



# Efforts to Keep VCTC Transit Services Sustainable

Ventura County Transportation Commission  
October 9, 2026



# Metrolink

## Main Issues

- Ridership has been slow to rebound and fare revenue is not as high as projected
- Member agency subsidies have increased significantly since pandemic due to increased costs and lower fare revenue
  - Not sustainable, especially for LA Metro and OCTA, whose subsidies increased 80-90%
  - JPA - when one member reduces their service level, it increases the other agencies' share of fixed costs
- Toll credits reduced (used as grant match)



# Metrolink

## Key Points

- VCTC own's the rail ROW between LA County line and Moorpark and must maintain it whether passenger rail service runs or not
  - Running Metrolink service in VC generates a significant amount of FTA funds that can be used on SGR
  - Without the service, would have to contribute more LTF or STA than currently
- Although the majority of the funds that support Metrolink are federal, State funds remain essential for cash flow, grant matching requirements, and certain projects
- Nearly 60% of the recurring revenue VCTC provides to Metrolink is generated directly by Metrolink's service and would not be available otherwise



# Metrolink

## Metrolink's Regional Significance via SCAG

- Significant VMT and GHG reduction – average passenger trip length is over 39 miles
  - Especially as 73% of riders have a car
- Contributes to a reduction of approximately 9.2 million car trips annually
- They run Tier 4 locomotives and renewable diesel, the equivalent removing 14,000 cars from the road
- SCAG RTP/SCS assumes growth in Metrolink service frequencies
  - Service is already being reduced so goals will not be met and further reductions will exacerbate current issues



# Metrolink

## Efforts to Support Sustainability

- Metrolink Reimagined – transitioned service from commuter focused service to regional rail
  - Well-founded service implementation based on travel trends, much more efficient service, less train sets used
  - Midday ridership didn't matriculate to degree hoped for
- Cut \$16M of fixed costs
- Service reductions in March and planned for November – significant effort on part of member agencies and Metrolink to avoid worse cuts
- Resolving toll credit issue
- Very judicious use of CARES funds to cover the gap in cost vs revenues available



# Metrolink

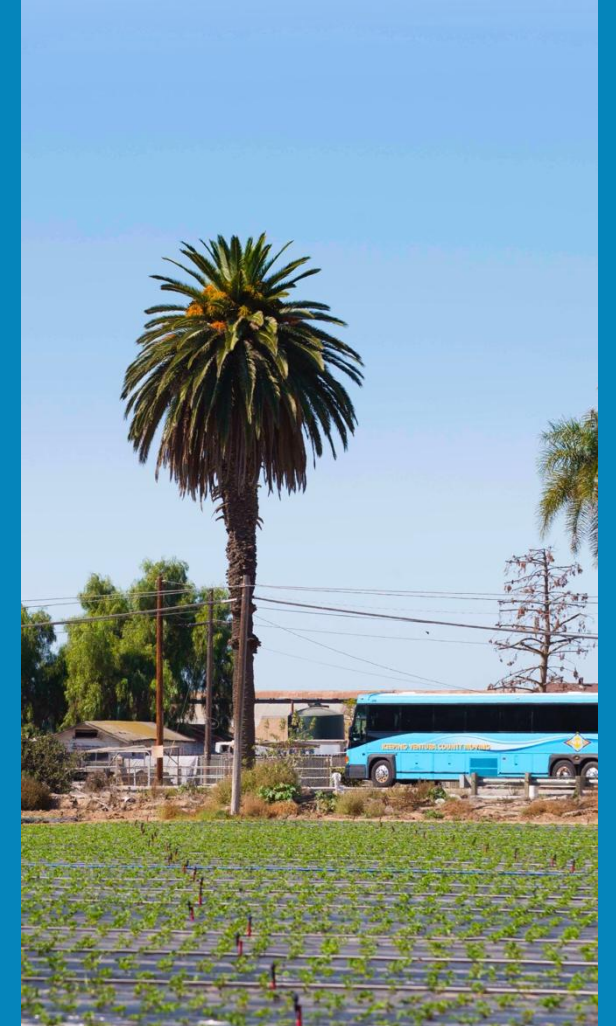
## Looking Forward

- Collectively beginning work on FY28 budget (usually done in February)
- Will do another deep dive looking at fixed costs, service levels, fare policies, etc.
- FTA funds will be reduced based on the funding levels in the federal Continuing Resolution, exacerbating situation
- Work more closely with LOSSAN, which has seen significant ridership and revenue growth, with trains frequently operating at full capacity



# VCTC Intercity & Metrolink

- Metrolink/Pacific Surfliner and VCTC Intercity service are most competitive with auto travel and have outsized VMT reductions due to long trip lengths
- During rush hour, Metrolink is always competitive with a car and can be faster
- Intercity has limited stops so travel times are slower than a car but can be attractive compared sitting in traffic
- Local transit trips are less competitive with autos and are often slower than biking especially for trips less than 10 miles



# VCTC Intercity

## Main Issues

- Costs have increased:
  - Increased wages to be in line with other county operators
  - Increased diesel fuel costs
  - Increased traffic adding to travel time
- Revenues not keeping up with expenses or are down
  - Main funding source, STA, is very volatile and trending down – STA was \$12.7M in FY23 and \$9.2M in FY26
  - Coastal Express route costs have increased (diesel and traffic) but SBCAG contribution has increased nominally



# VCTC Intercity

## Efforts to Support Sustainability

- Back to basics outreach campaign, focusing on better schedules & improving public communication material
- Streamlined routes, particularly Coastal Express, making the service more usable and less confusing to the passengers
- Significant efforts to increase OTP
- Implemented Tap2Ride – attracting new riders
- Replacing aging fleet – reducing maintenance costs



# VCTC Intercity

## Looking Forward

- Staff is currently evaluating service productivity and expect to make some service cuts
- Evaluating a fare increase to be implemented in 2027
- Will evaluate more sustainable funding options
- Working with SBCAG on appropriate service levels and funding arrangements



# Valley Express

## Main Issues

- Dial-a-Ride service costs are less predictable and harder to budget for
- Relying on grant funding and need a plan for long term sustainability
  - Utilizing grant funding for Fillmore-Moorpark route that will run out in about a year
  - Have a grant funding for increased service/changes to service in line with the SRTP



# Valley Express

## Efforts to Support Sustainability

- Successfully applied for and received two CMAQ grants, applied for AHSC funding as well
  - These grants will help to transition to a stronger emphasis on fixed route service
- Developing service plans and five-year budget forecasts
- Planning for policy changes to help shift ridership from more expensive DAR service to fixed route service
- Looking to implement a fare increase



# CalVans

## Main Issues

- Experienced several years of operating losses due to:
  - Management issues
  - Lower ridership
  - Slow recovery from the pandemic
  - Increased immigration enforcement activity
- Increased gas costs
- Generate FTA funds that are not returned to them



# CalVans

## Efforts to Support Sustainability

- VCTC has:
  - Supported and lobbied for CalVans to receive Prop 4 funding that were allocated
  - Supported CalVans to relocate vehicles to Ventura County to cut leasing costs
- CalVans has:
  - Implemented stronger collections effort
  - Implemented staff pay reductions/furloughs
  - Placed limits on discretionary spending, revised billing and fuel agreements
  - Sold surplus vehicles
  - Negotiated annual excess-insurance premiums down from an anticipated \$1.3 million to \$900,000.



# CalVans

## Looking Forward

- Continuing lobbying for and supporting CalVans where feasible
- Review the overall vanpool opportunities to evaluate the future of vanpool in Ventura County
- Will review whether FTA funds should be provided to CalVans



# LOSSAN

## Main Issues

- Funding for the continuation of the morning rail service to Santa Barbara is uncertain (pilot ends April 2027)
- Codeshare may be eliminated Friday-Sunday
- State funding less certain in future despite strong ridership and revenue
- VCTC working with LOSSAN, SBCAG, the State and Metrolink to work through these issues





# Free Fare Programs

---

## Main Issues

- Free Fare Programs (College Ride, Youth Ride Free and Free Fare Days) cost more than revenues available - \$3M compared to \$2M available
- Banked funds exhausted, SB 125 funds used to fill gap will be expended by FY28, if not FY27
- LCTOP funding uncertainty - revenue expected to be 66% of most recent allocation but could be much less due to change in Cap and Invest priorities
- Youth Ride Free
  - 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the cost, higher cost than initially projected
  - Planned to be a two-year pilot but very popular and critical to transit operators ridership rebounding after the pandemic
- College Ride has seen highest increases over the last two years of all FFPs due to increase in GCTD ridership



# Free Fare Programs

## Efforts to Support Sustainability

- Planned allocation of SB 125 interest to continue the program, approved by Transcom
- Goal to fund programs through FY28 (assuming past LCTOP funding levels)
- Will be collecting data by college with the intention that it is supported by the school long term (typical model)
  - Program now only includes schools who are open to funding the program long term
  - Goal for this program to be funded long term
- Reduced reimbursement rate to operators in April 2024 (100% to 75%)
- Reduced free fare days from 6 to 3



# Beyond VCTC & Upcoming Efforts

- Most agencies in Ventura County are facing financial hurdles
  - GCTD has a large deficit
  - Thousand Oaks and services they manage experiencing contract increases
  - Moorpark considering reducing fixed route service
  - Ojai Trolley losing 5311 funding
  - Simi Valley has a longer-term deficit
- VCTC will bring forth item reviewing formula funding to TRANSCOM and the commission





**Questions?**