

THE INTEGRATION CONCEPT PLAN

As supporting documentation for the *Ventura County Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan*, this Integration Conceptual Plan (ICP) provides background and existing conditions analysis of the County's demand-response services and the implementation steps should the Commission and transit operators choose to pursue the full integration of 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 250,000 passenger trips. The Transit Integration and Efficiency Study (TIES) evaluated multiple integration scenarios, and in 2023 the VCTC recommended advancing Alternative 1 with the continued study of Alternative 2, which includes demand-response integration. This plan examines the potential creation of a countywide demand-response agency encompassing all existing paratransit and dial-a-ride programs, along with the subregional consolidation of fixed-route services across the County. The ICP provides background, analyzes and establishes a path forward for integration should the Commission elect to pursue it.

Nothing in this plan requires, mandates, or obligates any local jurisdiction or operator to implement or participate in the proposed integration. Rather, this document is intended solely as a conceptual framework and reference, serving as a blueprint should the Commission and its partner agencies choose to revisit integration in the future.

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, while also identifying opportunities to support regional trip-making and enhance connectivity through improved coordination and interjurisdictional access.

As demand-response systems experience growth, the complexity of coordinating trips across jurisdictional boundaries becomes more apparent, highlighting opportunities to strengthen regional connectivity. Different characteristics amongst operators such as rider policies, fares and passes, program eligibility and operating

technology can hinder the rider's ability to navigate transit services across the region.

Integration elements for demand response services under Alternative 2 include integrated call center software and regional vehicle deployment (without geographical boundary restrictions) to improve service delivery and cost efficiency, as well as to facilitate more seamless long-distance travel throughout the region.

The DRIP provides a foundational framework for integration, building upon the concepts established under Alternatives 1 and 2 and identifying implementable strategies that consider the operational and financial implications of integration as well as rider benefits.

Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan), 2022 Update

The Coordinated Plan is another foundational study besides the TIES that defines the need to improve the 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 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.

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 limited access to technology in using public transportation – finding the ride, booking the trip, paying the fare.
- **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-eligible 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 address policy, infrastructure, programs, and services. Accessibility documentation, ADA vehicle procurement, and ADA administrative processes were identified as high priorities with medium-level implementation effort.

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 key challenges and opportunities that demand-response integration could address, based on Ventura County's existing service design. Additional system performance details are provided in the Ventura County 2025–2034 SRTP. The analysis is primarily based on 2023 data, with recent updates noted where applicable, and focuses on 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.

Demand-Response Service Classification by Ridership Category

The service areas of seven (7) demand-response operators serving Ventura County are shown in Exhibit A (following page). These programs are categorized by program type, with some serving multiple categories:

- 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.

Table 2 – Program Types

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

As a countywide policy, all ADA complementary paratransit programs include seniors (ages 65 and older) within their eligibility criteria; these riders, along with ADA-certified individuals, are pre-registered to utilize paratransit service.

Demand-response programs available to the general public riders, without eligibility requirements, include traditional DAR programs such as Camarillo general purpose DAR and Valley Express general purpose DAR and microtransit services, including Moorpark On-Demand, and Simi Valley Transit On Demand.

Service Areas and Transfer Locations

The largest service area is operated by Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD)/Go ACCESS, which serves multiple communities. Individual municipalities, including Camarillo, Thousand Oaks, Moorpark and Simi Valley, each operate their own services. The East County Transit Alliance (ECTA) provides trips between eastern county communities, with transfer connections to more distant communities. Camarillo also provides trips for its residents to and from Moorpark, Simi Valley, and Thousand Oaks. Valley Express provides service in the Santa Clara River Valley, serving Santa Paula, Fillmore, and Piru.

Transfers among the county's demand-response services are a key focus of this integration study, as efforts to remove barriers to seamless travel between communities require improved coordination across systems. This has also been included in ongoing requests from the community regarding the challenges of using paratransit services across jurisdictions, as well as in observed travel patterns that highlight the potential need for more seamless regional travel. The implementation of RideCo's software platform has already reduced transfer-related challenges and improved transfer efficiency. Requests have been brought up through the Unmet Transit Needs process, most recent Coordinated Plan and community outreach events.

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

Table 3 – Ventura County DAR Transfer Locations

Transfer Location	Notes
St. John's Regional Medical Center	GO ACCESS pick-ups/drop-offs CAT or ECTA passengers here, CAT passengers dropped off at home
Camarillo Town Center	GO ACCESS meeting ECTA riders and vice versa
Wells and Telegraph	Valley Express riders transfer to and from GO ACCESS here

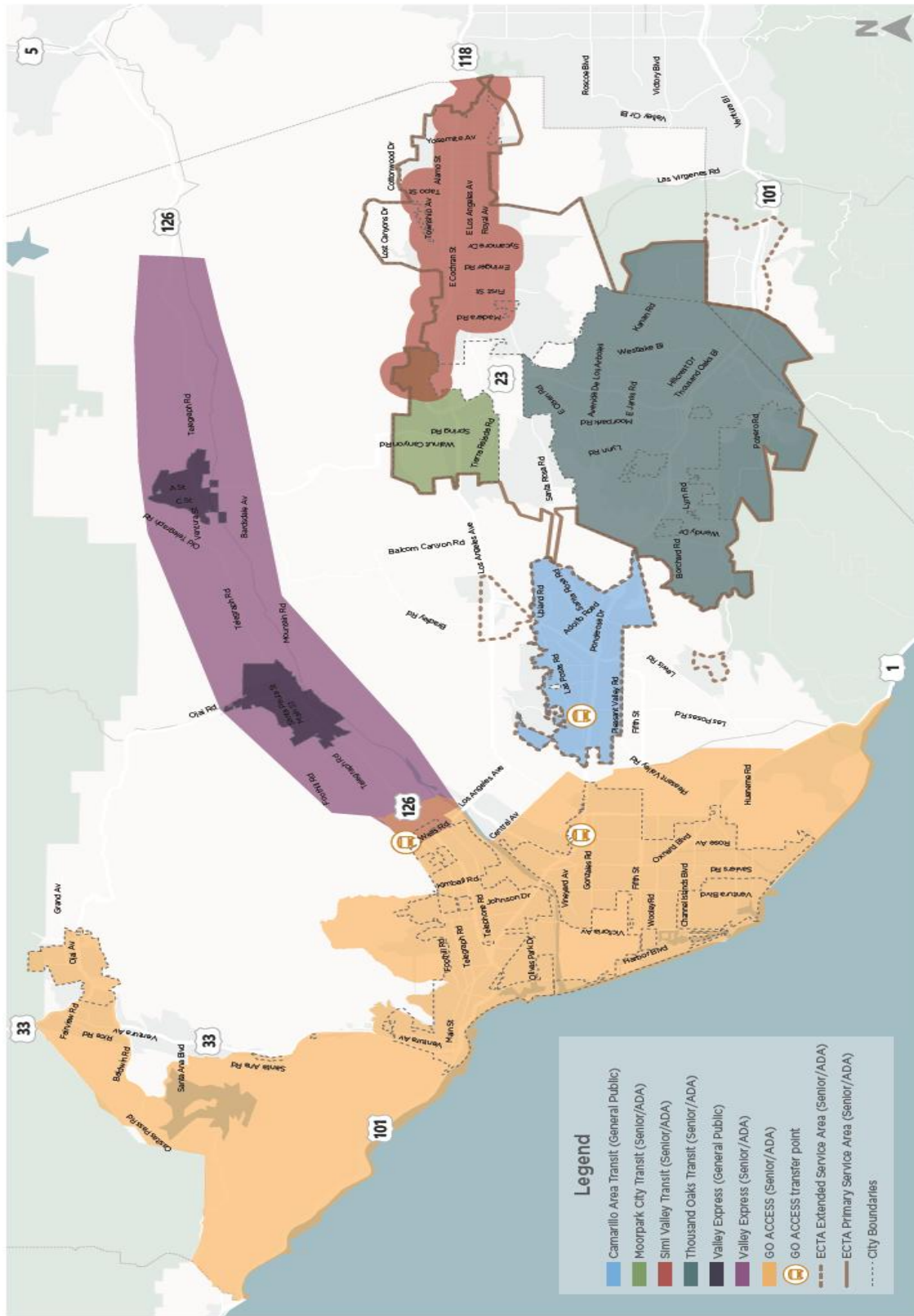


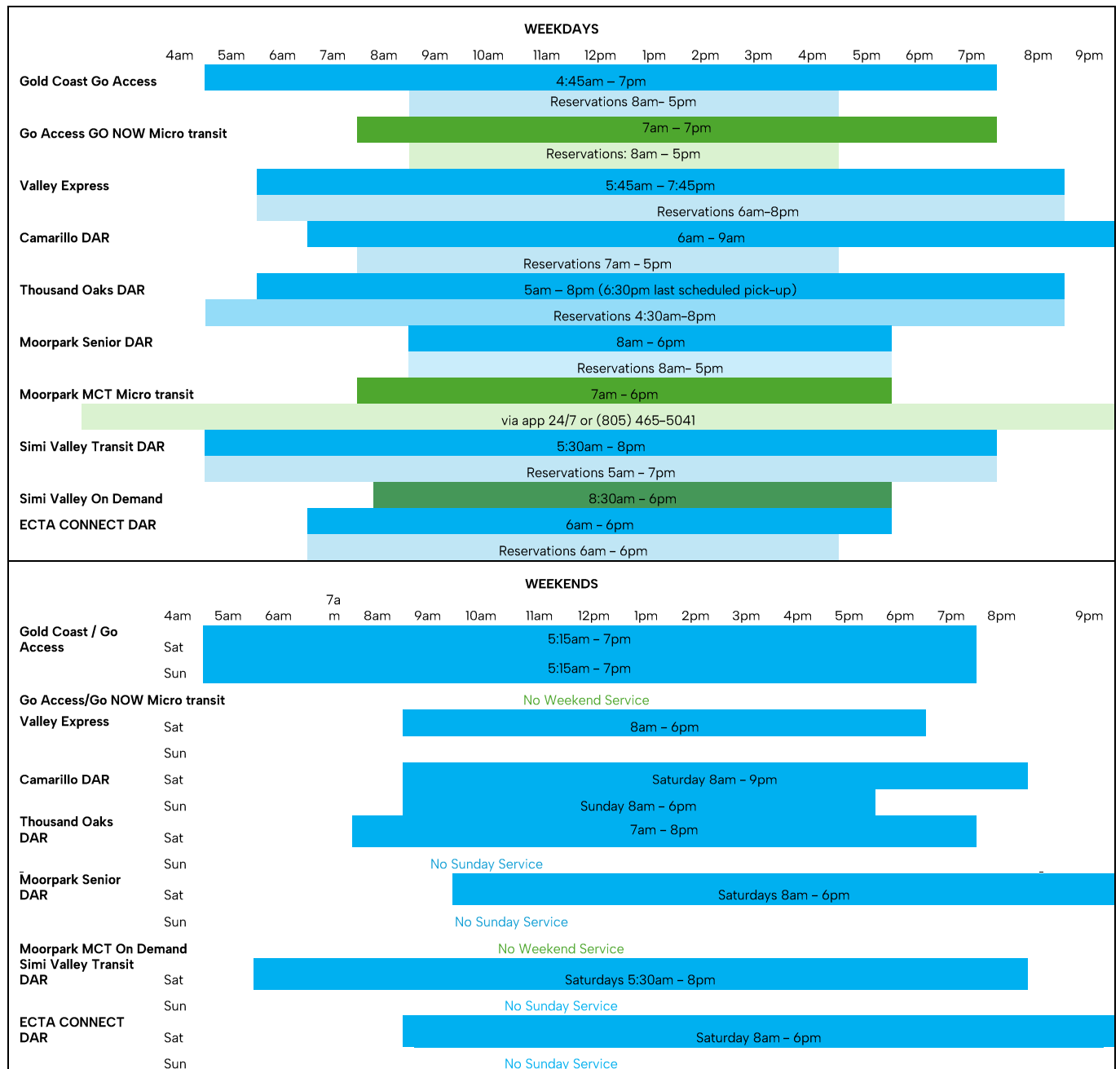
Figure 1 - Ventura County's DAR Service Areas

Operating Days and Hours

Operating days and hours vary among the County's nine demand-response transit services. For ADA paratransit services, operating schedules are required by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to correspond with the operating hours of the associated fixed-route services. The figure below summarizes weekday and weekend operating hours for the County's demand-response programs, with microtransit services highlighted in green.

For the purposes of this study, both the existing dial-a-ride programs and potential regional rides services will be evaluated. Unlike ADA complementary paratransit, regional rides would be considered a premium service and would not be subject to FTA requirements to mirror fixed-route service schedules.

Figure 2 – DR Program Hours



Fares and Fare Payment

Fare policies and systems vary across jurisdictions, reflecting differences in local operating practices, fare structures, and technology platforms. As illustrated in the chart below, agencies utilize a mix of payment methods, including exact cash, pre-

paid fare media, mobile ticketing applications, and agency-specific electronic fare accounts, resulting in an inconsistent customer experience across services.

These variations extend not only to how fares are paid, but also to fare levels, eligibility categories (e.g. senior and person with disabilities), and pricing structures for regional or intercity trips. In some cases, agencies offer digital payment options through mobile apps, while others continue to rely primarily on cash or legacy fare media, creating barriers for riders traveling across jurisdictional boundaries.

The ongoing migration toward RideCo's point-of-sale (POS) system in 2026 represents a significant step toward modernizing and standardizing fare collection across participating agencies. This transition is expected to:

- **Streamline fare payment options** by providing a consistent, app-based payment platform across services
- **Improve customer convenience** by reducing confusion about accepted payment methods when traveling between jurisdictions
- **Support operational efficiency** by integrating fare collection directly with scheduling, dispatch, and trip management systems
- **Enhance data consistency** for revenue tracking, reporting, and interagency cost allocation

This effort builds on broader system integration work enabled through RideCo, which has already highlighted how differing local policies, including fare structures, can impact system performance, customer understanding, and overall service efficiency.

While agencies will continue to retain local control over fare levels and policy decisions in the near term, the transition to a shared POS system establishes a foundational platform for future coordination. Over time, it may also support greater fare alignment, simplified fare policies, and seamless rider experiences across the countywide demand-response network.

Figure 3 – DR 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, RideCo App
Camarillo DAR	\$2	\$3	\$6 on Regional Service	Exact Cash, Umo, Fare Card or via RideCo App
Thousand Oaks DAR	\$4	n/a	n/a	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, RideCo App
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

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, as part of the public outreach plan for this study. Overall satisfaction is high, with many respondents rating responses as either “good” or “excellent.”

Survey responses also highlighted areas where rider experiences vary, including reservations, call responsiveness, and vehicle on-time performance. These service elements are influenced by a range of operational factors, such as scheduling practices, staffing, and service policies, that differ across agencies. As reflected elsewhere in this report, variations in these policies include differences in reservation windows, on-time performance definitions, dwell time, and late cancellation thresholds.

These findings help to identify opportunities for further evaluation and coordination across providers to support a more consistent and predictable rider experience.

In addition to the outreach conducted specifically for this study, VCTC conducts annual Unmet Transit Needs outreach activities as part of its broader planning process. These outreach activities provide an opportunity for the public to identify gaps in transit service and inform funding and service priorities. Input received through this process is considered in coordination with other planning efforts, including the Ventura County SRTP.

Table 4 – DAR Survey Ratings

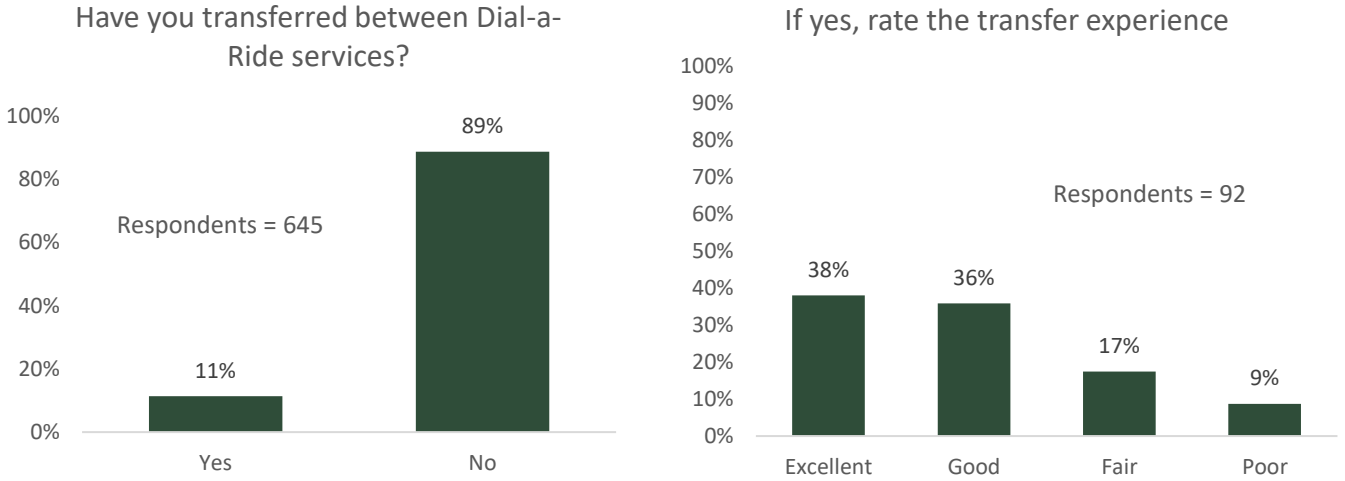
Question prompt	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Reservationist's ability to reserve a trip near the time you requested	41%	37%	16%	5%
Telephone wait time to speak to reservationists	37%	39%	20%	4%
Vehicle's on-time performance in picking you up	34%	35%	21%	11%
Driver's assistance to you	50%	35%	13%	3%
Safety 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. The majority rated their experience as “good” or “excellent”, 26% found the experience “fair” or “poor”.

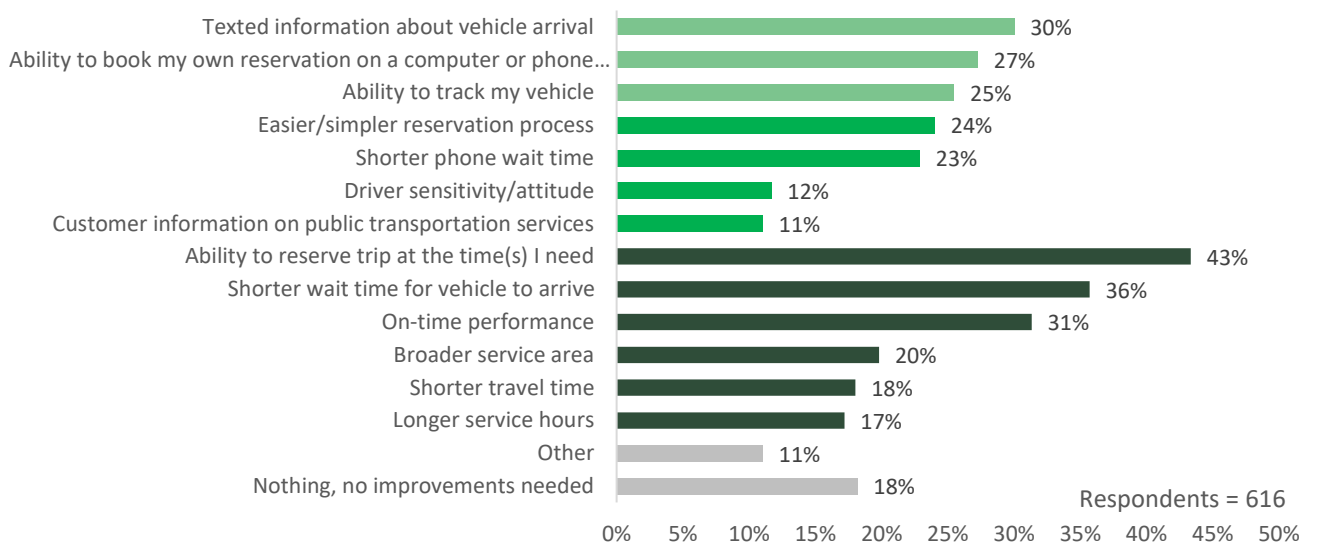
From an operator perspective, the low frequency of interjurisdictional transfers may suggest that the current locally focused service models are effectively meeting the majority of existing trip needs within individual jurisdictions. However, from a regional perspective, these findings may also reflect underlying barriers to cross-system travel, such as differing service policies, transfer requirements, or lack of awareness, that may discourage riders from making interjurisdictional trips.

As a result, while overall satisfaction is high, the data highlights an opportunity to better understand latent demand for regional travel and to explore strategies that support more seamless connections for those trips that do extend beyond local boundaries.



Improvement Questions

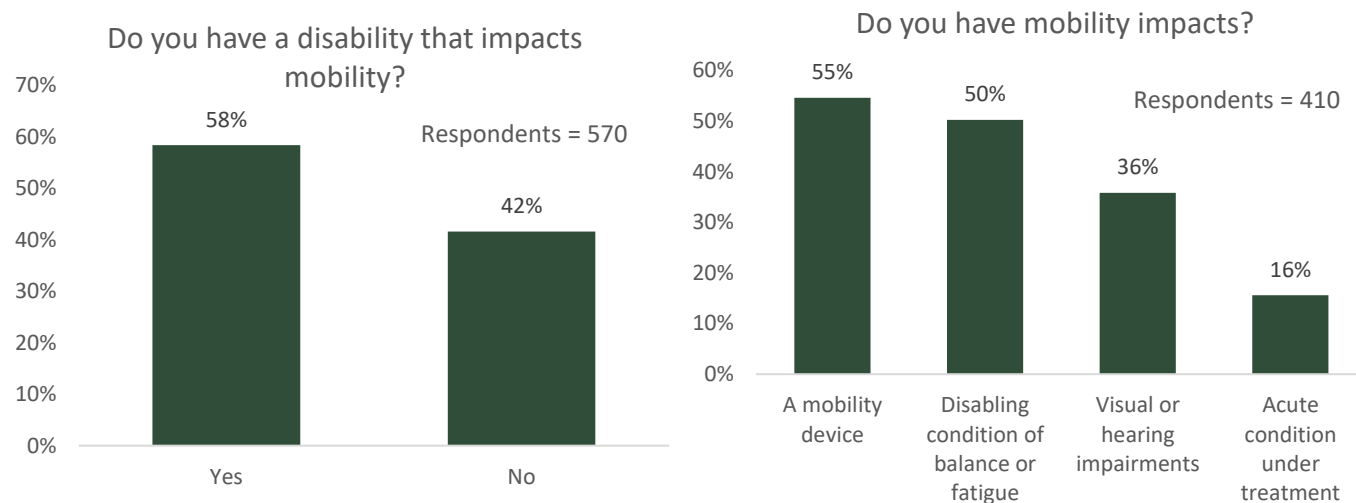
Survey respondents were asked what improvements to dial-a-ride services would help them the most. Questions fell into categories of technology (green), operations (black), and customer experience – (grey).



Responses leaned towards operational needs, specifically related to the ability to reserve a trip when they need it, shorter waiting 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.

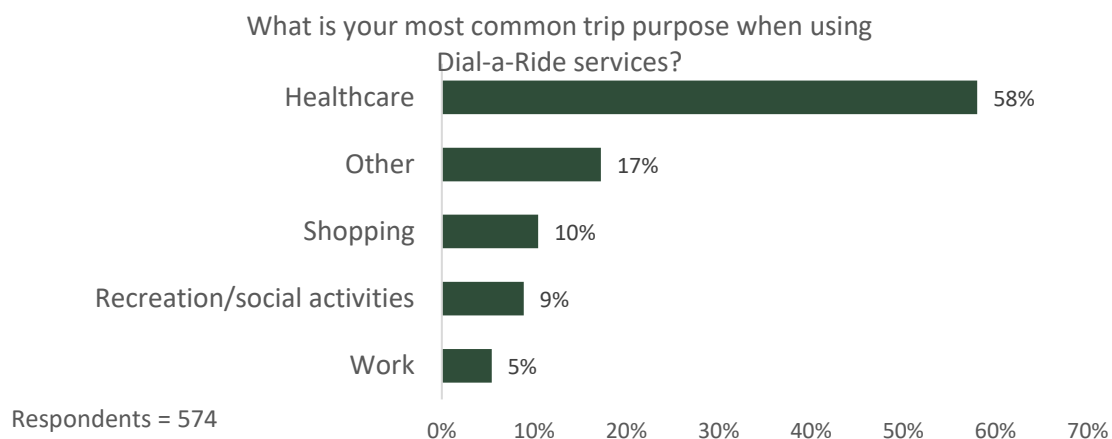
Mobility Questions

58% 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. 58% percent of respondents stated "Healthcare," 17% stated "Other," 10% stated "Shopping," 9% mentioned "Recreation," and 5% stated "Work."



Operations and Performance Considerations for Integration

The existing conditions analysis is based on 2023 data, which reflects a snapshot of operations prior to the broader implementation of RideCo. Since that time, most agencies have transitioned to the RideCo platform during 2024 and 2025, resulting in operational changes that have generally supported improved efficiency and service delivery.

As a result, current system performance and customer experience may differ from what is reflected in the 2023 baseline data and may include improvements not captured in this analysis. While these advancements represent a meaningful step forward, the findings of the existing conditions assessment remain valuable for understanding system conditions prior to these changes and for informing consideration of longer-term strategies, including opportunities for further coordination and integration.

Parameters, Metrics, and Priorities

Across the County, on-time performance, trip negotiation practices, and dispatch discipline remain important factors influencing service delivery. Historically, trips served outside the published pick-up window have the potential to undermine customer confidence and affect system 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 may occur. Lower productivity can contribute to operational adjustments, which may include evaluating service levels and vehicle deployment.

Unit Costs

The costs of providing paratransit and senior transportation services has increased since 2019. The detailed existing conditions analysis by operator highlights variations across agencies; the table below provides a high-level illustration of changes in operating costs since 2019. While the overall trend reflects cost growth, actual costs continue to vary by agency and are influenced by factors such as the level and type of service provided.

Table 5 – Average DR Operating Cost per Revenue Hour

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

During the course of this planning work, the National Transit Database (NTD) provided FY2024 figures for each of the providers for Cost Per Revenue Hour. Moorpark and ECTA are included in Thousand Oaks and are not reported separately.

Table 6 – NTD FY2024 DR Expense per Vehicle Revenue Hour

Agency	FY24
Simi Valley	\$284.76 ¹
Thousand Oaks	\$209.51 ²
Camarillo	\$139.50 ³
VCTC	\$94.16 ⁴
GCTD	\$106.65 ⁵

Ridership and Productivity

Demand-response ridership declined significantly following the COVID-19 pandemic and, as of the 2023 analysis period, had not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Similar trends are reflected in system productivity, as measured by rides served per hour. Table X summarizes productivity trends across seven demand-response programs between FY19 and FY23.'

¹ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90050.pdf

² https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90165.pdf

³ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90163.pdf

⁴ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90164.pdf

⁵ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90035.pdf

During this period, four systems experienced declines in productivity, one remained relatively unchanged, and two showed improvement, with Simi Valley Transit (SVT) demonstrating an increase in rides per hour. These variations suggest that recovery patterns and operational performance have not been uniform across agencies and may be influenced by factors such as service levels, staffing levels, demand patterns, and local operating conditions.

The observed decline in productivity relative to pre-pandemic conditions reflects both reduced trip volumes and challenges associated with operating demand-response services in a lower-demand environment. When trip volumes decrease without a corresponding reduction in service hours, the number of rides per vehicle hour naturally declines, affecting overall system efficiency.

It is important to note that these findings are based on data through FY2023 and represent conditions prior to the broader implementation of RideCo across Ventura County. Since 2024, many agencies have transitioned to RideCo, which has introduced changes to scheduling, dispatching, and trip grouping that may influence productivity and service utilization. As a result, current performance may reflect improvements not captured in the earlier dataset.

While ridership and productivity have not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels in the available data, the trends identified in this analysis provide important context for understanding system performance and for evaluating strategies to support continued recovery and more efficient service delivery moving forward.

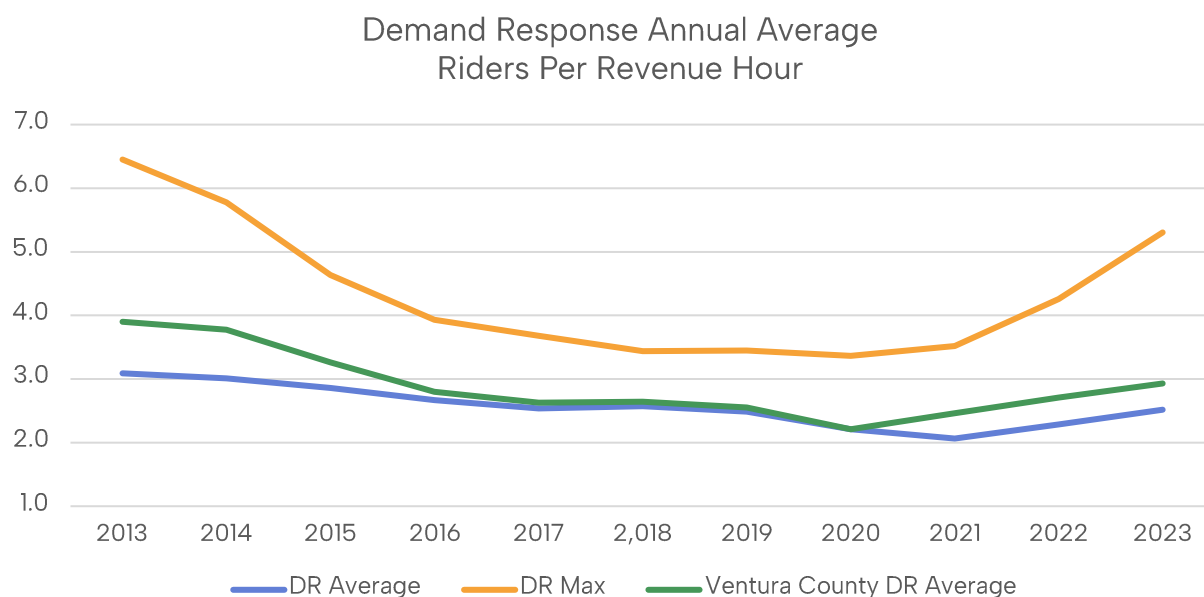
Table 7 – DR Service Productivity Indicators

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%
<i>Average Without SVT</i>	<i>2.0</i>				1.6	-21.2%

Figure 5 provides a statewide benchmark for demand-response productivity using the NTD data for California demand-response services, excluding large urban areas. The figure shows that the higher-end statewide average is approximately 5.4 rides per revenue hour, while the lower-end average is approximately 2.5 rides per revenue hour. Ventura County operators average approximately 2.9 rides per revenue hour, placing the County above the lower end of the statewide range but below the highest-performing systems included in the comparison.

The NTD-based Ventura County average differs somewhat slightly from data provided directly by operators for this analysis because agencies do not report all service data in the same way. For example, Thousand Oaks Transit reports aggregated data that includes service provided as a contractor for other agencies. For this reason, NTD data is useful as a high-level benchmark, while locally reported data remains important for understanding individual operator performance and service conditions.

Figure 4 – Productivity for California DR Services (National Transit Database)



During the course of this planning work, the NTD provided FY2024 figures for each of the providers for Rides Per Hour. Moorpark and ECTA are included in Thousand Oaks and are not reported separately.

Table 8 – NTD FY2024 DR Expense Per Vehicle Revenue Hour

Agency	FY24
Simi Valley	5.0 ⁶
Thousand Oaks	3.0 ⁷
Camarillo	2.7 ⁸
VCTC	1.2 ⁹
GCTD	2.1 ¹⁰

Interagency Transfers and Long-Distance Trip-Making

Interagency trip-making occurs within Ventura County’s demand-response network, but available data indicate that these trips represent a relatively small share of

⁶ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90050.pdf

⁷ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90165.pdf

⁸ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90163.pdf

⁹ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90164.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/90035.pdf

overall daily activity. Survey responses show that most respondents do not transfer between dial-a-ride systems, and prior findings from TIES similarly concluded that few riders utilize trips across multiple providers. Local data further illustrate this pattern; for example, at one of the County's primary transfer points at Wells Road and Telegraph, GCTD reported an average of approximately five to six transfer trips per month with Valley Express.

For riders who do make these interagency trips, the experience can present additional challenges. Transfers between vehicles may require additional coordination and time and can be more complex for riders using wheelchairs or other mobility devices. While most respondents who reported transferring rated their experience as "good" or "better", approximately 28% indicated a less favorable experience, which is notably higher than satisfaction levels typically observed for other service attributes.

In response to these challenges, some service arrangements have evolved to provide more direct trip options and reduce the need for transfers where feasible. Examples include ECTA's provision of intercity trips within east county cities, GCTD and Camarillo's direct service connection , Camarillo's service connections to Simi Valley, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks, and coordination between Valley Express and GCTD to facilitate transfers.

Integration Strategy

This chapter outlines the key components needed to support demand-response integration across Ventura County. It begins by establishing foundational service stipulations that would guide how service is delivered under any scenario, along with a set of functional improvements that agencies can advance to support successful integration. While these improvements focus on operational coordination and system performance, more detailed customer-facing enhancements are addressed separately in the Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan.

To support implementation, the chapter also presents:

- **Basic stipulations for providing service**
- **Functional improvements** needed to support integration
- **A governance framework** to enable both near- and long-term coordination
- **Phase implementation steps** outlining how integration could occur over time
- **Future funding options** to support implementation and ongoing operations

To support a coordinated approach, it is important for operators to work toward consensus on the following goals and stipulations, while ensuring compliance with FTA regulations:

- Enhance the overall rider experience, including for those who may need to travel regionally or outside of their community.
- Maintain full compliance with the 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.
- Support a shared, collaborative approach to understanding and managing productivity and cost factors in the delivery of demand-response services

All transit providers in Ventura County comply with the ADA by providing complementary paratransit services to eligible riders, consistent with FTA regulations outlined in FTA Circular 4701.1 (42 USC 12101-12213). In addition, operators offer complementary services to support senior populations.

These core service requirements represent a foundational baseline and should be recognized as common standards across all providers. Establishing shared understanding and agreement on these stipulations is important regardless of whether a more integrated service model is pursued.

Principles to Establish a Foundation for Successful Integration

The *Ventura County Demand-Response Customer Experience Plan* highlights the principles needed for increasing customer experience such as ease of booking trips, reliability, communication, and overall service consistency. These principles emphasize customer-facing improvements that can be implemented within existing agency structures to make services more intuitive, accessible, and responsive to rider needs.

This Integration Concept Plan, by contrast, focuses on the foundational principles needed to support system-level integration across agencies. In addition to service quality considerations, it addresses broader elements such as policy alignment, operational coordination, governance structures, and resource sharing that would be necessary to support a more unified system. Together, the two documents are intended to be complementary: the Customer Experience Plan identifies what improvements should feel like from the rider's perspective, while the Integration Concept Plan outlines the structural and organizational considerations needed to support those improvements at a regional level.¹¹ The following strategies identify system-level integration opportunities that go beyond the customer-facing recommendations in the CEP and could be advanced if agencies choose to pursue deeper operational coordination.

- ***Trip Scheduling Platform Roles:*** A more integrated countywide on-demand system would be supported by the use of a unified trip scheduling platform, which is currently RideCo. A shared software system can facilitate consistent data collection across agencies, providing a more complete understanding of system performance and informing operational decision-making related to service delivery and outcomes such as productivity and on-time performance.

In addition, dynamic scheduling capabilities may support improvements at both the individual agency level and across the broader network by enabling more coordinated trip assignment and resource utilization.

A unified software system has the potential to support more coordinated long-distance trip-making, including opportunities for one-seat rides where feasible or more effectively timed connections between vehicles. By enabling dynamic trip scheduling, the platform can consider systemwide conditions

¹¹ This Plan does not analyze electric vehicle ranges related to countywide fleet.

when assigning trips, allowing available vehicles to be matched based on factors such as current location and upcoming demand.

This approach may support more coordinated use of vehicles across service areas, rather than limiting operations to jurisdiction-specific fleets. In practice, this can allow agencies to better respond to varying demand levels and reduce instances where vehicles are underutilized in one area while demand exists in another. These capabilities may also contribute to reductions in non-revenue travel time between trips and support more efficient sequencing of picks up across jurisdictional boundaries.

- ***Direct One-Seat Ride Opportunities:*** The transition to RideCo has helped support more coordinated transfer timing by enabling trips to be scheduled with greater visibility across participating services. In a more fully integrated scenario, where fleets are not strictly limited by agency boundaries, there may be opportunities to improve the rider experience through more direct trip options, including one-seat rides where feasible, as well as more effectively timed connections when transfers are required.

The existing conditions analysis indicates that demand for interjurisdictional DAR trips is relatively limited and is currently being addressed through existing interagency agreements. However, these arrangements often rely on designated transfer points, which may not always represent the most efficient or convenient option for riders. Additionally, limitations in the 2023 dataset did not allow for linking interagency trips across providers to fully evaluate opportunities for more direct service. Subsequent implementation of RideCo has enabled simulation modeling of more coordinated service scenarios, which are discussed later in this chapter.

The intention of **this strategy is not to expand long-distance DAR service beyond current needs**, but rather to use available data and ongoing coordination efforts to streamline existing interjurisdictional trips. Over time, this approach may support improvements in trip simplicity, reliability, and overall customer experience for riders who already rely on these type of trips.

- ***Co-Mingled Service Considerations:*** While RideCo offers advanced scheduling capabilities, co-mingled service models serving both general public and ADA riders require careful attention to maintaining compliance with ADA complementary paratransit requirements. This includes ensuring staff, particularly call takers and dispatchers, are trained to understand and

apply FTA ADA rules, including prioritization of ADA-eligible trips where required. In some cases, this may influence how trips are assigned to balance efficiency with regulatory compliance and service obligations.

To support effective implementation of co-mingled service models, agencies may consider the following actions:

- Evaluate RideCo's capability for **accommodating multi-system trip scheduling** and dispatch functions, while maintain ADA compliance requirements
- Utilize RideCo's **reporting and analytical tools** to monitor trip demand, vehicle deployment, and performance trends, and to inform adjustments to service levels, scheduling practices, or promised pick-up windows.
- **Integrate transfer trips** into RideCo's platform to better understand opportunities for coordination and shared fleet use in cases where direct one-seat trips are not feasible.
- Explore RideCo's cost allocation and tracking capabilities, including **assigning funding responsibility** by jurisdiction and generating consistent, transparent billing information using a clearly defined, reliable, defensible and equitable methodology.

Call Center and Dispatch Integration

Establishing a single dispatching function, whether through a single physical call center or unified virtual platform, can provide meaningful benefits, particularly as the population continues to age. Older adults are more likely to rely on telephone-based interactions rather than digital tools, and often prefer a consistent, familiar point of contact when scheduling trips. A single, coordinated entry point can reduce confusion about which agency to call, simplify the trip reservation process, and improve overall accessibility for riders who may have mobility, cognitive, or language-related challenges.

In addition, a centralized system can support greater continuity of service by allowing customer service representatives to access shared information and coordinate trips across providers, rather than requiring riders to navigate multiple systems independently. For aging populations with more complex or frequent travel needs, such as medical appointments, this approach can help reduce barriers, improve reliability, and create a more seamless experience, even when travel spans multiple jurisdictions.

In the CEP, options of integrated software approaches are provided. In this Plan, more complex options and their benefits are identified:

- **Single point of contact for riders** provides riders with one phone number and reduces confusion among riders.
- **Centralized dispatch and information sharing** enables real-time information sharing in a shared space, instead of being siloed into multiple operating environments, this approach allows passenger information to be shared in real-time among employees.
- **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.
- **Reduction in difficult and lengthy passenger transfers**, improving the customer experience and utilization of vehicle deployments.

Elements to consider for a potential consolidating some call center locations include:

- **Staffing** – It will be necessary to clarify staffing levels across call taking and dispatch functions. As RideCo processes are introduced and certain responsibilities are reduced or automated, assignments may shift. Where possible, the approach will prioritize retention and reassignment of existing staff to remaining functions. Implementation will require consideration of agency HR policies, compensation structures, and other workforce factors, as well as sensitivity to the human impacts of these changes.
- **Facilities** – If the Client Rep and transit providers choose to physically consolidate some facilities, GCTD and at SVT have potential for consolidated operations. 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 intend to dedicate to call taking and dispatching activities moving forward.

The Role of EV (Electric Vehicle) Mandates

Regardless of whether demand-response services are integrated into a single regional operation, transit agencies throughout Ventura County will be required to transition to zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) fleets in accordance with the California Air Resources Board (CARB) Innovative Clean Transit (ICT) regulations. As a result, the role of electric vehicles and associated charging infrastructure should be further evaluated in both near-term pilot efforts and any longer-term integration scenarios.

Piloted Regional Brokerage/Overlay Model

Under a regional brokerage or overlay model, the impacts of fleet electrification are expected to be limited. Because service delivery, including labor and vehicle deployment, would remain the responsibility of contracted operators or participating agencies, individual agencies would continue managing their own vehicle fleets and charging infrastructure. The brokerage itself would not be responsible for procuring or maintaining electric vehicles (as brokerages are private companies and not government agencies).

In situations where a participating agency's Dial-A-Ride vehicle is assigned to regional trips through the brokerage, operational procedures such as share-lease agreements with charging infrastructure would be considered. Vehicles would be expected to return to their home base for charging, and service scheduling would need to consider vehicle range limitations and charging windows to maintain service reliability.

Full Integration Model

A fully integrated regional demand-response system would require a multi-year implementation period, during which existing agency assets, including electric vehicles, charging infrastructure, maintenance facilities, and operating properties, would be consolidated into the new organizational structure. As integration advances, considerations such as ownership and transfer of fleet assets, long-term facility lease agreements, responsibility for charging infrastructure, utility costs, and future capital replacement obligations would be thought through.

The transition to a unified fleet also presents opportunities to improve operational efficiency through centralized fleet management, coordinated vehicle replacement planning, and strategic deployment of charging infrastructure. However, these benefits would need to be balanced against transferring assets among agencies and ensuring that facilities are equipped to support regional ZEV fleet.

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 a network conducive to seamless regional trip-making. 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 (which at the time of this Plan development has not occurred) 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 XX presents the current governance structures and information about the existing operating responsibility for the county's nine on-demand services.

Table 9 – Existing Management Structures of DR 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* <i>*Transitioning to RideCo in 2027. Microtransit facilitated by RideCo currently</i>
MCT On Demand (Microtransit)	Transdev	Facilitated by RideCo Software
MCT	MV Transportation c/o Thousand Oaks	Administered by City of Thousand Oaks under contract with Moorpark
Ventura County	MV Transportation c/o Thousand Oaks	East County Transit Alliance/MOU
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 Considerations

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 CEP provides a more immediate and practical pathway for improving the rider experience across the County. Rather than relying on structural changes, such as the formation of a new entity, the CEP focuses on incremental, achievable steps, such as establishing more consistent policies, coordinated service standards, and enhanced customer experience initiatives, within the existing agency framework.

As part of this planning effort, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed through the CEP 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 DAR fleet
- The establishment of a uniform procurement strategy for future DAR vehicles and electric vehicles
- The planning and phased implementation of a potential integrated, countywide call center

As coordination deepens and the MOU evolves to address more complex operational and governance considerations, 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 more integrated demand-response system.

Any such transition would require careful coordination and broad agreement among participating agencies, including approval by each operator's governing body, as well as review by legal, risk, and financial stakeholders. In addition, appropriate public outreach and engagement would be necessary to ensure transparency and incorporate community input, along with formal consideration and approval by the Commission.

Integration Scenarios and Funding Framework

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 the Ventura County SRTP process examined the financial outlook of 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. With low 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.

The importance of this issue cannot be overstated, as all participating providers expressed concerns regarding their ability to accommodate regional trips and the impact on their existing budgets. The following sections are intended to help agencies identify strategies for developing a **sustainable regional transit program and governance structure**. The goal is to ensure that any new service is financially viable over the long term, avoiding a situation in which costs continue to escalate annually while serving a limited number of passengers.

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

As service integration advances, opportunities for consolidated procurement should be explored as existing contracts reach expiration. Joint procurements can generate economies of scale, reduce administrative duplication, and improve purchasing efficiency across participating agencies. However, pursuing this approach requires coordination and commitment from each agency's purchasing, procurement, and legal staff to develop shared procurement processes and contract structures.

While many agencies currently procure vehicles through the statewide purchasing contract through the California Association for Coordinated Transportation (CalACT), the concept extends *beyond* vehicle acquisition. Opportunities exist to combine procurements for fuel, preventive maintenance services, communications equipment, technology systems, and other capital investments. Rather than six separate procurement efforts undertaken by Moorpark, Simi Valley, ECTA/Thousand Oaks, Camarillo, GCTD, and VCTC (Valley Express), a coordinated procurement strategy could allow these agencies to leverage collective purchasing power and reduce administrative burden.

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 may begin with the development of a standardized Request for Proposals (RFP) framework for a single provider. This approach can incorporate elements such as employee-based performance incentives, standardized vehicle specifications where applicable, alignment of fleet replacement schedules, and inclusion of lifecycle support considerations for vehicle and equipment procurement. It may also address planning for compliance with alternative fuel requirements.

Over time, the standards established through a coordinated RFP approach could inform a more unified service model and serve as a foundation for potential future governance structures, such as a JPA, by promoting greater consistency in service delivery and operational expectations across providers. 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 cited¹²:

- 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, 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

¹² https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-13-782?utm_source

contractors' workforces are more flexible, with more employees working in part-time positions, and lower insurance costs, among other things.

- 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.

Regardless of whether full integration results in services being operated in-house, through a contracted provider or both, effective oversight of service delivery is critical to maintaining a productive and customer-focused program. Strong contract management and performance monitoring are needed to keeping costs under control. Otherwise, each fiscal year the costs to deliver services increase while productivity either plateaus or declines

If the integrated system continues to rely on contracted operations, consideration should be given to consolidating services under a single transit operator when the Client Representative (described in the CEP) determines that the timing and organizational readiness are appropriate. Given the complexities associated with managing multiple service contracts, a single-provider model is recommended.

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 countywide agency would handle 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, countywide¹³. 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 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, productivity, driver professionalism, and service coverage. This ensures the public receives 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

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

adequate staffing to keep services running. Cities, which may lack the staffing 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 previous 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 and follow up with the contractor when necessary.
- **City of Thousand Oaks** – The current provider contract has experienced considerable turnover among general manager and supervisory positions, which has made it difficult to consistently meet performance targets. The City continues to seek improvements in customer service, such as reduced call times, but ongoing staff turnover has presented challenges. The City is currently undertaking a new procurement for a replacement contractor, which is expected to provide enhanced tools and mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing contract performance requirements moving forward.
- **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 maintain greater control over its service staff and day-to-day operations. In 2017, the City placed this approach before voters, who supported keeping operations in-house, despite the higher cost. This model allows the City to more directly manage service quality, respond to operational issues in real time, and align staffing decisions with local priorities, contributing to greater accountability and consistency in service delivery.
- **GCTD's** Board of Directors transitioned demand-response operations in-house in the fall of 2024 as part of a broader strategy to maximize utilization of the District's existing transit facility, dedicated transit management expertise, and shared operational resources. This transition has resulted in cost savings, improved working conditions, reduced turnover, and greater coordination between fixed-route and demand-response operations through shared dispatch, maintenance, training, road supervision, and administrative and management oversight functions. It has also reduced duplicate facility costs, lowered deadhead hours, and improved operational efficiencies, including faster fueling and vehicle servicing. By consolidating operations within GCTD's existing facility and utilizing dedicated transit staff with direct operational experience, the District has enhanced accountability, improved service delivery, realized operational efficiencies, and reduced operating costs per vehicle, while strengthening coordination across transit services.

Cost Sharing and Joint Procurement Opportunities

- Potential reduction of high-level supervisory positions
- Potential leveraging of matching funds.

Cost Implications

- Potential cost increase to fixed-route operations
- Potential cost increase to due increase demand

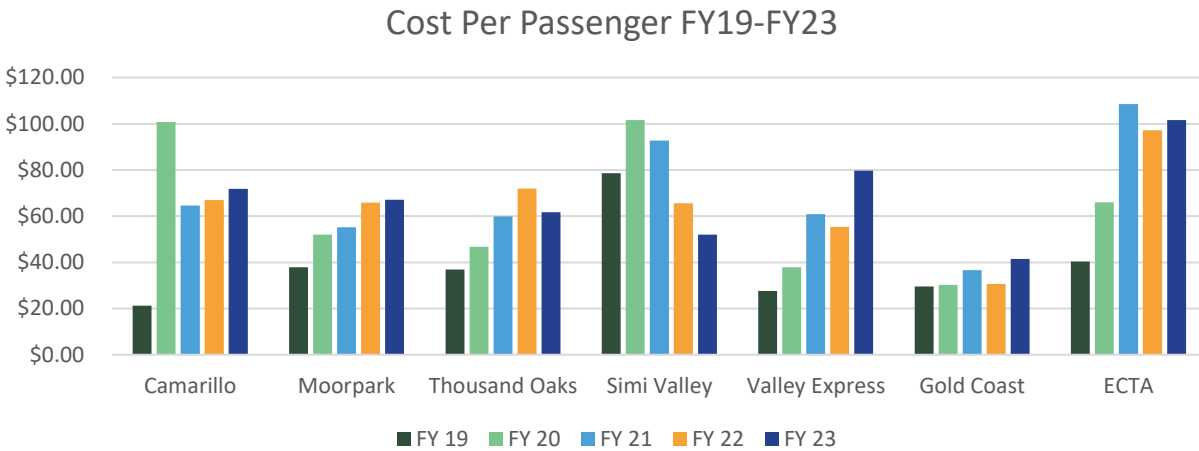
Call Center and Dispatch Functions

Assuming a one-phone number is implemented through the *Demand-Response CEP*, and if full integration were to occur, more call center technology could be consolidated, 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 as technology evolves.

Integrating call center operations and dispatch functions is presumed to achieve efficiency. 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, **Error! Reference source not found.** 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 FY23.¹⁴

¹⁴ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2023/90147.pdf

Figure 5 - Cost per DAR Passenger by Agency by Fiscal Year



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 FY23.¹⁵ 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 \$51.40.¹⁶

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

¹⁵ https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2023/30019.pdf

¹⁶ RideCo Case Study SEPTA <https://docsend.com/view/fizge3kids43wgs7>

service, making integration less appealing. Simi Valley showed willingness to support call center integration but emphasized a desire to remain the “frontline” 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 market 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 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 explore opportunities to pool resources and consolidate operations, where appropriate, to support a more seamless experience for riders, particularly when planning trips across multiple jurisdictions. This approach is intended to build upon existing coordination efforts and further enhance integration in ways that improve the overall customer experience. As agencies consider potential consolidation of call center functions, it will also be important to collaboratively define and maintain clear performance metrics to monitor outcomes and support ongoing success.

Call center metrics to consider 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. 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 12, 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.

Methodology

RideCo is **not** designed to **forecast future demand, estimate latent or unmet demand, or determine future service hour requirements**. Rather, RideCo utilizes existing operational data provided by participating transit agencies—in this case, data collected during a representative week in March 2025—to evaluate potential service efficiencies under alternative operating scenarios.

Using its routing and optimization algorithms, RideCo analyzes whether existing demand can be accommodated more efficiently by reducing revenue hours while maintaining service quality. The platform also evaluates opportunities for riders located within a reasonable walking distance of existing fixed-route transit services to utilize those services in lieu of demand-response trips. Performance is then assessed using key metrics such as revenue hours and direct passenger miles to determine the potential benefits of each scenario.

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 Simulation 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 13 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 number of people.

Table 11 – RideCo Simulations (GCTD + 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.¹⁷ 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.

¹⁷ 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 $\frac{3}{4}$ 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 RIDE CO 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, due to improved productivity and reductions in time spent driving without passengers.**

In addition to productivity and service hours, Table 14 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, which serves as a planning tool for if/when the agencies decide to fully integrate. Cost allocation models should be designed to:

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

An effective cost allocation framework 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.

Table XX 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 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 Model Results

Baseline: Hours Per Agency (March 16–22, 2025)							
Operator	Revenue Hours	Pct of Total Hours	Weekly Expenses	Total Monthly Expenses	Cost per Hour	Trips	Cost per Trip
Camarillo	424	15%	\$53,123	\$212,493	\$125.29	1,188	\$44.72
ECTA	102	4%	\$14,220	\$56,880	\$139.41	206	\$69.03
Thousand Oaks	156	6%	\$23,824	\$95,294	\$152.71	503	\$47.36
Moorpark	140	5%	\$1,682	\$6,728	\$12.01	604	\$2.78
Valley Express	134	5%	\$32,485	\$129,940	\$242.43	378	\$85.94
Gold Coast	1,344	49%	\$85,391	\$341,564	\$63.53	1,868	\$45.71
Simi Valley	440	16%	\$58,595	\$234,378	\$133.17	871	\$67.27
Totals	2,740	100%	\$269,319	\$1,077,277	\$98.29	5,618	\$47.94
RideCo Scenario #5: Miles Per Agency (March 16–22, 2025)							
Operator	Direct Psgr. Miles Scenario #5	Pct of Miles	Weekly Expenses	Total Monthly Expenses	Cost per Mile	Trips	Cost per Trip
Camarillo	6,590	16%	\$53,123	\$212,493	\$8.06	1,188	\$44.72
ECTA	2,462	6%	\$14,220	\$56,880	\$5.78	206	\$69.03
Thousand Oaks	3,613	9%	\$23,824	\$95,294	\$6.59	503	\$47.36
Moorpark	2,996	7%	\$1,682	\$6,728	\$0.56	604	\$2.78
Valley Express	1,662	4%	\$32,485	\$129,940	\$19.55	378	\$85.94
Gold Coast	18,058	45%	\$85,391	\$341,564	\$4.73	1,868	\$45.71
Simi Valley	5,137	13%	\$58,595	\$234,378	\$11.41	871	\$67.27
Totals	40,518	100%	\$269,319	\$1,077,277	\$6.65	5,618	\$47.94

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	\$40,398	\$10,773	\$16,159	\$13,466	\$13,466	\$131,966	\$43,091
Yearly Operating Cost Allocation	\$161,592	\$43,091	\$64,637	\$53,864	\$53,864	\$527,866	\$172,364
Change from baseline	-24%	-24%	-32%	701%	-59%	55%	-26%

Cost Allocation Model B Direct Passenger Miles							
Jurisdiction	Camarillo	ECTA	Thousand Oaks	Moorpark	Valley Express	Gold Coast	Simi Valley
Percentage of Direct Passenger Miles	16%	6%	9%	7%	4%	45%	13%
Weekly Operating Cost Allocation	\$43,803	\$16,365	\$24,015	\$19,914	\$11,047	\$120,030	\$34,145
Yearly Operating Cost Allocation	\$175,212	\$65,459	\$96,061	\$79,657	\$44,189	\$480,119	\$136,581
Change from baseline	-18%	15%	1%	1084%	-66%	41%	-42%

Cost Allocation Model C Combination of Revenue Hours and Direct Passenger Miles							
Jurisdiction	Camarillo	ECTA	Thousand Oaks	Moorpark	Valley Express	Gold Coast	Simi Valley
% of Revenue Hours/Direct Passenger	16%	6%	7%	4%	4%	45%	13%

Miles Combo							
Weekly Operating Cost Allocation	\$43,668	\$15,963	\$19,524	\$11,182	\$11,182	\$120,795	\$34,722
Yearly Operating Cost Allocation	\$174,673	\$63,853	\$78,097	\$44,727	\$44,727	\$483,178	\$138,887
Change from baseline	-18%	12%	-18%	565%	-66%	41%	-41%

Disclaimer: When obtaining the March 2025 invoices, agencies account for a variety of costs that do not align with one another. For example, one agency may have a line item for fuel, while another may bundle it under general operations. Therefore, these numbers are based on what was provided in March 2025, as well as data available nationally through NTD for FY24.

Of the three models, Model C (combining both Revenue Hours and Direct Passenger Miles) provides estimated costs using the Providers' current metrics, but under the assumption that jurisdictional boundaries are open and agencies still operate separately. 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, while moving towards an integrated model.

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, under a separate governance structure, 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 most 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.

With that said, under a *full* integration model, there would not be separate agencies paying into a regional program. The new agency would either be a direct recipient of

federal and state funds, and/or have contracts with various agencies to deploy countywide dial-a-ride services.

Regional Trip Making

Cost allocation for regional trip-making will 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 Table 16.

To provide an order-of-magnitude estimate of potential regional service delivery 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 22,000 trips could be classified as regional on a yearly basis for Ventura County(*understandably, once a service becomes more easily available (one-seat county ride trip vs transfers), the demand will increase. However, policy decisions, eligibility requirements, and budget constraints can all be tools used to manage demand*).

The average Cost Per Trip under an open boundary scenario is \$47.94. Assuming regional trips may be double the length of an average trip, a range of costs can be between \$65 – \$95 per trip.

As mentioned earlier, these longer-distance rides would only be served if funding is available to cover costs. Also, while these estimates are 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	Lead 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 Ventura County 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.¹⁸

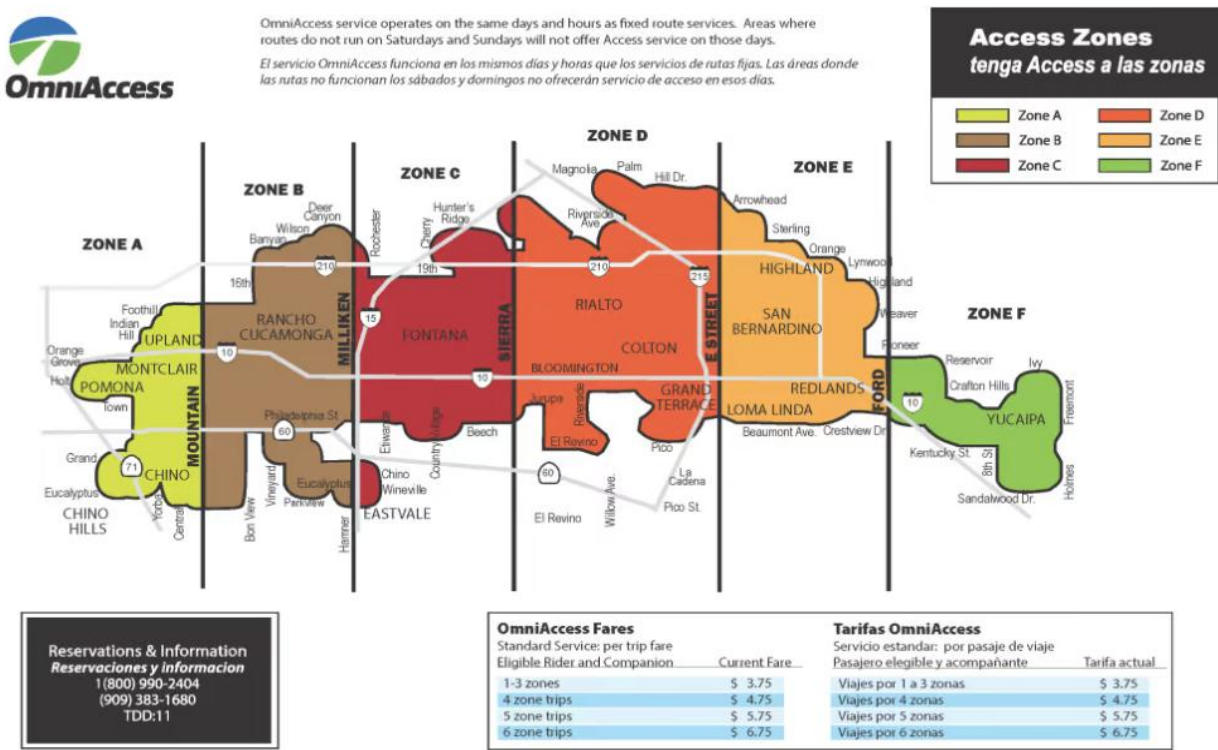
OmniAccess, the dial-a-ride service provided by Omnitrans in San Bernardino County, also has a similar operation to RTA, traversing multiple jurisdictions in a

¹⁸ <https://www.riversidetransit.com/index.php/dial-a-ride/what-is-dial-a-ride>

populated area of southern California. Here is an example of the zones they travel through, as well as the associated fares by zones.¹⁹

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 6 OmniAccess Zones for Dial-a-Ride Service Area



¹⁹ <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 based cost-sharing on the number of zones a trip cost. 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
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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 Decision Making Framework

Overview of Current State Funding and Expenditures

Ventura County and its cities receive TDA (Transportation Development Act) funding to support transit operations. Table 17 provides information on how much TDA funding in FY 23/24 went to bike/pedestrian improvements, transit, and streets collectively throughout Ventura County.

Table 17 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

At the local level, Table 18 below shows the cities that allocated TDA Article 8a funding to streets and roads in FY23/24.

Table 18 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

Access for All Grant

The Access for All Grant is a California grant funding program to expand access to wheelchair accessible vehicle on-demand responsive transportation. It is a competitive application process. In 2026, \$15.4 million was approved and given to the following entities:

County	Access Provider	Funding Amount*
Alameda	City of Fremont - Ride-On Tri-City**	\$1,080,000.00
Alameda	Onward Health, Inc.	\$521,298.25
Alameda	The Center for Independent Living	\$799,930.00
Marin	Onward Health, Inc.	\$225,775.00
Napa	Napa Valley Transportation Authority	\$162,395.00
Orange	Butterfli Technologies	\$3,125,969.00
Orange	OCY Management, LLC	\$1,581,162.70
Riverside	Butterfli Technologies	\$1,325,910.00
San Bernardino	Butterfli Technologies	\$38,480.00
San Bernardino	Nomad Transit, LLC - Via Transportation	\$1,456,236.63
San Mateo	Nomad Transit, LLC - Via Transportation	\$1,822,189.76
San Mateo	Onward Health, Inc.	\$5,666.00
Santa Clara	Nomad Transit, LLC - Via Transportation	\$1,990,025.76
Santa Clara	Onward Health, Inc.	\$1,123,602.50
Sonoma	City of Petaluma - Petaluma Transit	\$150,000.00
Total Award Amount for Cycle 5 CY 2026		\$15,408,640.60

**Includes a 15% administrative cost.*

***Pending signed and executed funding agreement.*

Source : <https://cpucsafa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/SAFA-Cycle-5-Award-Announcement-Final-1.pdf>

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.

Policy Framework for Paratransit Funding Decisions

A policy framework will help local operators 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.

A consistent and encouraging theme emerging from months of public engagement is the strong desire for more seamless, regionally connected travel. Residents recognize that trips across jurisdictions present an opportunity to improve coordination, as journeys that should be simple can become longer or fragmented without alignment. By building on a shared regional perspective, cities can work together to advance meaningful improvements in mobility and customer experience. Aligning around common outcomes will help maximize the impact of available funding and create a more connected, efficient regional transit network that benefits all communities. 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 – Goal Alignment:

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.

Summary

This section of the SRTP serves as a practical guide to the potential integration of paratransit services, outlining the benefits, challenges, costs, and implementation considerations associated with a coordinated regional approach. While additional studies may help refine projected costs and operational impacts, any forecasts remain estimates based on currently available data. The most effective way to evaluate the viability of regional service is through a pilot program lasting 12 to 24 months. Such a pilot would provide valuable insight into: (a) the extent to which regional service meets community needs, (b) the actual costs of delivering service, and (c) the impacts on existing dial-a-ride providers.

This Plan recognizes and respects the concerns expressed by the transit providers regarding service integration and regional mobility initiatives. It also acknowledges VCTC's commitment to pursuing only those services that can be funded and sustained over the long term. Regional rides would not move forward unless the financial resources are identified and secured.

Public transit agencies exist to provide essential mobility services that improve quality of life and access to opportunity. As Ventura County's population continues to age, an increasing number of residents will need to travel beyond their home communities to access medical care, specialized services, and social activities. The current network of transit providers plays a critical role in meeting that need and will continue to be instrumental in shaping the future of mobility throughout the County.

At its core, transportation is about connecting people to the destinations that matter most. For many riders, particularly older adults and individuals with disabilities, the priority is simple: a safe trip from origin to destination. The organization providing that trip is often secondary to the assurance that the service is available when needed and delivers them safely to where they need to go.