

## STAFF REPORT

**SUBJECT:** Planning for Ventura-Santa Barbara Interregional Bus Transit Service

**MEETING DATE:** July 11 2012

**AGENDA ITEM:** 7

**STAFF CONTACT:** Scott Spaulding

### RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss long-range operation of interregional transit service between Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties and principles for the use of South Coast Measure A Interregional Transit Program funds.

### SUMMARY:

In 2001 SBCAG partnered with the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) to launch a new VISTA bus service to serve commuters traveling from Oxnard and Ventura to their jobs in Santa Barbara and Goleta. The VISTA *Coastal Express* has grown to become the largest and most productive VISTA service, carrying over a third of all system riders and generating well over half of all VISTA fare revenue. SBCAG and VCTC each pay half the net operating cost for VISTA service to the South Coast, which is projected to be \$280,000 for each agency this year. The Measure A South Coast Interregional Transit Program, overseen by the SBCAG South Coast Subregional Committee, is the sole Santa Barbara County funding source for the service. The four-phase freeway expansion project that will add a carpool lane to US 101 between Ventura County and Santa Barbara will not only help relieve chronic peak-hour traffic congestion but will facilitate expanding commuter bus service that will be able to use the new lane to reduce trip times for passengers.

VCTC is currently the lead agency for operating the VISTA service, and in March the Commission adopted a plan to transfer management of VISTA bus services in 2014 to Gold Coast Transit, the local public transit agency serving Ventura and Oxnard. The Commission's decision to transfer responsibility for managing VISTA services to Gold Coast presents an opportunity for the South Coast Subregional Committee to establish a set of goals, priorities, and objectives for the use of Measure A funds to operate commuter bus service in the Ventura-Santa Barbara corridor. In addition, committee members have expressed a desire for changes in the governance structure for interregional bus service in the corridor which allows SBCAG to assume a larger role in setting policies for the operation of service including rider markets to be served, fares, schedules, performance measures, etc.

On June 14 VCTC informed SBCAG that the assets of VCTC's service contractor, CUSA, had been sold through bankruptcy proceedings and that the operating contract ending June 30, 2012 would not be renewed. VCTC negotiated a one-month extension of VISTA service with CUSA but service plans beyond July 31 have not yet been established. VCTC will likely approve a one year agreement with a new operator to continue the service. In light of the potentially significant changes that will occur in how commuter bus service between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties is designed, funded, and operated, a planning group of SBCAG, VCTC, and Gold Coast staff have already begun meeting to develop an administrative and operating structure and draft a Memorandum of Understanding between the funding agencies.

Staff will present background information on commuter bus service in the corridor and identify key issues for consideration by the Committee to foster a discussion of how to most effectively utilize Measure A resources to reduce freeway congestion, offer attractive alternatives to commuters, and promote economic development in the South Coast through funding and operating commuter bus service between Ventura and the South Coast. This item is intended to initiate a committee discussion that will ultimately provide direction to staff in planning for the operation of interregional bus service in the corridor and negotiating a new MOU with Ventura County.

**ATTACHMENTS:** None