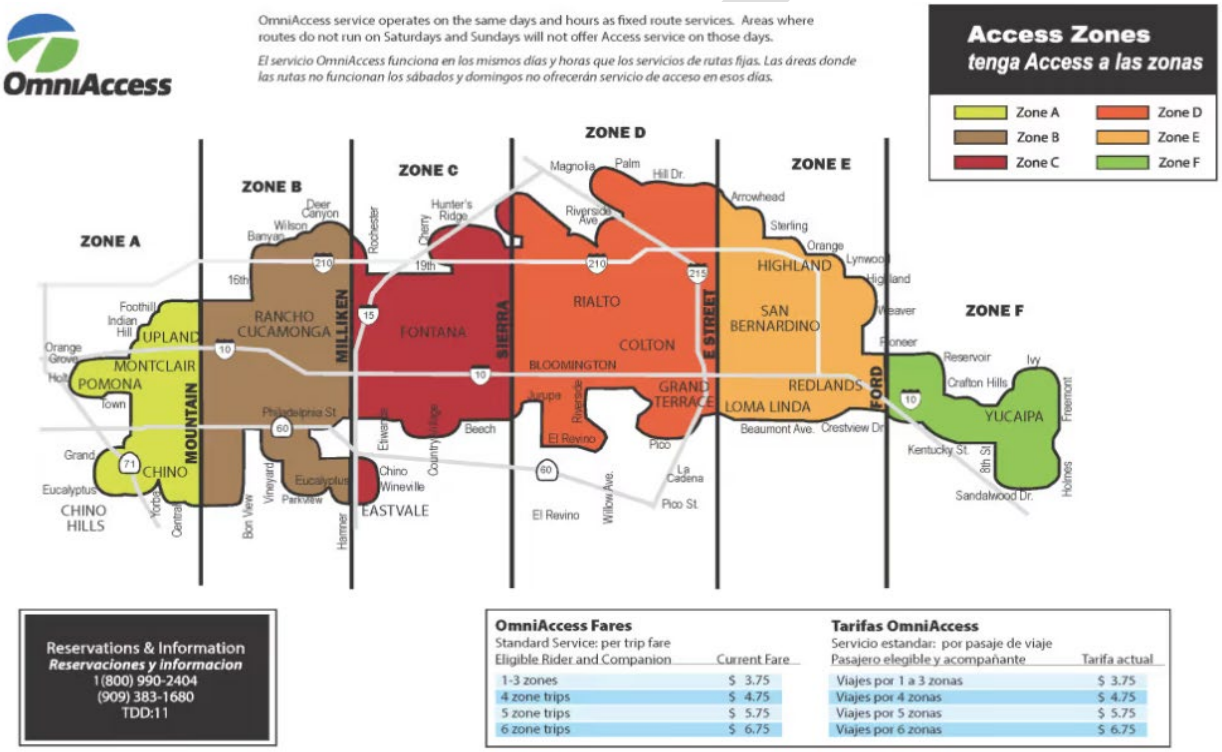
Riverside Transit Agency (RTA), based in Riverside, California, operates in a region that is comparable to Ventura County in terms of geography, population density, traffic congestion, and vehicle wear and tear. RTA provides Dial-A-Ride services across a broad area of Western Riverside County, serving multiple cities and navigating high-traffic corridors. To determine fares, RTA uses a zone-based system with a base fare of $3.50. Riders are charged an additional fee for each zone traveled, up to a maximum fare of $10.50 per one-way -trip.[8]

[8] https://www.riversidetransit.com/index.php/dial-a-ride/what-is-dial-a-ride

OmniAccess, the dial-a-ride service provided by Omnitrans in San Bernardino County, also has a similar operation to RTA, traversing multiple jurisdictions in a populated area of southern California. Here is an example of the zones they travel through, as well as the associated fares by zones. [9]

Also, similar to Ventura County, both RTA and Omnitrans have one main corridor to travel on: the I-10 in San Bernardino, the 215 in Riverside County, and the 101 in Ventura County.

Figure 4 OmniAccess Zones for Dial-a-Ride Service Area



[9] https://omnitrans.org/services/access-ada/

In addition to what is recommended in the SRTP, there are two models to consider for fare allocation, one based on mileage, and one based on zones.

MILEAGE-BASED FARE ALLOCATION

Mileage-based allocation assigns fares proportionally to the miles traveled on each trip. Ventura County is 40 miles across.

Advantages of Mileage Cost Fare Allocation

- Riders pay for what they use
- Longer trips use more resources
- Helps prevent subsidizing long trips disproportionately compared to short, local trips
- Mileage correlates with operating costs
- Works well in counties with large geographic spread, multiple cities, and rural edges

Concerns of Mileage Cost Fare Allocation

- Harder to explain: Riders may not know how far their trip is in miles, leading to confusion about fare costs.
- Requires accurate geocoding and distance calculations for every trip
- Potential equity concerns in rural areas. Riders in rural or underserved areas may have to travel farther for basic services

ZONE-BASED COST FARE CALCULATION

A zone-based fare allocation for dial-a-ride services is a system that divides the service area into geographic zones bases cost-sharing on the number of zones a trip cross. Below is the dial-a-ride service map that was reviewed in previous chapters of this Plan. Each of these color-coded areas would be considered a Zone and each Zone would be a designated price.

Advantages of Zone-Based Cost Fare Allocation

- Easier for riders to understand
- Scalable for large geographic areas
- Predictable and transparent - fares and cost shares can be pre-calculated by zone pairing
- Accountants/funders can plan around fixed fares
- Simplifies jurisdictional cost-sharing

Concerns of Zone-Based Fare Allocation

- Zone boundaries can feel arbitrary to riders if they don’t match real travel patterns.

- Trips near zone borders can seem unfairly priced.
- May not reflect actual mileage or service cost variations as precisely as distance-based models.

Disclaimers To Consider

The above information on fare cost allocation does not take into the consideration of an agency's TDA farebox recovery requirement nor travel time related to congestion. These are examples to provide guidance for Client Rep and the agencies to decide what is the best approach to calculating fares.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION/MARKETING AND PROMOTION OF DEMAND RESPONSE SERVICES

A majority of this work will have been performed under the *Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan*, however if full integration were to occur, the following factors are important to consider.

Informing riders and potential riders from vulnerable populations of what service is available and how to use them helps to build community value. Educating about how to ride contributes to user satisfaction by helping to set expectations. Growing demand for service through marketing that expands awareness can be supported by the increased productivity and greater efficiency of an integrated system.

For riders of demand response services and their caretakers, finding a trip can be a difficult task – particularly for a new rider who is unfamiliar with public paratransit. Educating riders and potential riders on how to "discover a trip", then "schedule a trip" and then "take a trip" is a universal challenge.

The National RTAP Marketing Toolkit is among the best readily-available tools to aid in marketing public transportation. While not exclusively focused on demand-response programs, this is geared to smaller systems who have particular and unique markets. This online seminar, and Toolkit itself lead users through a step-by-step process to identify markets, develop messages and determine marketing strategies. A photo library and Publisher templates can aid in preparing ready-to-use materials.

https://irp.cdn-website.com/270961f6/files/uploaded/Marketing_Toolkit_Update_Webinar.pdf	https://www.nationalrtap.org/Toolkits/Marketing-Toolkit/How-To-Guide-For-Marketing-Transit

Some education and promotion can be conducted modestly as early as Phase 2, after the alignment of key service components. Increasingly integrated marketing activities can be undertaken as the integration process moves forward.

- Identifying key messages that will resonate with the targeted markets of demand response services.
- Developing creativity for a toolkit of promotional pieces that will resonate with target markets for use by the jurisdictions and their trusted partners.
- Developing a common look that incorporates familiar visual elements, such as each jurisdiction's name or logo, while moving towards standardized, shared logo
- Ensuring the accessibility branding/marketing tools, develop a multi-channel communication plan, focus on "what's the same" and "what's new" and updating all digital and physical materials.
- Engaging trusted messengers, community-based partners to get out the word and to continue to do so, about available demand-response services.

Cost Sharing Opportunities

- Shared messaging – what to communicate about an integrated demand-response program that will resonate with users?
- Shared marketing creative development and production – cost for brochures, rider guides, decals, flyers, signage, graphics
- Joint website and digit presence
- Coordinated vehicle rebranding
- Pooled advertising campaigns
- Unified public outreach events
- Pooled translation and language services

Cost Implications

- Potential one-time expense to craft new branding and to implement it for countywide services

Potential Funding Sources and Framework for Decision Making

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STATE FUNDING AND EXPENDITURES

Ventura County and its cities receive TDA (Transportation Development Act) funding to support transit operations. Table 15 provides information on how much TDA funding in FY 23/24 went to bike/pedestrian improvements, transit, and streets collectively throughout Ventura County.

Table 15 Type of TDA Funding Source Allocated to Ventura County Cities

Funding Source	FY23/24 Actuals
TDA LTF Article 3 Bike/Ped	$252,631
TDA LTF Article 4 Transit	$27,619,034
TDA LTF Article 8a Streets/Roads	$5,219,524
TDA LTF Article 8c Transit	$8,630,022
Total	**$41,721,212**

While there is currently no formal proposal or concrete evidence of a statewide shift, discussions about transitioning TDA funding exclusively to transit have circulated within transit planning circles. A 2016 report from the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) recommended a review of the TDA structure, including reconsideration of the continued eligibility of streets and roads under Article 8. The report observed that many rural areas rely heavily on TDA funds for road maintenance, which may not fully align with California's long-term climate and equity objectives or the intent of LTF funds.

Senate Bill 508 (Beall, 2015) introduced several updates to the TDA's performance requirements. While it did not eliminate funding for streets and roads, it helped renew conversations around directing a greater share of TDA resources toward public transit.

State policy initiatives such as SB 375, the Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI), and CARB's Sustainable Communities Strategy reviews have increasingly emphasized the need to prioritize transit investments over road expansion. These broader policy goals have prompted agencies to re-examine how transportation dollars are allocated.

Looking ahead, updates to the "unmet transit needs" process could result in stricter standards, making it more difficult to reallocate funds away from transit.

While a statewide transition of all TDA funding to transit has not materialized, it would be prudent for Ventura County and its cities to prepare in case a tighter allocation of funds is made.

At the local level, Table 16 below shows the cities that allocated TDA Article 8a funding to streets and roads in FY23/24.

Table 16 TDA Article 8a Allocated to Ventura County Cities

City Allocation to Streets and Roads	FY 23/24 Article 8A
City of Fillmore Article 8a	$500,037
City of Camarillo Article 8a	$1,681,058

City of Santa Paula Article 8a	$1,063,429
City of Simi Valley	$0
City of Thousand Oaks Article 8a	$1,975,000
County of Ventura	$0
Total	**$5,219,524**

PARTNERSHIP FUNDING IDEAS

LA Metro partnered with Kaiser Permanente to provide mobility-on-demand for paratransit and first/last mile transportation needs. Specifically, the program provides non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) for patients. This program has reduced missed appointments and improved patient access to healthcare.

The Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority (RTA) teamed up with United Way to launch programs that provide transportation solutions for individuals needing access to healthcare services. These initiatives have included subsidized transit fares and specialized shuttle services to medical facilities, addressing transportation barriers to healthcare.

The 211 Ventura County program is a free, 24/7 information and referral service that connects residents to a range of health, human, and social services and is operated by Interface Children & Family Services, it serves as a centralized hub for accessing vital community resources. In speaking with this agency, they expressed interest in assisting VCTC with transportation information efforts, offered potential additional funding sources related to call-center programs. As part of their existing scope, they offer information on transportation options and assistance programs, and real-time updates and resources during emergencies like wildfires or power outages.

UNDERUTILIZED FEDERAL GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

Accelerating Innovative Mobility (AIM) Challenge Grants

This grant supports forward-thinking mobility projects like microtransit, mobility as a service (MaaS), or integrated fare systems. It is underutilized because the awards are small, and many agencies are unfamiliar with non-traditional mobility strategies. Continued expansion of the use of RideCo, particularly for long transfer rides, would speak to this grant opportunity very well.

Enhancing Mobility Innovation (EMI) Program

The purpose of the grant funds is to improve mobility access, user experience, and efficiency, especially using technology. It is underutilized because, like AIM, it is overlooked in favor of

traditional funding streams. It is perfect for mid-sized or rural agencies trying to implement innovative customer service tools or coordination platforms.

The Carl Moyer Fund Program is available for capital purchases related to reducing emissions, such as replacing older diesel and gasoline transit vehicles with clean energy ones.

A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR PARATRANSIT FUNDING DECISIONS

A policy framework will help VCTC evaluate, allocate, and monitor dial-a-ride resources effectively, while balancing regulatory compliance, equity, operational efficiency, and community needs. This chapter has presented a structured approach to achieving integrated demand-response services and explored the costs and benefits of doing so.

Most importantly, the cities—working together and in partnership with VCTC—must begin to shift their focus from isolated, operational-level decision-making to a more strategic, regional approach to mobility planning.

A consistent and resounding theme heard throughout months of public engagement is the difficulty residents face in traveling across jurisdiction trips that should be simple are often long, fragmented, or inaccessible. When each city prioritizes only its own metrics or short-term cost savings, the broader goal of improving mobility and customer experience is undermined. To truly enhance regional transit and make meaningful use of funding, cities must align around shared outcomes and customer-centered service delivery that transcend municipal boundaries.

Below are the key components to a funding framework going forward:

Dial-a-Ride Goals:

- Reduce the inconveniences ADA/senior riders experience when transferring across multiple cities.
- Build confidence that vehicles will arrive when they say they will arrive.
- Expand capacity for more trip-making by increasing the productivity of existing services.
- Continue and improve upon options for same-day reservations.

Funding allocation criteria that align with goals:

VCTC and its leadership, under the newly established Dial-A-Ride MOU/JPA, should actively pursue funding opportunities that prioritize operational efficiency and innovation—not merely the continuation of existing service models. A compelling example of this approach is the FTA's Mobility-on-Demand (MOD) Sandbox Program, which supports pilot projects that explore forward-thinking service models, particularly in demand-responsive transit such as paratransit.

The MOD Sandbox Program focuses on enhancing efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and user experience through several key strategies:

- Technology Integration – Already underway through VCTC's partnership with RideCo, this includes dynamic scheduling, real-time tracking, and app-based booking platforms.
- Partnership Models – The program encourages public-private collaborations with transportation network companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft, as well as microtransit operators and tech startups, to boost flexibility and reduce service costs.
- Data Sharing and Evaluation – Funding is often contingent on transparent data practices, including the use of open performance metrics and outcome-based evaluations, enabling replicability and informed decision-making.
- Service Optimization – Eligible projects may include zone-based restructuring, vehicle right-sizing, and service layering using non-dedicated fleets (e.g., taxis or TNCs) to efficiently cover lower-density areas.

A strong real-world example is Valley Metro in Phoenix, AZ, which, under the MOD Sandbox, partnered with Veyo to test a more agile, tech-enabled paratransit model using non-dedicated vehicles and real-time dispatching. The result: a measurable reduction in no-shows and cancellations, increased shared rides, and a lower cost per trip than traditional service models.

This approach represents a meaningful departure from the status quo, where traditional funding mechanisms often reinforce static cost structures—such as reimbursing operators on a per-mile or per-hour basis. In contrast, programs like the MOD Sandbox:

- Reward innovation in service delivery
- Require data-driven performance tracking
- Promote scalable, efficient solutions rather than simply preserving existing fleets and staffing patterns

By aligning with these funding methodologies, VCTC has an opportunity to elevate service quality, reduce operating costs, and serve as a model of innovation in regional mobility.