

VENTURA COUNTY DEMAND-RESPONSE INTEGRATION PLAN



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Executive Summary

Demand-response transportation—including ADA paratransit, dial-a-ride, and microtransit—provides essential mobility for seniors, people with disabilities, and other riders across Ventura County, but it is also among the costliest and resource-intensive services to operate. This Customer Experience Plan (CEP), part of the broader Demand-Response Integration Plan (DRIP), responds to years of regional discussion, most notably the 2023 Transit Integration and Efficiency Study (TIES) and the 2025–2034 Short Range Transit Plan (SRTTP), about how to make these services more consistent, easier to navigate, and more cost-effective without disrupting local control.

Rather than recommending immediate consolidation of demand-response operations countywide, to address concerns of the Ventura County transit operators the CEP takes a phased approach: it identifies practical, near-term, customer-facing improvements that agencies can pursue now, while documenting the background and pathways that would be relevant if the Commission and operators choose to pursue deeper integration in the future (addressed separately in the companion Integration Concept Report).

Building on progress already made including near-countywide adoption of the RideCo scheduling platform and a shared ADA eligibility determination process, the CEP recommends a set of guiding principles and actions, including:

- Encouraging use of fixed-route service where appropriate, while preserving on-demand capacity for riders who depend on it
- Maintaining the countywide ADA eligibility process and continuing to leverage RideCo’s dynamic scheduling capabilities
- Working toward a unified regional mobile application and a single regional phone number, while allowing agencies to retain agency branding
- Keeping dispatching local while improving regional consistency for cross-jurisdictional trips
- Coordinating policy alignment around no-show/cancellation rules, dwell times, trip-type balance, negotiation practices, and fare uniformity
- Evaluating regional service delivery models (trip brokerage, regional overlay, or lead agency with contracted fleet) and corresponding cost allocation approaches
- Establishing a Client Representative position to facilitate implementation across agencies
- Pursuing a coordinated regional branding and communications strategy

The plan also recommends formalizing this coordination through TRANSCOM and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among VCTC and the nine demand-response programs, with implementation phased through pilot efforts, shared performance metrics, and ongoing evaluation. The appendices provide supporting detail, including a sample MOU and a sample job description for

the Client Representative position. Throughout, the plan emphasizes that these are recommendations for consideration—any next steps would require further direction/approval from the Commission and agreement among participating operators.

INTRODUCTION

Why This Plan Was Developed

Demand-response transportation services play an essential role in Ventura County’s transit network. These services, which include ADA complementary paratransit, dial-a-ride, and microtransit in some jurisdictions, provide critical mobility for seniors, people with disabilities, and other riders who may not be able to use fixed-route transit for all trips. At the same time, these services are among the most resource-intensive modes of public transportation to operate. As demand has grown and travel patterns have become increasingly regional, local transit providers and the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) have been asked to balance three important objectives: maintaining high-quality service, improving the rider experience across jurisdictional boundaries, and ensuring that public funding is used as effectively and sustainably as possible.

This Demand-Response Integration Plan (DRIP) grew out of multiple plans and several years of regional discussion about how to strengthen transit service in Ventura County. Those discussions were informed by ongoing operational challenges, including rising service costs, uneven demand across jurisdictions, differences in policies and service design, and the difficulty riders experience when trying to make trips that cross local service boundaries. They were also shaped by broader changes in the transit environment, including the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on ridership and revenues, increased pressure on local operating budgets, workforce and contractor constraints, and a growing expectation that transit systems function as a connected regional network rather than as a series of isolated local programs.

Foundation in Earlier Planning Efforts

The most significant formal foundation for this work was the 2023 Transit Integration and Efficiency Study (TIES), which examined opportunities to improve transit service delivery across Ventura County and evaluated multiple alternatives for greater coordination and integration. The TIES effort was initiated to evaluate opportunities to enhance efficiency, including strategies that could improve the passenger experience, enhance regional mobility, and support more effective service delivery. The study found that Ventura County’s transit systems offer many strengths, but it also identified persistent barriers to seamless travel, including differences in rider policies, fares, eligibility requirements, branding, published information, technology platforms, and operational practices across providers. These barriers were especially pronounced for riders using demand-response services, where interagency coordination is inherently more complex and trip costs are comparatively high.

Following TIES, the VCTC recommended advancing Alternative 1 while continuing the study of

Alternative 2. Alternative 1 focused on partial consolidation and enhanced coordination, while Alternative 2 contemplated a more comprehensive countywide approach to demand-response integration. The current planning effort reflects that direction by separating near-term customer-focused improvements from longer-term structural integration concepts. In practical terms, that means this document is not a recommendation to immediately consolidate all demand-response operations into a single countywide agency. Instead, it is part of a phased planning framework that identifies improvements that can be pursued now, while also documenting the background, assumptions, and pathways that would be relevant if broader integration is considered in the future.

This work also aligns with the 2025–2034 Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP), which provides the broader countywide framework for service planning, capital investment, and customer experience improvements over the next decade. The SRTP emphasizes the importance of improving mobility, simplifying the customer experience, supporting equity, and making the most effective use of limited operating resources. Within that broader framework, the demand-response planning effort focuses on a particularly important part of the transit network: the services that riders depend on when fixed-route travel is not available, accessible, or practical. The SRTP also reinforces the need to think about local transit services as part of a countywide mobility system, especially for riders making longer interjurisdictional trips.

How Ventura County Reached This Point

Ventura County’s demand-response network has evolved over time through local initiative, incremental coordination, and targeted regional collaboration. Each operator developed services to meet the needs of its own community, reflecting local priorities, budget constraints, service standards, and administrative structures. This local focus has allowed agencies to tailor service to riders in their jurisdictions, but it has also produced a system in which service characteristics differ from one area to another. For riders traveling only within a single jurisdiction, those differences may not be relevant. For riders making countywide trips, or for new riders trying to understand available options, the variation can create confusion, reduce ease of use, and limit the sense that the network functions as a connected whole. As the Ventura County population ages and seniors the only demographic growing, demystifying demand-response and making it easier for people to travel regionally, consistent with today’s travel patterns, is critical as the demand for the service is expected to grow.

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

At the same time, Ventura County has already made meaningful progress toward stronger

¹ California Department of Finance Projections | California Department of Finance

coordination. Agencies have improved direct service between jurisdictions, advanced policy alignment in several areas, and worked together through regional forums such as TRANSCOM. Most operators now use the RideCo scheduling platform, which has created a stronger technological foundation for coordination, dynamic scheduling, and future regional service design. The County also already benefits from a shared ADA eligibility determination process, which promotes greater consistency for riders and operators alike. These steps demonstrate that regional coordination is not a new concept; rather, this plan builds on progress already underway and seeks to organize that progress into a clearer, more intentional framework for decision-making.

Despite this progress, important challenges remain. Demand-response service is expensive to operate, and the cost of providing longer regional trips can be difficult to absorb within locally funded programs. Riders continue to encounter differences in fares, policies, communication tools, and service branding. In many cases, regional travel still requires riders to navigate multiple systems, understand different local rules, or transfer between services in ways that can be burdensome, particularly for riders with disabilities, older adults, or those unfamiliar with the transit network. Meanwhile, local operators must continue to meet ADA requirements, maintain service quality, manage resource constraints, and respond to changing customer expectations. These realities are what make a phased, deliberate planning effort necessary.

Progress Over the Last 15 Years – Foundational Regional Coordination

Formation of the East County Transit Alliance (ECTA):

The creation of ECTA represents one of Ventura County’s earliest efforts to provide cross-jurisdictional demand-response service. Through an interagency agreement among east county jurisdictions, ECTA established a shared operational model for intercity dial-a-ride and ADA paratransit trips, allowing riders to travel point to point across city boundaries without navigating multiple local systems. The City of Thousand Oaks serves as the fiscal agent and operator, demonstrating early consolidation of administrative and operational functions while preserving local participation.

Premium Direct Camarillo-Gold Coast Service and other Regional Connectivity Improvements:

The City of Camarillo elected not to fully participate in ECTA cost sharing but instead implemented direct ADA and senior dial-a-ride service for eligible Camarillo residents traveling to Simi Valley, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks. This approach reduced the need for vehicle transfers and improved rider convenience while maintaining local operational control. Camarillo and GCTD established procedures allowing ADA-certified riders and seniors to travel deeper into the GCTD service area from Camarillo and vice versa for GCTD ADA certified riders and seniors, using coordinated dispatch and transfer points. While still requiring coordination, these measures represented incremental progress toward more seamless regional trips.

Implementation of RideCo for Demand-Response Services

Building on TIES findings, VCTC and local operators initiated implementation of RideCo, a shared dynamic scheduling and dispatch platform. RideCo supports same-day scheduling, improved vehicle utilization, and better data consistency across agencies, representing a tangible, near-term step toward operational integration without requiring immediate governance changes.

Policy Alignment Driven by RideCo Implementation and Operator Experience

As RideCo has been implemented across participating operators, VCTC and local operators have used the platform as a practical tool to identify and address long-standing policy inconsistencies that affect both riders and operations. Through regular coordination, including recurring operator working meetings and RideCo implementation calls, agencies have surfaced real-world issues related to trip scheduling, negotiated pick-up times, no-show and late cancellation policies, dwell time expectations, reservations, and transfer coordination. These discussions, grounded in operational challenges have informed incremental policy alignment across agencies, particularly in areas where inconsistent rules created confusion for riders or limited the effectiveness of dynamic scheduling. RideCo has enabled agencies to see where differing policies directly impact on-time performance, productivity, and customer experience, creating momentum for greater consistency and enforcement of shared standards as a precursor to broader integration efforts.

Purpose and Structure of the DRIP

The DRIP is intended to provide decision-makers, operators, and stakeholders with a shared foundation for evaluating how Ventura County's demand-response services can continue to evolve. Consistent with recent Commission direction, the planning effort is structured in two related but distinct parts: a Customer Experience Plan focused on near-term, customer-facing improvements that can be pursued within the existing agency structure, and an Integration Concept Report that documents existing conditions, service models, governance considerations, and longer-term integration pathways **should the Commission and operators choose to explore them further.**

Accordingly, the sections that follow are grounded in a phased and practical approach. The emphasis is on identifying what can be improved now, such as customer-facing tools, policy coordination, regional communication, and more seamless trip-making, while preserving local control and recognizing the investments agencies have already made. At the same time, the broader integration context is acknowledged so that any future decisions can be informed by a clear understanding of how Ventura County arrived at this point, what progress has already been made, and what considerations would need to be addressed before moving toward a more integrated model. In that sense, this introduction is meant to frame the DRIP not as a single decision, but as part of an ongoing regional process to improve accessibility, coordination, and mobility for riders throughout Ventura County.

THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PLAN

VCTC, in collaboration with the local transit providers, recognizes the importance of enhancing the customer experience for demand-response services and acknowledges that there are opportunities for improvement. These services include those commonly provided across Ventura County, such as dial-a-ride (DAR), paratransit, and in some cases, microtransit. Improving demand-response services enhances accessibility and regional mobility by creating a more seamless, user-friendly experience for riders, while also strengthening coordination, improving efficiency, and maximizing the return on public investment.

The Customer Experience Plan (CEP) focuses on identifying practical, near-term, customer-facing strategies and actionable improvements that enhance the customer experience, while laying the foundation for the consideration for broader service integration, should local operators and the Commission determine that further integration is warranted. Building on the progress already made by local operators, the following section outlines a shared set of baseline goals and stipulations to support continued coordination and guide implementation of these customer-focused improvements.

As a foundation for these efforts, participating agencies can work together to align on the following shared goals and stipulations, while continuing to ensure compliance with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations:

- 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.

As agencies advance these goals through customer-facing improvements, performance measures and cost allocation approaches will be further refined to ensure transparency, measurability, and equitable distribution of costs across jurisdictions, including safeguards for smaller agencies.

VCTC's Goal

With the conclusion of the Transit Integration and Efficiency Study (TIES) study in 2023, the Commission approved the adoption of Alternative #1, which considered a partial consolidation of subregional demand-response services and enhanced agency coordination; and a continued study of Alternative #2, consolidation of all demand-response services into a new countywide agency and consolidation of fixed-route services by geography. The CEP focuses on improvements aligned with

the long-term concepts explored under Alternative #2; however, it does not preclude or replace further study or consideration of Alternative #1 or other approaches as determined appropriate by the Commission and local operators.

Overview of Current Conditions

All communities comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (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.

At the time of this writing, all agencies (with the exception of Simi Valley’s DAR system, which is anticipated to transition to RideCo by the end of 2026) are on the RideCo software platform. The RideCo’s platform enables dynamic dispatching of on-demand transportation, allowing trips to be scheduled in real time to respond to changing conditions such as planned/unplanned detours, construction, schedules changes, and fleet availability.

Over time, and particularly since the initiation of this effort, demand-response services across Ventura County have continued to improve. Direct service between jurisdictions has expanded, policy alignment as progressed, and the adoption of the RideCo platform across agencies has enhanced both customer experience and backend operations. Building on this progress, the next step is to establish a defined set of shared principles and actions to further strengthen customer service.

Principles

Encouraging Use of Existing Fixed-Route Services

While on-demand transportation services offer a high level of convenience and are often more attractive to riders than fixed-route options, they are significantly more costly to operate and inherently less efficient in terms of passengers served per hour. Agencies across Ventura County have already taken steps to promote and support fixed-route services; building on these efforts, it is important to continue aligning strategies that encourage use of fixed-route services. These strategies include: travel training, targeted outreach, and service improvements outlined in the 2025-2034 Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP), while preserving on-demand capacity for individuals who rely on it most.

Countywide ADA Eligibility

All operators in Ventura County currently utilize a single outsourced contractor (through an arrangement with VCTC) to administer ADA eligibility determinations. This approach promotes consistency, efficiency, and a uniform understanding of certification requirements across the region. Maintaining this model is recommended, as it supports clear communication and ongoing education for both current and future ADA riders.

Embracing Dynamic Scheduling

The scheduling platform provided by RideCo is highly effective in optimizing on-demand service by maximizing passenger trips per vehicle hour. Operators currently collaborate regularly with RideCo to

calibrate the system maximize efficiency within their local service areas and across the regional network.

Building on these efforts, operators should continue to leverage RideCo's data-driven insights to identify areas of increased demand and adjust resources as needed, such as:

- (a) deploying additional vehicles or scheduling more drivers during peak periods
- (b) evaluating maximum ride time constraints
- (c) transfer coordination
- (d) adjusting pickup windows, and;
- (e) refining the balance between advanced reservations and same-day trips.

Achieving an effective balance between operational constraints, workforce availability, and system optimization will require ongoing coordination and refinement.

One Mobile Application

The RideCo mobile application is highly customizable and is currently configured to reflect the branding of individual jurisdictions. While this supports local identity and works well for existing users familiar with their local system, it may present challenges for new or infrequent riders seeking to travel across jurisdictional boundaries. Although no formal data has been collected on user preferences regarding multiple applications, a unified, regional mobile app is a logical next step to improve clarity, enhance awareness of available services, and reduce perceived barriers to using the system countywide. A single interface improves clarity, increases awareness of services, and reduces perceived barriers to use. This recommendation aligns with the TIES and SRTP strategy to maximize promotional marketing effectiveness by utilizing a single countywide brand and collateral.

At the same time, RideCo's platform provides flexibility on the backend, allowing agencies to retain their agency-branded mobile applications within RideCo if desired. RideCo can support a unified front-end customer experience while maintaining separate, agency-specific configurations on the back end (allowing providers to retain operational control). RideCo also allows the use of geofencing to determine which provider is responsible for fulfilling a trip. When a rider requests a trip, the system assigns it to the appropriate operator based on origin, destination, and service rules. The software is structured so that each participating agency operates within its own "tenant" on the back end. This approach acknowledges recent investments in these applications and established customer familiarity, while still supporting consideration of a more coordinated regional customer experience over time

One Phone Number

In addition to the one mobile application, consideration should be given to establish a single regional phone number. Modern call center technologies enable the use of a centralized phone number while allowing call takers to remain distributed across multiple locations, supporting both coordination and

local flexibility. Several solutions can support this approach.

RideCo is designed to integrate with call center technologies through its open Application Programming Interface (API) architecture and system features, allowing it to interface with existing platforms to support trip reservations and customer service functions.

Aside from RideCo, the two main options for one-number call center integration are:

- **Intelligent/Geofence routing** can automatically direct incoming calls to the most appropriate agent or agency based on predefined rules and real-time conditions, rather than assigning calls to the next available representative.
- **Interactive Voice Response (IVR)**, (i.e. phone tree), can be used to guide callers through a menu of options using keypad or voice commands. This allows calls to be categorized and routed appropriately before reaching a live agent.

Agencies may also continue to maintain their existing call center operations, with a coordinated approach enabling greater regional consistency while preserving local knowledge and customer familiarity.

Localized Dispatching

To support a stronger focus on customer service and be responsive to operator feedback (and less resource attention to dispatch consolidation), dispatching functions are recommended to remain at the local level. Agencies would continue dispatching for both demand-response and fixed-route operations, avoiding the need to separate functions.

Maintaining local dispatch however, requires regional consistency for regional ride requests. This includes standardized customer service policies (discussed in the following section) and reducing manual intervention in RideCo's automated dynamic scheduling. RideCo does have the ability to apply a centralized trip brokerage logic where a rules-based, algorithm-driven layer determines how regional trips would be allocated across the system. Under this model, each agency would retain control over its own operations (vehicles, drivers, and day-to-day dispatch decisions) while the platform would enable regional optimization where appropriate. RideCo also supports standardized data structures, enabling information sharing across agencies while keeping certain datasets separate.

Agencies may choose to revisit the concept of consolidated dispatching in the future as other strategies are implemented and refined, independent of any broader customer-facing actions.

Service Branding

It's recommended that agencies coordinate to establish a regional branding initiative centered on customer service and improving regional mobility. This effort should articulate the intended outcomes of greater brand consistency, namely, reducing barriers and making transit easier to understand for riders traveling across jurisdictional boundaries, while increasing mobility options. The goal is to enhance continuity between operators while allowing agencies to retain their existing

branding. Roles and responsibilities associated with this effort are described in the Strategy Detail section.

As part of this process, agencies, through either a Client Representative or the TIES Implementation Advisory Ad Hoc Committee will review current agency branding, service names, and logos; identify customer pain points. These would include: confusion around service boundaries, eligibility, and booking processes; and assessing communication channels, including the RideCo app, agency websites, call center practices, and printed materials. This process should help identify inconsistencies and support greater policy alignment, as discussed later in this chapter. A key area for review is public perception of “who various services are for,” including awareness that local transit services are available to the general public, as noted in the SRTP.

Table 1 lists the various on-demand systems and their nomenclature. The next step involves developing branding elements that are applied across the system, including service names, taglines, visual identity, and messaging guidelines. Suggestions for branding are included in the Strategy Detail section.

Table 1 - Ventura Countywide DAR Systems

Town	Type of Service	Service Name
Simi Valley	ADA/DAR	ADA/DAR
Simi Valley	On-Demand	Simi Valley Transit On-Demand
Thousand Oaks	Dial-a-Ride	T.O. Dial-a-Ride
ECTA	Dial-a-Ride	ECTA Connect
Camarillo	Dial-a-Ride	CAT Dial-a-Ride
Moorpark	Dial-a-Ride	Senior Dial-A-Ride Program
Moorpark	Microtransit	MCT On Demand
Valley Express	Dial-a-Ride	Dial-a-Ride
Gold Coast	Dial-a-Ride	Go Access

Coordinated Policy Alignment

Service policy integration is essential in a multi-jurisdictional, demand-response system to reduce customer confusion and build confidence in a more seamless, countywide service model. Currently, agencies operate under varying service policies, which can create inconsistencies in how trips are requested, scheduled, and delivered, particularly for riders traveling across jurisdictional boundaries. Ventura County agencies have already made meaningful progress toward greater alignment; building on this progress, a more in-depth review of policies by a subject matter expert will be needed to identify remaining inconsistencies and opportunities for refinement. Formalizing these efforts, while establishing clear metrics and reporting mechanisms, represents the next step in advancing coordination while ensuring accountability.

As depicted in the table below, these differences span several core operational policies, including advance and same-day reservation windows, definitions of on-time performance, allowable dwell time at the curb, and thresholds for late cancellations. These variations can lead to uncertainty for riders, especially those who rely on multiple systems, as the rules governing trip eligibility and service expectations may change depending on the provider.

Integration of these policies is necessary to establish a more predictable and user-friendly experience. Standardizing reservation practices, such as aligning advance booking requirements and same-day service availability, can simplify trip planning and reduce barriers to access. Similarly, adopting a consistent definition of on-time performance and uniform dwell time expectations helps ensure reliability and sets clear service standards across agencies.

Late cancellation policies are also a key area for alignment, as inconsistent definitions and enforcement can impact both customer understanding and system efficiency. Differences in these policies affect vehicle availability and scheduling effectiveness, particularly in a dynamically routed system. Establishing common definitions and thresholds allows for more efficient use of resources while maintaining fairness and transparency for riders.

Importantly, these service policies are directly tied to the effectiveness of RideCo and similar dynamic scheduling platforms. As agencies continue implementing RideCo, it has become evident that inconsistent policies, such as differing dwell times or cancellation rules, can limit the platform's ability to optimize trips and deliver reliable service. Moving toward standardized policies enables the system to function more cohesively, improving both operational performance and the overall customer experience.

While agencies will continue to retain local oversight, aligning core service policies represents a critical step toward a more integrated, customer-focused network and lays the groundwork for broader coordination in the future.

Policy review should specifically include the following:

No-Show and Late Cancellation Policies

No-show and late cancellation policies are essential to protecting system capacity and ensuring efficient service delivery. When riders fail to appear for scheduled trips or cancel with insufficient notice, valuable vehicle availability and driver time are lost, resources that could otherwise be used to serve other passengers.

To promote consistency across providers, participating agencies should adopt a standard practice of waiting no more than five (5) minutes beyond the scheduled pickup window before designating a trip as a no-show. Additionally, trips canceled within two (2) hours of the scheduled pickup time should be classified as late cancellations. Agencies should also establish performance expectations to monitor system impacts, with a recommended benchmark that no-shows and late cancellations combined do not exceed 10 percent of total monthly trips.

While the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) recommends a two-step no-show policy based on a rider's frequency of use, the CEP encourages agencies to implement policies that are practical, transparent, and enforceable. For example, a clearly defined threshold—such as three no-shows within a specified period resulting in temporary suspension—may be more effective in practice. As noted by the FTA, “Regardless of the methodology chosen, agencies must be prepared to explain to FTA during oversight activity how their threshold represents a pattern or practice consistent with § 37.125(h).”²

Dwell Time

All agencies should implement the same dwell time (how long a vehicle waits at pickup) which directly impacts schedule reliability and prevents delays from cascading across the system. Dwell time should be no more than 5 minutes.

Mix of Advanced Reservations / Subscriptions / Same-Day

Balancing trip types are important to efficiency and equity. Advanced reservations improve planning, subscription rides support frequent riders, and same-day trips increase flexibility and customer satisfaction. This blend allows for maximum fleet efficiency, as well as ensure equitable service to a diverse set of needs. Per ADA regulation (49C.F.R. Section 37.131(b) *“permits a transit operator to provide subscription service above the 50% ceiling if it finds it has excess capacity available (i.e., all requests for next-day service are met, and capacity to provide additional trips remains). If, after constant monitoring, it finds next-day requestors are being denied trips, the operator must either increase its passenger carrying capacity or reduce the number of subscription trips. Note that subscription service is discretionary and is not mandated by Section 37.133. Whether to provide subscription service beyond the 50% ceiling, or whether to provide subscription service at all, is entirely within the transit agency's discretion.”*³

Negotiation Times

² https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/Final_FTA_ADA_Circular_C_4710.1.pdf Section 9.12.2

³ <https://www.transit.dot.gov/does-americans-disabilities-act-ada-limit-subscription-trips-50-available-paratransit-trips>

Negotiating trip pick-times is an area of transit operations that many demand-response agencies struggle to manage. It is established in ADA Paratransit service models 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. Specifically, FTA ADA Circular states, *“A true negotiation consider the rider’s constraints. While some trips have inherent flexibility (e.g., shopping, or recreation), other trips have constraints with respect to when they can begin (e.g., not before the end of the individual’s workday or not until after an appointment is over).”*¹ The Client Representative can lead agencies to ensure customer service representatives are doing this when appropriate.

Fare Uniformity

Fare consistency is one of the most visible aspects of a “seamless” system. It (a) eliminates rider confusion, (b) simplifies payment systems and future integration, and (c) supports transfers across agencies without friction. Specific fare uniformity recommendations can be found in the Strategy Detail section RideCo integrates with point-of-sales system and is implemented with all Ventura County transit agencies, with the exception of Valley Express (who is working towards implementation). This recommendation is consistent with the regional fare structure strategy detailed in the SRTP, which holds that the slight price variations among providers in Ventura County provide no clear benefit to the various agencies nor meaningfully affect affordability for riders, either.

Regional Service Delivery Model

Over the years, one-seat paratransit rides have been identified by the community as a need through VCTC’s Unmet Transit Needs process, as well as through input from its Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee/Social Services Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC/SSTAC) members and other stakeholder feedback. This concept has also been advanced as a potential strategy recommended in both the Coordinated Plan and the TIES.

Providing a countywide approach to regional DAR service that enables one-seat rides for paratransit passengers may help reduce barriers to travel by minimizing or eliminating the need for transfers across jurisdictions. This approach can improve the overall customer experience, particularly for riders with mobility or accessibility needs, without requiring structural integration of services or changes to local operational control. At the same time, there is a range of service models that allow trips to be allocated across agencies in a manner that maintains cost-effectiveness and operational balance. While the primary intent of this approach is to reduce barriers to travel, such as minimizing or eliminating transfers for regional trips, enhanced coordination may also support broader system connectivity. However, this should be considered an ancillary benefit and not an evaluation of, or step toward, service integration. The chart below describes three main service models and their associated costs, which can fulfill regional service requests without local integration.

Table 2 - Regional Service Delivery Models

	Regional Trip Brokerage	Regional Overlay Service (Third-Party Contractor)	Lead Agency + Contracted Fleet
How It Works	Central entity receives all regional trip requests and assigns them to the most appropriate provider	Separate countywide service operates alongside local DAR services	One agency manages a regional service, often with a dedicated fleet
Role of Providers	Handle regional, long-distance, or cross-boundary trips	Operate a dedicated regional (private operator) service across jurisdictions	Operate vehicles and drivers for regional trips under contract
Best Use Case	Multi-agency regions with frequent intercity travel	Areas needing a simple regional layer without restructuring local service	Regions wanting stronger control and branding
Advantages	Seamless customer experience; efficient trip allocation; reduces transfers	Easy to implement; clear structure; consistent regional trips	High consistency; centralized oversight; strong branding
Potential Tradeoffs	Requires strong coordination and governance	Possible duplication of resources if not integrated	More complex procurement and management

Comparative Cost	\$ – Leverages existing agencies' fleet and drivers	\$\$ – Adds a new layer of service for regional trips	\$\$\$ – Central entity operates/contracts a regional fleet
Example Agency	MTA Access-A-Ride (trips scheduled to the most appropriate jurisdiction)	Houston METROLift, which contracts with UZURV and RideCo to deliver ADA rides for the Greater Houston area	Sacramento Regional Transit Smart Flex (dedicated fleet for eligible riders across nine zones in the Sacramento area)

Detailed cost assumptions, including estimated annual cost ranges, agency-level cost allocation scenarios, and trip volume assumptions, are addressed in the Integration Concept Plan. This Customer Experience Plan focuses on customer-facing improvements, while the companion Integration Concept Plan provides the supporting financial analysis to inform future decision-making. More detailed analysis of agency-specific cost impacts would require further evaluation and is beyond the scope of this effort.

Role of On-Demand Transportation Providers in Regional Service Delivery

Private on-demand transportation providers, including Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft, as well as other specialized mobility providers, can support a range of service models that may complement public transit operations. These providers are often able to assume certain operational risks, service variability, and customer service functions that may be more challenging or resource-intensive for local public transit agencies to manage directly.

In a regional context, these partnerships can offer additional flexibility in delivering specialized services, such as same-day trips, low-density service coverage, or high-touch assistance for riders with mobility or accessibility needs. While these providers are not a replacement for public operated services, particularly those required to meet ADA standards, they may serve as a supplemental option to enhance service delivery, improve responsiveness, and expand mobility options in a cost-effective and scalable way. Examples such as Onward and UZURV demonstrate how these services can provide tailored support, including door-through-door assistance, caregiver coordination, accessible vehicles, and pre-scheduled trip options:

Onward

Onward provides assisted, "door-through-door" rideshare services for seniors and individuals with mobility or cognitive impairments and offering companionship. Onward focuses on specialized, high-touch transportation designed for healthcare appointments, groceries, and personal errands. Specific functions include:

- Door-Through-Door Service: Drivers provide physical support from the rider's home to the destination, including inside.
- Companion Drivers: Drivers are trained to assist with mobility or cognitive limitations.

- Caregiver Support: Their platform offers tools for caregivers to manage transportation and rider preferences.
- Scheduling: Provides scheduled, recurring transportation rather than on-demand only.

UZURV

UZURV is an Adaptive Transportation Network Company that provides specialized, pre-scheduled, and on-demand door-to-door rides, focusing on seniors, people with disabilities, and healthcare patients. It partners with transit agencies and provides vetted drivers for paratransit services.

- Accessible Transportation: Offers wheelchair-accessible vehicles to meet specific mobility needs.
- Pre-Scheduled Rides: Specializes in booking, paying for, and scheduling rides in advance via mobile app or phone.
- Partnerships: Works with transit agencies and healthcare providers to offer transport services.

Access for All

Launched in September 2023, in an effort to increase accessibility to on-demand transportation services like Uber or Lyft for individuals in wheelchairs, Ventura County's Access for All program provides round-the-clock on-demand wheelchair accessible transportation throughout Ventura County. The program utilizes California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) grant funds to subsidize fares in order to make trips more affordable to passengers and to incentivize transportation providers to operate the specialized service within the county. Trips do not require advance reservation and allow for inter-city travel within Ventura County outside normal hours of operation provided by public transit including weekends. The Access for All (AFA) program's aim is to fill transportation gaps within traditional paratransit provider service restricted by local service areas and limited by more traditional hours of operation.

The program has experienced modest success, measured more for meeting the needs of a select group of individuals challenged by unpredictable on-demand pickup times across a large geographic area than by sheer number of trips performed. The service is provided by Ventura Transit System (VTS), a local Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) transportation provider who leverage their existing fleet of vehicles, drivers, operations supervisors, dispatch staff, customer service representatives and administration staff to meet the demands of the Ventura County AFA program.

Average Passenger Fare, Cost and Trip Distance

Passenger Fares

Passengers are charged a \$2.50 per mile fare for trips anytime, anywhere within Ventura County. Trip requests can be requested by phone or booked online. The grant subsidy provides a \$60 base

fee per trip plus \$1.40 per mile to be paid to the service operator for trips performed. The average passenger fare per trip in 2024 was \$15 with a subsidy of \$74 for a total cost per trip of \$89. In 2025, the average passenger fare per trip was \$11 with a total subsidy of \$71 for a total per trip cost of \$82. In 2024 and 2025 combined, the average passenger fare per trip was \$13 with a total subsidy of \$72 for a total trip cost of \$85. The average trip distance in 2024 was 10 miles and in 2025 was 8 miles, averaging 9 miles trip length over the two-year time period. There is no restriction on trip distance except that trips must begin and end in Ventura County.

The following table provides the average fare, subsidy, total cost and distance per trip for 2024 and 2025:

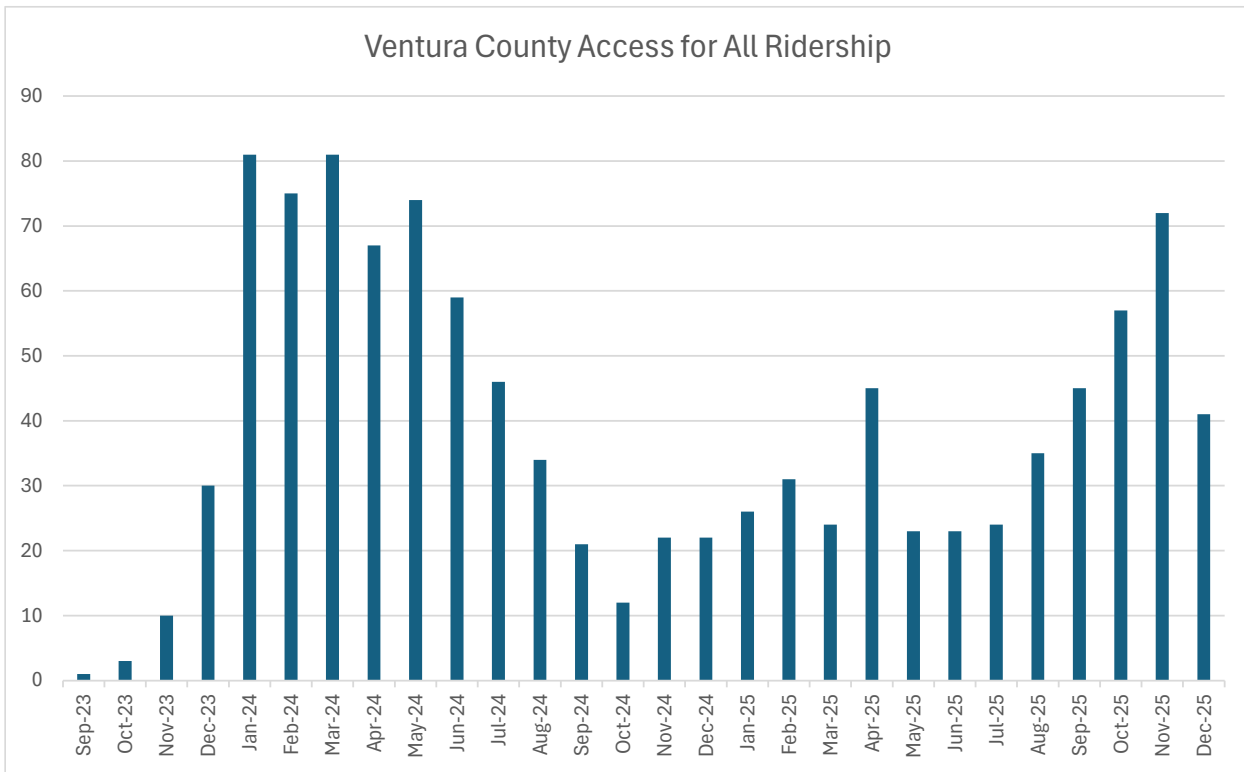
Table 3 - Average Fares, Cost, and Length of Trip

	Avg Fare per Trip	Avg Subsidy per Trip	Total Cost per Trip	Avg Distance per Trip
2024	\$ 15.19	\$ 74.18	\$ 89.38	10 miles
2025	\$ 11.25	\$ 70.50	\$ 81.76	8 miles
2024 & 2025	\$ 13.18	\$ 72.30	\$ 85.48	9 miles

Ridership

Ridership has varied over the length of the program with no discernible trend. The marketing of the service has been minimal, primarily consisting of organic (nonpaid) monthly social media posts promoting the program on VCTC social media platforms. Monthly ridership averaged 38 per month in 2024, 35 per month in 2025, and 37 trips per month average in 2024 & 2025 combined.

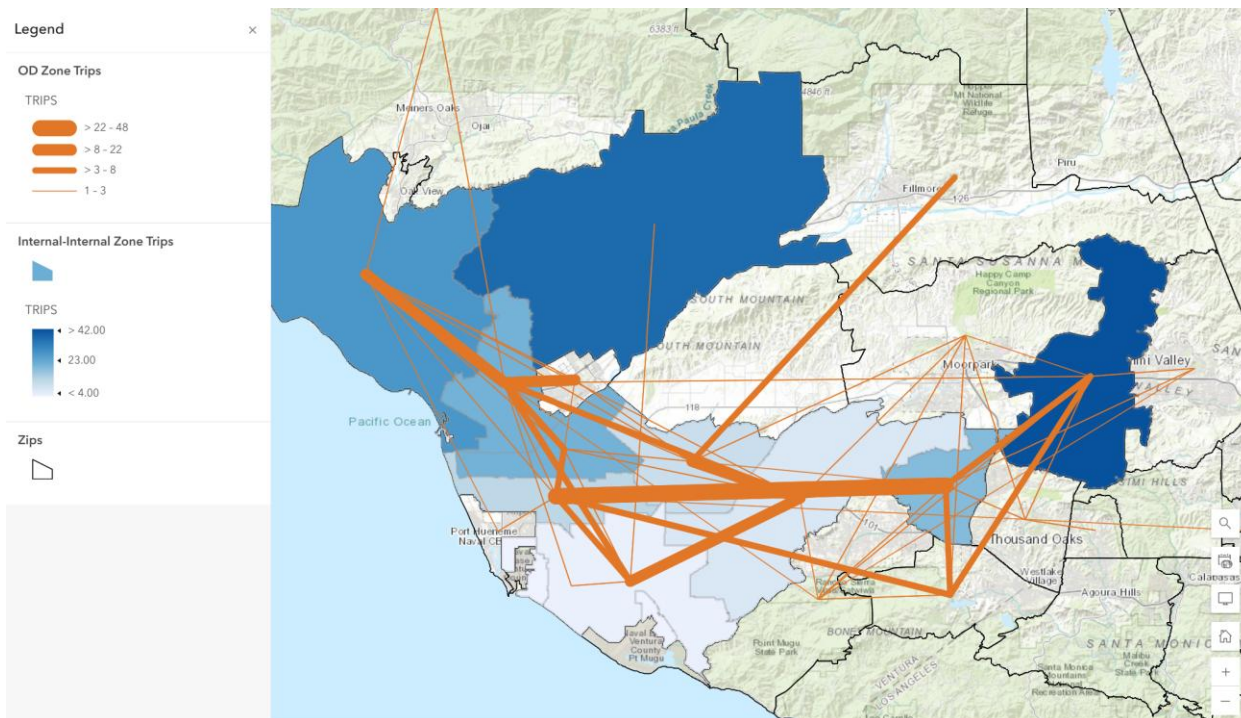
Table 4 - Trips per Month



Origins and Destinations

The Ventura County Access for All program allows for inter-city travel for individuals in wheelchairs across local paratransit providers’ service areas in Ventura County. The program is designed to meet this gap. Origin/destination per Zip Code mapping of AFA trips suggests a demand for cross-county travel, particularly between Oxnard – Camarillo, Oxnard - Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley – Camarillo, Simi Valley – Thousand Oaks, and Fillmore -Ventura. Additional frequency of travel occurs internally within the zip codes of Simi Valley and Santa Paula and Ventura.

The following map shows trip frequency between and within zones defined by zip code in Ventura County:



Program Limitations

AFA could help supplement identified service gaps, particularly where existing fixed-route or demand response services do not fully meet mobility needs, by offering an additional, flexible transportation option for eligible riders. However, its applicability is limited because the program is restricted to individuals who use wheelchairs, meaning it cannot serve the broader population of riders experiencing gaps in service. In addition, while AFA can support individual trips, it is not well-suited for longer regional travel due to cost considerations. For example, a roundtrip journey between Fillmore and Oxnard would likely become prohibitively expensive, making it an inefficient tool for routine or longer-distance travel needs.

It is also important to note that trip fulfillment is subject to vehicle availability, similar to TNCs. While same-day or short-notice requests cannot be guaranteed, advance reservations, —particularly for late-night or weekend trips, generally increase the likelihood that service can be accommodated.

Service delivery is further influenced by program funding levels, variable demand, and the countywide service area, all of which present operational challenges. Trips may occur at any time of day and are often requested on an on-demand basis, including longer cross-county trips that may not be feasible for traditional paratransit providers to accommodate without transfers. As a result, AFA is best considered a targeted, supplemental solution rather than a comprehensive strategy for addressing regional mobility gaps.

Cost Allocation Considerations

Private on-demand transportation providers can play a complementary role in regional service

delivery by expanding flexibility and supporting specialized trip needs. When strategically integrated, these services can enhance customer experience and improve system responsiveness without replacing core public transit operations.

If operators elect to pursue a regional service delivery model, an accompanying cost allocation approach would need to be established. This is a critical component of planning regional trips, as jurisdictions must have a clear understanding of the costs associated with serving trips under a coordinated framework. Effective cost allocation models should: (a) equitably distribute costs among jurisdictions, (b) reflect actual service usage, and (c) promote transparency and long-term financial sustainability. These models are typically informed by a combination of operational data, financial information, and performance objectives.

Table 5 - Cost Models by Service Delivery Approach

Service Model	Cost Model	Cost Details	Explanation	Example
REGIONAL TRIP BROKERAGE	Trip-Based Cost Allocation	Cost = fully allocated cost per trip × number of regional trips provided	Pay for what is delivered; easy to track; transparent	GCTD manages all regional ride deployment. All agencies pay a fixed monthly rate to GCTD for regional rides originating from their area.
	Passenger Time/Mile Allocation	Adds weight for long-distance/high-cost rural trips	Prevents agencies with long trips from being undercompensated; addresses equity	GCTD manages all regional ride deployment. Agencies pay a base rate plus a mileage rate for rides originating from their area.
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	UZURV manages all regional ride deployment. Agencies contribute a set amount annually for regional rides.
	Zone-Based Cost Sharing	Costs allocated by service hours or miles	Reflects geographic usage of overlay service	UZURV divides the service area into zones; agencies pay based on service hours used within their zone.
	Per-Trip Subsidy Contribution	Agencies pay a set subsidy per trip originating in their area	Pay for what is delivered; transparent	UZURV manages all regional ride deployment. Each agency pays a flat subsidy for every trip starting in its area.
LEAD AGENCY / CONTRACTED FLEET	Fully Allocated Cost Recovery	Lead agency calculates cost per hour, mile, or trip	Predictable budgeting; easy to administer contractually	GCTD leads all regional service with a dedicated fleet and team, charging agencies a flat rate per revenue hour for rides originating in their area.
	Minimum Guarantee + Variable Cost	Agencies pay a base contribution plus a variable cost per trip	Covers fixed costs while reflecting actual usage	GCTD leads all regional service with a dedicated fleet and team. Each agency pays an annual administration fee plus a per-trip cost.

To advance toward a more coordinated regional DAR system while maintaining local control, a practical approach is to begin with targeted, low-risk activities that build consistency and strengthen collaboration among agencies. These efforts allow agencies to test and refine coordination strategies incrementally, without requiring structural changes to existing service delivery models.

Focusing on near-term, “low-hanging fruit” opportunities can provide early benefits to riders by improving consistency in the customer experience, enhancing communication across jurisdictions, and supporting more seamless service delivery. These initial actions also help establish a foundation for future coordination by aligning practices, building trust among operators, and identifying areas for further refinement. The most practical opportunities for implementation are outlined below:

Table 6 - Proposed Implementation Responsibilities by Function

Function	Responsible Party
Regional Branding for Mobile App and Fare Payment Systems	VCTC
RideCo Back-End Configuration for Regional Performance Tracking	VCTC
Coordinated Call Center through a Single Regional Phone Number	All local transit providers
Centralized National Transit Database (NTD) Reporting for Regional Trips	VCTC
Customer Service Training and Coordination Programs	All local transit providers
Countywide Travel Training Program	All local transit providers
Evaluation of Future Regional Ride Service Delivery Model	VCTC; all local transit providers
Coordination of Future DAR Vehicle Procurement	VCTC, with reimbursement by local transit providers

TRANSCOM (Transit Operators Advisory Committee) serves as Ventura County’s primary advisory forum for coordination among transit operators and local agencies. The committee provides a venue for sharing perspectives, aligning priorities, and developing recommendations related to funding, service delivery, and system improvements. Through its diverse membership, TRANSCOM supports VCTC’s mission to enhance regional mobility by bringing together technical expertise and local knowledge from across the county.

TRANSCOM has played a key role in advancing coordination across the region, including supporting the countywide adoption of the RideCo platform, facilitating interagency discussions on policy alignment, and coordinating efforts related to regional funding and service planning initiatives. These collaborative efforts demonstrate the value of TRANSCOM as a forum for building consensus and advancing shared priorities across jurisdictions.

While TRANSCOM brings together a regional perspective, there is an opportunity to further strengthen its impact by focusing on more tangible, action-oriented outcomes, particularly in the area of regional customer service improvements. Through continued partnership and collaboration, TRANSCOM can continue serve as a critical forum to guide discussions and advance initiatives such

as implementation of shared principles, regional branding, and coordinated service delivery approaches, with the goal of translating coordination into measurable benefits for riders.

VCTC and the nine demand-response programs should consider developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize roles, responsibilities, and shared commitments related to improving customer service and advancing the strategies outlined in this plan. Establish a common framework can support consistent implementation, enhance coordination, and provide clarify in areas such as service delivery, data sharing, and performance expectations.

This approach builds on existing examples of successful coordination among operators, such as agreements between GCTD and the City of Camarillo for premium direct service, which demonstrate the potential for partnership-driven solutions to improve regional mobility. Formalizing similar collaborative arrangements through an MOU can help scale these success, while maintain local control and flexibility for participating agencies. A sample MOU is provided in the Strategy Detail section for reference.

Potential Steps to Formalize Regional Coordination

Advancing regional coordination will require a thoughtful, phased approach that builds on existing partnerships and acknowledges the varying needs and capacities of participating agencies. Rather than pursuing immediate structural changes, the following steps focus on strengthening collaboration, aligning practices, and implementing customer-facing improvements within current operations. These actions are intended to support continued coordination, foster trust among operators, and lay the groundwork for any future enhancements that agencies and the Commission may choose to pursue.

Confirm Areas of Initial Coordination

Through TRANSCOM or a similar forum, operators can collaboratively identify and prioritize specific customer-facing strategies for near-term coordination. Initial efforts should focus on achievable items that provide immediate value to riders and build momentum for broader coordination. These may include advancing policy alignment in key areas (e.g., no-show policies, booking windows), improving consistency in branding and customer messaging, and enhancing coordination of communication tools such as call routing, rider information, and service alerts. Prioritization should reflect both customer impact and feasibility within existing operational frameworks.

Develop a Shared Framework (e.g., MOU or Agreements)

Operators may consider formalizing roles, responsibilities, and expectations through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or similar agreement structure. This framework would establish a common foundation for coordination while preserving local control and governance. Building on existing interagency partnerships—such as GCTD and Camarillo premium direct service arrangements—the framework can define expectations for participation in regional initiatives, outline decision-making processes, and clarify approaches to cost allocation, data sharing, and service delivery. A shared framework can support consistency, transparency, and accountability as coordination efforts expand over time.

Establish Performance Metrics and Data Sharing Practices

Agencies can work collaboratively to define a set of shared performance measures that support consistent evaluation of service effectiveness and customer experience across jurisdictions. These may include indicators such as productivity (e.g., passengers per hour), on-time performance, customer satisfaction, and regional trip completion rates. In parallel, agencies can establish data-sharing protocols that align with existing reporting requirements while enabling more comprehensive regional analysis. Consistent metrics and transparent reporting practices will support informed decision-making, help identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability in advancing coordination efforts.

Pilot Coordinated Approaches Within Existing Operations

Without requiring structural changes, agencies can test coordinated practices within current service models to evaluate both customer benefits and operational impacts. Potential pilot efforts may

include implementation of one-seat regional trips, coordinated call routing through a single entry point, or application of shared branding elements across participating services. These pilots can be designed to minimize risk by leveraging existing resources and infrastructure, while providing valuable insights into feasibility, cost implications, and customer response. Lessons learned can inform future refinements and guide decisions on broader implementation.

Leverage TRANSCOM as an Ongoing Coordination Forum

TRANSCOM can continue to serve as the primary venue for advancing regional coordination by facilitating discussion, consensus-building, and ongoing refinement of strategies. As coordination efforts evolve, TRANSCOM can play an expanded role in tracking progress, resolving interagency challenges, and developing recommendations for advancing customer-facing improvements. Leveraging TRANSCOM in this way ensures that coordination efforts remain grounded in operator experience and responsive to local needs while maintaining a consistent regional perspective.

Evaluate Progress and Refine Services Over Time

As coordination efforts are implemented, agencies should establish a process for periodically evaluating outcomes, including both quantitative performance metrics and qualitative customer feedback. This iterative approach allows operators to identify challenges, assess the effectiveness of pilot initiatives, and refine strategies as needed. Continuous evaluation supports incremental improvement, builds confidence among participating agencies, and ensures that future coordination efforts are informed by demonstrated results before considering any broader or longer-term changes.

SUMMARY

VCTC, in partnership with local transit operators, developed this CEP to identify practical, near-term strategies to enhance demand-response services across the region. These services are essential for supporting mobility among seniors, individuals with disabilities, and other riders with limited transportation options. The plan focuses on improving the customer experience within the existing system while supporting continued coordination among agencies.

Demand-response services in Ventura County have advanced through expanded interjurisdictional service, improved policy alignment, and the countywide implementation of the RideCo platform. While these improvements have enhanced system performance and rider experience, key challenges remain, including:

- Inconsistencies in policies, branding, and customer-facing tools across agencies
- Limited visibility and ease of navigating regional travel options
- High operating costs and efficiency constraints inherent to demand-response service

Building on this progress, the plan identifies opportunities to create a more seamless, user-friendly experience for riders, particularly for trips that cross jurisdictional boundaries. These opportunities include:

- Improving coordination of customer-facing tools (e.g., mobile apps, call center access, and branding)
- Reducing barriers to travel, including minimizing transfers for regional trips
- Strengthening policy alignment, performance metrics, and data sharing
- Leveraging TRANSCOM to advance collaborative, consensus-driven improvements

The plan emphasizes a balanced, flexible approach that supports coordination while preserving local control and acknowledging recent agency investments. It also outlines potential service delivery and cost allocation concepts to inform future discussion, emphasizing that these approaches are intended to reduce customer barriers rather than advance formal service integration. Overall, the plan provides a practical framework for continued partnership among agencies, focusing on incremental, customer-focused improvements that enhance accessibility, consistency, and regional mobility while supporting transparent and equitable decision-making.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COORDINATION STRATEGY DETAIL

Implementation Support Consultant (Client Representative)

VCTC and local operators should consider procuring or engaging a Client Representative to support the implementation of customer-facing customer service improvements and coordination of potential regional demand-response initiatives. The Client Representative would serve as a neutral party and central point of coordination, helping to facilitate collaboration among agencies, support implementation of shared strategies, and ensure progress toward improved customer service outcomes.

The Client Representative is also intended to help alleviate the administrative and coordination burden on individual operators by serving as a central point of coordination for cross-agency efforts. While some level of participation and input from local operators will continue to be necessary, the overall approach is designed to streamline coordination activities and reduce duplicative efforts. Implementation of specific initiatives would occur through a collaborative process, with items advancing based on operator consensus and availability of staff and funding resources, ensuring that efforts remain manageable and do not overextend agency capacity.

Responsible Party: Ventura County Transportation Commission

Length of Contract: To Be Determined

Best Practices for VCTC, Operators, and the Client Representative to Follow

- Define role clearly
- Structure contract for phased deliverables
- Support role with guidance and direction from lead agency (VCTC)
- Include stakeholder engagement responsibilities
- Require coordination with current legal teams
- Require performance tracking
- Allow for scope adjustments
- Encourage and support each jurisdiction's strengths
- Address each jurisdiction's weaknesses

When: Implementation of any next steps, such as engaging a Client Representative, would require separate direction from the Commission, agreement from participating operators, and confirmation of available resources.

The CEP is intended to serve as a framework for consideration and does not presume consensus or commitment to implementation. Any advancement of these concepts would occur through a

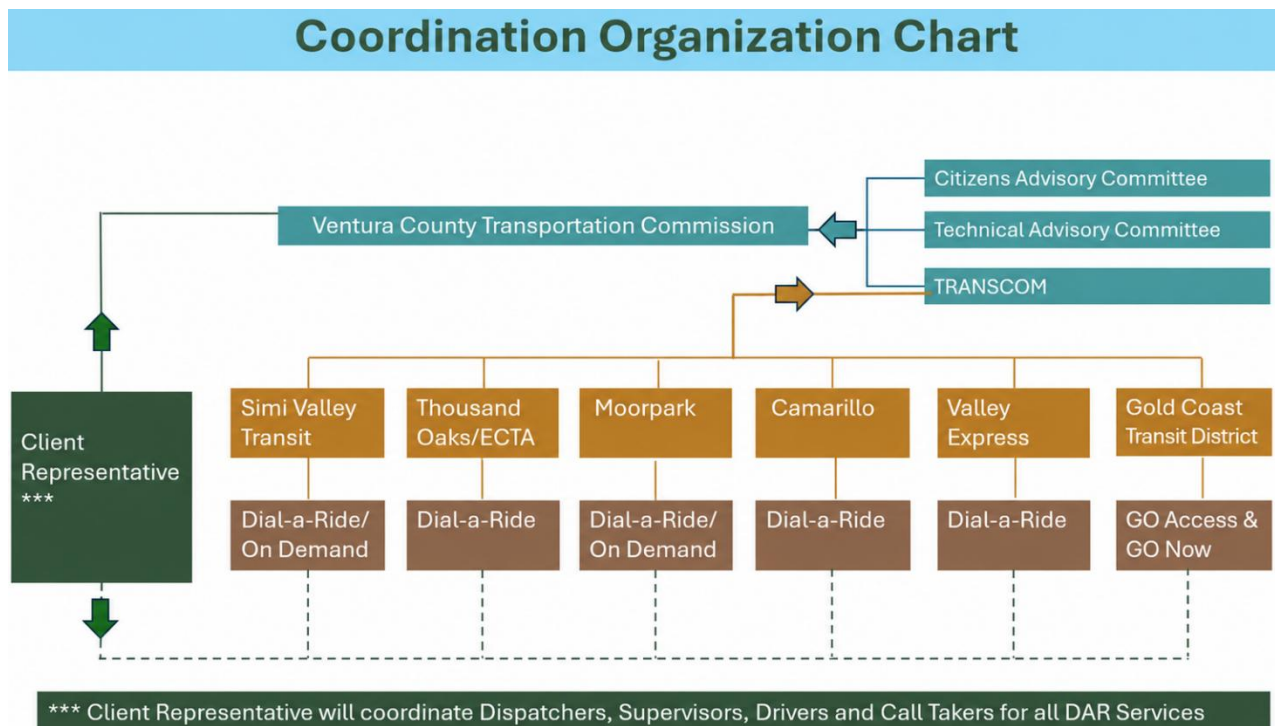
subsequent, collaborative process, allowing operators and the Commission to evaluate readiness, priorities, and alignment with ongoing or future study efforts.

How: This is envisioned as a contracted position and not as a VCTC employee. Appendix A provides an example of a Job Description for this position. An initial workplan would need to be prepared by the Client Representative, in consultation with TRANSCOM.

Cost: Estimates for this position range between \$150,000 to \$175,000 annually, inclusive of a small direct expense budget, largely for local travel and envisioned as a time-limited contract of two years.

Cost Sharing/Cost Responsibility: VCTC would be responsible for funding the Client Representative. The jurisdictions will share the benefits of that oversight and leadership role (similar to how VCTC implemented out RideCo for countywide use).

Initial Table of Organization: Once the Client Representative is hired, the position would report to VCTC on a contractual basis and maintain established partnerships and communication channels across the County. The figure below illustrates the organizational structure envisioned for reporting purposes. This structure evolves as the Client Representative and participating agencies determine the future of DAR services.



Peer Agency Practices

The peer agency examples below are included to provide relevant context and demonstrate how similarly structured regions have approached fare policy and service delivery across multiple jurisdictions. Both Riverside Transit Agency and Omnitrans operate in environments that share key characteristics with Ventura County, including geographic scale, diverse travel patterns, and multi-agency coordination challenges. Their use of zone-based fare structures illustrates how agencies can balance simplicity for riders with cost recovery considerations in a regional context.

Riverside Transit Agency (RTA)

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 DAR 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.⁴

OmniAccess

The DAR 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. The image shows an example of the zones they travel through, as well as the associated fares by zones.⁵

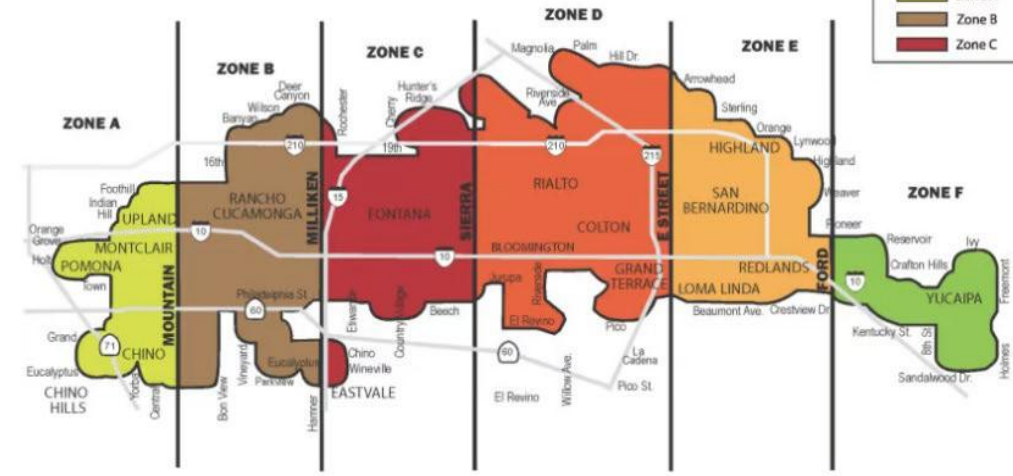
⁴ <https://www.riversidetransit.com/index.php/dial-a-ride/what-is-dial-a-ride>

⁵ <https://omnitrans.org/services/access-ada/>



OmniAccess service operates on the same days and hours as fixed route services. Areas where routes do not run on Saturdays and Sundays will not offer Access service on those days.
 El servicio OmniAccess funciona en los mismos días y horas que los servicios de rutas fijas. Las áreas donde las rutas no funcionan los sábados y domingos no ofrecerán servicio de acceso en esos días.

Access Zones
 tenga Access a las zonas



Reservations & Information
Reservaciones y información
 1 (800) 990-2404
 (909) 383-1680
 TDD:11

OmniAccess Fares		Tarifas OmniAccess	
Standard Service: per trip fare	Eligible Rider and Companion	Current Fare	Tarifa actual
1-3 zones		\$ 3.75	Viajes por 1 a 3 zonas \$ 3.75
4 zone trips		\$ 4.75	Viajes por 4 zonas \$ 4.75
5 zone trips		\$ 5.75	Viajes por 5 zonas \$ 5.75
6 zone trips		\$ 6.75	Viajes por 6 zonas \$ 6.75

There are two potential models for fare allocation, one based on mileage, and one based on zones. The following section outlines how each model functions in practice, including key advantages, tradeoffs, and considerations for implementation in Ventura County. While both methods offer viable pathways to improve transparency and consistency in fare policy, they differ in how costs are communicated to riders and allocated across jurisdictions. The discussion that follows is intended to support informed decision-making by highlighting how each approach aligns with regional goals related to equity, simplicity, and long-term financial sustainability.

Mileage-Based Fare Allocation

Mileage-based allocation assigns fares proportionally to the miles traveled on each trip. Ventura County is roughly 40 miles across, below is a sample of what a mileage-based fare cost allocation can look like for a DAR user. The base fare for anyone leaving their home would be \$4.00 with a \$5.00 increase for every 10 miles traveled.

Table 7 - Mileage-Based Example

Base Fare	1–10 Miles	11–20 Miles	21–30 Miles	31–40 Miles
\$4.00	\$5.00	\$10.00	\$15.00	\$20.00

Total Maximum One-Way Trip = \$24.00

Advantages of Mileage-Based Fare Allocation

This approach is generally supported as a fair and transparent method of aligning fares with service usage. While mileage-based fares may be more complex for riders to understand compared to flat or zone-based structures, this potential challenge can be addressed through clear communication,

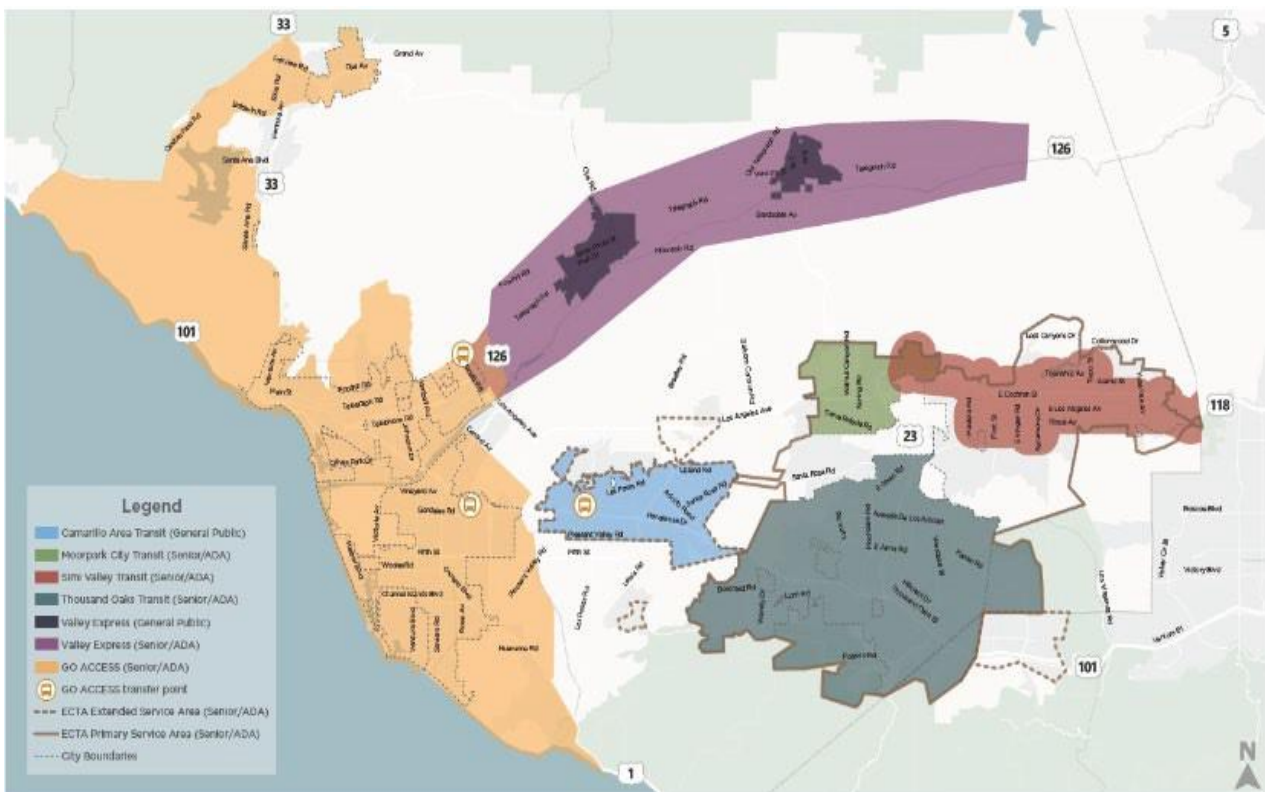
effective marketing, and user-friendly tools that help riders easily estimate the cost of their trips. Some key advantages include:

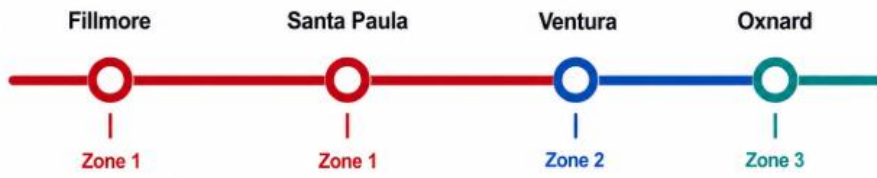
Considerations for Mileage-Based Fare Allocation

While mileage-based fare allocation is generally viewed as a fair and transparent approach to aligning costs with service usage, it also presents several considerations that may require careful implementation. The variability of fares based on distance can make it more difficult for riders to predict trip costs in advance, particularly for those unfamiliar with mileage-based systems. This concern can be mitigated through clear communication, user-friendly fare estimation tools, and consistent messaging to help riders understand how fares are calculated. Additionally, agencies may need to consider potential equity impacts for riders traveling longer distances—particularly in low-density or rural areas—to ensure that fare structures remain accessible and do not create unintended barriers to service.

Zone-Based Fare Calculation

A zone-based fare allocation for DAR services is a system that divides the service area by logical groupings (in this case, primarily the cities and nearby unincorporated developments) and bases cost-sharing on the number of zones a trip crosses. The Ventura County DAR service map below shows color-coded areas that could be the basis for a DAR fare zone and each zone would be a designated price.





Advantages of Zone-Based Fare Allocation

Zone-based fare structures are generally easier for riders to understand, as clear geographic boundaries and a defined zone map allow riders to more easily estimate the cost of a trip compared to per-mile pricing. This approach is scalable for larger geographic areas and provides a predictable and transparent fare structure, as costs can be pre-calculated based on zone pairings. In addition, zone-based systems simplify financial planning by allowing agencies and funding partners to anticipate costs within fixed fare bands (e.g., a trip from one zone to another consistently incurs the same cost). From an operational perspective, this approach also supports jurisdictional cost allocation, as zone boundaries can be used to more easily assign costs based on trip origins and destinations.

Considerations for Zone-Based Fare Allocation

Zone-based fare structures also present several considerations that may require careful evaluation during implementation. Because zone boundaries are defined geographically, they may not always align with actual travel patterns, which can cause them to feel arbitrary from a rider's perspective. Trips that begin or end near zone boundaries can appear inconsistently priced relative to similar trip distances, potentially leading to perceptions of unfairness. In addition, zone-based systems may not reflect true variations in service costs as precisely as distance-based models, particularly for longer or more complex trips that span multiple jurisdictions. While these challenges do not preclude use of a zone-based approach, they highlight the importance of thoughtful zone design, clear communication, and ongoing monitoring to ensure fares remain equitable and easy for riders to understand.

Fare Policy and Allocation Approaches

There are a range of fare policies and allocation approaches that may be considered to improve DAR services throughout the County. Fares should be consistent with the framework established in the Ventura County SRTP and can be further refined through the coordinated policy-setting process recommended in this plan.

As agencies explore options, fare structures should balance simplicity for riders with the need to reflect service costs, support operational efficiency, and maintain equity across jurisdictions. Consideration should also be given to how fares align with regional mobility goals, including reducing barriers to travel for riders making trips across service boundaries. Establishing a coordinated approach to fare policy can help improve transparency, support seamless travel, and lay the groundwork for potential future coordination efforts.

Farebox Recovery and Funding Considerations

Transit agencies in California are required, pursuant to the Transportation Development Act (TDA), to meet minimum farebox recovery ratio of 20 percent in urbanized areas and 10 percent in rural areas. If a regional mobility pilot program were implemented, the requirements would be waived for two (2) full fiscal years, in addition to the remainder of the fiscal year in which the pilot is initiated.

Based on the Integration Concept Report, the average cost to operate on-demand service in Ventura County is approximately \$10.40 per mile. Assuming an average one-way trip length of six miles, roughly double that of a typical local DAR trip, the fully allocated cost of a regional trip is estimated at \$62.40. In this context, jurisdictions receiving TDA funding may consider evaluating the feasibility of allocating a greater share of those funds towards regional trips, while also pursuing supplemental funding sources, such as the Access for All Program, to help offset costs and mitigate farebox recovery constraints. Continued coordination with RideCo to optimize regional trip-making and increase passengers per trip may also help improve fare revenue and overall cost efficiency.

Uniform Branding

The National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) Branding Toolkit highlights that effective branding is foundational to customer understanding and awareness, particularly for DAR services.⁴ Clear, consistent branding helps riders better recognize available services, understand how to access them, and distinguish between different service types across jurisdictions.

Agencies are encouraged to ensure that all public-facing information is clear, accessible, and easy to understand for riders of varying abilities, languages, and backgrounds. This includes providing meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency and ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities through tools such as translated materials, large print, audio formats, and accessible digital content. The use of plain language is also strongly recommended to reduce confusion and improve usability.

In addition, effective communication plays a critical role in maintaining trust and confidence in transit services, particularly during service changes, disruptions, or emergency situations. Proactive outreach, through methods such as surveys, community meetings, and direct notifications, can help ensure that riders and stakeholders are informed in a timely and accessible manner.

Incorporating these principles into a coordinated branding and communications approach can help improve consistency across agencies, reduce barriers to understanding and accessing services, and ultimately enhance the overall customer experience for riders traveling within and across Ventura County.

Naming Conventions/Logos

Below is a sample concept for how regional trip naming and branding could be presented to customers. The proposed design draws from the colors of Ventura County's existing transit providers to reflect regional collaboration, and the other elements represent the County's geographic identity and sense of place. Together, these elements create a unified visual language that is both locally recognizable and regionally cohesive.

The accompanying messaging is intentionally simple and customer-focused, emphasizing the availability of one-seat rides across the County and reinforcing the ease of regional travel. By clearly communicating that riders can travel seamlessly beyond their local jurisdiction, the branding concept

aims to reduce uncertainty, improve awareness of available services, and encourage broader use of the system. While conceptual, this example demonstrates how coordinated branding can support a more intuitive and accessible customer experience without requiring agencies to forego their individual identities.



VENTURA COUNTY

ONE SEAT RIDE



Your Ride. Our County. One Connection. |  DIAL-A-RIDE
COUNTYWIDE

 ONE EASY CALL |  COUNTYWIDE SERVICE |  RELIABLE. ACCESSIBLE. FOR EVERYONE.

⁴ <http://cloud.nationalrtap.org/Toolkits/Marketing-Toolkit/How-To-Guide-for-Marketing-Transit/Strategies-for-Marketing-Public-Transit/Fundamental-Communications>

DRIP: APPENDICES

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Example

The following MOU is provided for illustrative purposes only to demonstrate a potential framework for coordination. It does not constitute as a recommended or adopted agreement and would require review, refinement, and consensus among all participating agencies. Any future MOU would be subject to review and approval by each agency's legal counsel, risk management teams, and governing bodies.

Purpose

This MOU establishes a cooperative framework among Ventura County transit agencies ("Parties") to coordinate the provision of a regional dial-a-ride (DAR) service. The intent is to improve cross-jurisdictional mobility, enhance customer experience, and increase operational efficiency while preserving each Party's independent governance, operational control, and service delivery structure.

Principles

This MOU's principles are explained in detail in the beginning of the plan.

Scope

The Parties agree to collaborate in the following areas:

Regional trip coordination and/or a service model agreed upon by all parties

- Shared customer-facing tools (one call number/one mobile app)
- Standardized rider policies
- Data sharing and reporting
- Branding and customer communication
- Each Party retains responsibility for its own fleet, personnel, contractor management, and daily operations.

Roles and Responsibilities: Lead Agency

VCTC, in conjunction with its contracted Client Representative, will be the designated Lead Agency and shall: facilitate coordination meetings, oversee implementation of shared technologies, administer any jointly procured contracts if feasible, develop regional performance metrics and reporting templates, and act as a central point of contact for regional service issues.

Participating Agencies

Each participating agency shall:

- Continue to operate and manage its local DAR service, including drivers, vehicles, and dispatch

- Provide service within its jurisdiction and, where agreed, fulfill regional trips
- Accept and perform inter-agency trips based on mutually agreed protocols
- Participate in a shared call center system or coordinated call routing
- Provide consistent rider information aligned with regional standards
- Work toward consistency in:
 - No-show/late cancellation policies
 - Fare structures
 - Service hours and booking windows
 - Provide agreed-upon operational and performance data
 - Participate in regional reporting and evaluation efforts

Joint Responsibilities

The Parties collectively agree to:

- Develop and maintain regional service standards
- Establish trip allocation protocols, including:
 - Which agency serves which trips
 - Cost allocation methodology (e.g., per trip, per mile, negotiated rates)
- Coordinate service planning and adjustments
- Participate in joint procurement opportunities, such as:
- Implement a regional branding strategy

Cost Sharing and Financial Arrangements - Each Party shall remain financially responsible for its own operations. The costs associated with regional trips shall be reimbursed based on a mutually agreed formula. The future shared system costs (e.g., software, call center) may be split proportionally (e.g., by population, ridership, or usage), or funded through grants or external sources.

Governance Structure - The existing TRANSCOM Committee and Client Representative will oversee implementation and policy alignment, the review of performance metrics, and resolve any operational issues.

Term and Termination - This MOU shall remain in effect for five years.

Client Representative Contract Job Description Example

The following Client Representative job description, including items such as contract term, salary range, and classification, is provided for illustrative purposes only. Final scope, compensation, and structure would be subject to available funding, as well as input and consensus from TRANSCOM and participating operators. Any future position would require further refinement and formal approval through applicable agency processes.

Reports To: VCTC

Classification: Full-Time, Exempt / Contract

Salary Range: \$125k - \$175k

Position Summary

The Client Representative is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the planning, implementation, and operational alignment of regional on-demand rides across multiple jurisdictions, providers, and platforms, specifically; with the cities of Simi Valley, Camarillo, Moorpark, Thousand Oaks; as well as the Valley Express and Gold Coast regions. This position serves as the program's lead liaison with service contractors, RideCo (scheduling software), local jurisdictions, and regional partners to ensure ADA compliance, service quality, and policy consistency.

Key Responsibilities

Strategic Planning & Integration

- Develop service model for regional trip making
- Align eligibility criteria, fare policies, scheduling parameters, and service areas

Contract & Vendor Oversight

- Monitor performance of selected service model
- Coordinate with RideCo, dispatch, and call centers to ensure interoperability

Policy & Compliance

- Ensure adherence to ADA (49 CFR Part 37), Title VI, and FTA compliance requirements
- Standardized policies on no-shows, advance reservations, cancellations, and service delivery

Stakeholder Engagement

- Facilitate TRANSCOM meetings related to regional trip making with participating agencies and stakeholders
- Lead outreach to community organizations, riders with disabilities, and local jurisdictions
- Serve as the central point of contact for cross-agency issues or service escalation

Reporting & Funding Support

- Compile operational data and produce regular performance and compliance reports
- Assist with preparing documentation for grant applications and reporting (e.g., 5310, LCTOP)
- Identify opportunities for funding coordination and cost-sharing across services

Qualifications

Minimum Requirements

- Bachelor's degree in public administration, transportation planning, business, or related field
- 5+ years of experience in public transit, mobility management, or contract oversight
- Strong understanding of ADA paratransit regulations and demand-response operations

Desired Skills

- Experience with transit scheduling/dispatch software (e.g., Via, RideCo, Trapeze, Ecolane)
- Knowledge of FTA funding sources and reporting requirements
- Strong interpersonal and negotiation skills for managing contracts and interagency relations
- Ability to manage multiple projects and stakeholders simultaneously

Work Environment

This position may involve a hybrid of office, remote, and field work. Occasional travel to partner jurisdictions, public meetings, and contractor sites is required.

Integration Concept Plan | Framework for Future Consideration

Purpose and Relationship to the Customer Experience Plan (CEP)

While the CEP focuses on near-term, customer-facing improvements that can be implemented within the existing service structure, the companion Integration Concept Plan (ICP) serves a different and complementary purpose.

The ICP is intended to document existing conditions, outline potential regional service delivery models, and provide a planning framework that may be used if VCTC and local transit operators choose to revisit or pursue further integration in the future. It is not a recommendation for immediate implementation, nor does it establish a required course of action. Rather, it is designed to inform future discussions by identifying key considerations, potential approaches, and decision points associated with deeper coordination.

Decision-Making Requirements

Advancement of any concepts outlined in the ICP would require separate direction and approval from both the Commission and participating operators. Should there be interest in revisiting these concepts, VCTC would return to the Commission and TRANSCOM with progress updates, additional analysis, and clearly defined next steps for consideration. This would include further evaluation of governance structures, cost allocation methodologies, operational responsibilities, and institutional readiness.

Consideration Factors for Advancing Integration Concepts

In addition, several key elements would need to be developed prior to advancing any integration-related concepts, including identification of funding strategies, completion of targeted community and stakeholder outreach, and refinement of implementation pathways. These efforts would ensure that any future decisions are supported by robust analysis, stakeholder input, and a clear understanding of potential impacts.

Priority on Near-Term Customer Improvements

Consistent with the phased approach described throughout this plan, priority should first be given to implementing the customer-facing improvements identified in the CEP. These actions, such as enhancing coordination of customer tools, advancing policy alignment, and improving regional communication, are intended to deliver immediate benefits to riders while also establishing a stronger operational and collaborative foundation across agencies. Progress made through these efforts may also influence future considerations related to integration.

Adaptive Framework and Need for Ongoing Analysis

Given that conditions, performance, and coordination practices are expected to evolve as CEP strategies are implemented, additional analysis would be necessary before advancing any concepts outlined in the ICP. As such, the ICP should be viewed as a guiding framework based on current

conditions rather than a prescriptive roadmap. Any future application of the ICP would require refinement to reflect updated data, operational experience, and policy direction at that time. In this plan structure, the CEP and ICP function together as part of an ongoing, iterative planning process, prioritizing near-term improvements while preserving flexibility for future decision-making, consistent with Commission direction and operator collaboration.