

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Ventura – Santa Barbara/Goleta Commuter Bus Service

MEETING DATE: January 19, 2011

AGENDA ITEM: 7B

STAFF CONTACT: Scott Spaulding

RECOMMENDATION:

Authorize the Executive Director to secure facilitation services for an amount not to exceed \$4,000 in Measure A South Coast Interregional Transit Program funds to define goals, objectives, and priorities for commuter bus service between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

SUMMARY:

The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) operates six VISTA routes and over the past decade the service to/from Santa Barbara has become VISTA's largest single service, now accounting for 35% of system riders and 55% of all fare revenue. SBCAG and VCTC each pay approximately 50% of the net cost of the service. Under the Measure A South Coast Interregional Transit Program, \$25.35 million is available through 2040 to continue operating and expand commuter bus service in the congested Ventura – Santa Barbara/Goleta corridor. With construction expected to start in April on the US 101 Mussel Shoals\Carpinteria Creek HOV widening project and Phases 3 & 4 of the US 101 widening program planned following that, the freeway will be under construction for the next 10–15 years, making the provision of attractive and effective commuter bus service critically important to corridor management.

With long term funding secure, attention can now be focused on developing a common vision between SBCAG and VCTC for how commuter bus service should be provided in the future in the U.S. 101 corridor. Key issues to identify and address are the goals, objectives, and priorities for each agency and how to best develop and provide solutions to these goals, objectives, and priorities together. A facilitated workshop for SBCAG and VCTC staff (and other corridor partners including MTD and Caltrans) and another for SBCAG and VCTC board/commission members would identify values held in common and areas where there are differences so that a plan can be developed that meets the goals and objectives of both agencies. At its December 7, 2011 meeting, the South Coast Subregional Committee recommended that the board authorize the Executive Director to spend up to \$4,000 in Measure A South Coast Interregional Transit Program on facilitation services. VCTC has been requested to share the cost of hiring a facilitator which would reduce the cost to SBCAG

DISCUSSION:

Background

In 2001 SBCAG partnered with VCTC to introduce public commuter bus service between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties for the first time. Under an MOU between VCTC and SBCAG, VCTC is the lead agency, contracting with a private service provider to operate service. SBCAG and VCTC share equally in the net cost of the route serving Santa Barbara County, but VCTC is the policy board, solely responsible for setting fares, approving budgets,

and hiring and managing the contractor providing the service. SBCAG's share of the VISTA service is funded under the Measure A South Coast Interregional Transit Program, which provides \$25.35 million over 30 years to continue operating and expand commuter bus service in the Ventura–Santa Barbara/Goleta corridor.

With an estimated 15,000 commuters traveling from Ventura County to Santa Barbara County each weekday, and the concomitant peak hour traffic congestion that results from a large number of commuters using a narrow highway at the same time, there is obvious market demand for commuter bus service in the corridor. The limited number of peak hour VISTA trips does not meet existing demand and pales in comparison to the number of Clean Air Express trips provided in the 101 north corridor, especially when compared to demand.

Although SBCAG has funding available under the Measure A South Coast Interregional Transit Program to expand commuter bus service, Ventura County lacks a transportation tax measure and VCTC has stated that due to uncertain state and federal transit funding sources they do not anticipate having funding available to increase service over the next several years. Because SBCAG and VCTC share the cost of the service equally, VISTA service is not expected to be increased to match or exceed the level from North County in the near term.

Future Commuter Bus Service in the Corridor

Secure, long term Measure A funding allows for the development of a strategic vision for the type, level, and attributes of commuter bus service over the next several decades. A visioning process for both staff and policymakers would be a helpful and productive exercise for both agencies to plan how the demand for commuter service can and should be met in the future. This effort will identify each agency's goals, objectives, and priorities and guide decisions about how to provide efficient, effective, and attractive commuter bus service in the corridor. Although the VISTA service to Santa Barbara County has been operating for over a decade, this type of strategic planning effort has never been conducted.

COMMITTEE REVIEW: The South Coast Subregional Committee unanimously recommended authorizing the Executive Director to spend up to \$4,000 in Measure A South Coast Interregional Transit Program funds to define goals, objectives and priorities for commuter bus service at their December 7, 2011 meeting.

ATTACHMENTS: None