



Date: September 22, 2006
 Committee Meeting Date: October 12, 2006
 Board Meeting Date: November 2, 2006
 ACTION X DISCUSSION INFO

BOARD MEMORANDUM

TO: Policy Advisory Committee
 Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
 Board of Directors

THROUGH: Michael T. Burns
 General Manager *Michael T. Burns*

FROM: Donald A. Smith, Jr.
 Chief Operating Officer *Donald A. Smith, Jr.*

SUBJECT: RIDE Task Force Final Report

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive the Ridership Initiative to Develop Energy-efficiency (RIDE) Task Force’s Final Report and recommend the Board direct staff to continue to review and consider the report’s recommendations as it develops and implements fare, service, marketing, promotional, and community outreach proposals and plans.

BACKGROUND:

The RIDE Task Force was initiated in June 2005 by a coalition of labor, environmental and community-based groups that were concerned about the decline in ridership on VTA bus and light rail transit services. The coalition urged the creation of a broad-based Task Force with the mission of exploring new, innovative, and cost-efficient methods of increasing ridership.

At its September 2005 meeting, the VTA Board of Directors authorized the formation of the RIDE Task Force, as proposed by the coalition, and appointed Board Members Nora Campos and Jamie Matthews to serve as co-chairs. The Board also appointed the Chairpersons of the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Committee for Transit Accessibility (CTA) and Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) to the Task Force.

The Board also requested that the Task Force’s recommendations be compatible with Board-adopted policies, including Valley Transportation Plan (VTP) 2030, the work of the Ad Hoc Financial Stability Committee, and the Fare Policy that includes a goal of 20-25% farebox recovery.

DISCUSSION:

The RIDE Task Force met nine times between October 2005 and August 2006. Meetings generally consisted of presentations by staff, and questions, feedback and discussion by Task Force members and members of the public. In December, the meeting was devoted to a facilitated brainstorming session to capture ideas for improving ridership, which was later expanded as additional ideas were proposed.

The Task Force's accomplishments are described in the Final Report and briefly summarized here:

Fare Affordability and Convenience

- Supported implementation of an 8-Hour Light Rail Excursion Fare pilot program.
- Encouraged VTA to secure a regional grant to subsidize transit fares for low-income persons.
- Supported implementation of the Simple and Free promotion providing free off-peak service to seniors and disabled persons from January through March 2006.
- Supported implementation of the Summer Blast Pass offering a 3-month discounted pass to youth.

Better Information for Riders

- Supported implementation of a leisure travel marketing campaign, inviting residents to "Meet the Riders."
- Identified VTA website improvements to make it easier and quicker to find and use transit information.
- Identified the need for a better trip planning tool, and encouraged staff to continue discussions with Google regarding the use of its Transit Trip Planner for VTA.
- Expressed a strong interest in real-time passenger information and provided input on VTA's real-time passenger information project.

Better Access to the System

- Encouraged VTA to continue to invest in improvements to bus stop accessibility and bicycle access to transit services.
- Encouraged VTA to continue to work with cities and the County to ensure that land use proposals are designed to consider and incorporate transit, bicycle, and pedestrian access.

Service Improvements

- Encouraged VTA to complete its Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) and implement efficient and cost-effective means of improving and expanding transit services.
- Provided input on minor service improvements implemented July 2006 using resources reallocated from underutilized transit services to areas in need of service improvements.

The RIDE Task Force Final Report includes a number of recommendations, which are repeated here:

The RIDE Task Force recommends that VTA continue to review and consider the ridership ideas put forward by the Task Force as VTA develops and implements transit service improvements and marketing, promotion, and community outreach plans. As programs are developed, staff should identify costs, benefits, and specific measurable goals to be achieved so that the success of the program can be determined.

In addition, the Task Force would like to highlight the following recommendations for consideration:

Fare Affordability and Convenience

As part of the fare review process conducted during the preparation of VTA's FY08 and FY09 budget:

- Consider reducing fares paid by those least able to afford them: low-income, youth, seniors, and disabled persons.
- Consider reducing the cost of a Day Pass (currently priced a 3 times a single ride), to make it more affordable for people who need to transfer.
- Consider expanding the ECO pass program to community colleges and additional businesses and residential organizations.
- Consider extending the ECO pass program to additional regional transit services, such as the Monterey/San Jose Express Service (Monterey-Salinas Transit's Line 55).
- Consider making the discounted Summer Blast Pass a permanent program offered each summer to youth.
- Consider making the Light Rail Excursion Pass a permanent element of the fare structure.

Better Information for Riders

In addition to completing implementation of VTA's improved website, real-time passenger information project, and the Google transit trip planner to provide better and more timely information for riders, the RIDE Task Force recommends:

- Marketing and promotional activities aimed at the transit dependent, youth (to instill a transit culture early), and at making transit socially desirable, "the right thing to do."
- Taking better advantage of times and locations when traffic congestion occurs or parking is limited to promote transit as an alternative.
- Reviewing print and electronic materials to include information to facilitate transit use, including connections between bus and light rail lines and with connecting regional transit services.
- Collaborating with others (e.g., hotels, events, visitor and convention bureaus, chambers) to promote transit to their customers.

Better Access to System

To provide better access to the transit system, the RIDE Task Force recommends that VTA:

- Increase the funding made available to improve safe and accessible paths of travel for seniors and disabled people at bus stops, transit centers, and light rail platforms.
- Consider increasing the number of bus stop benches and shelters at higher-use bus stops and transit centers.
- Continue to work with cities to determine the need for curb cuts, sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian traffic signals to facilitate safe and accessible paths of travel to bus stops, transit centers, light rail stations, and light rail platforms.
- Develop a program to increase the number of bike racks located at high volume bus stops, transit centers and light rail stations.

Service Improvements

In addition to completing the Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) and implementing market-based service improvements as resources become available, the RIDE Task Force recommends that VTA:

- Explore additional opportunities to implement “rapid” bus service, similar to the Rapid 522 service, which has increased ridership in the El Camino Real corridor by over 15%.
- Work with Valley Medical Center and other hospitals throughout the County to address a need for late-night transportation for their patients, when transit service is not available.
- Work with San Jose State University staff to better define and justify the transit needs of its students, including providing direct bus service from Northeast San Jose to Downtown San Jose, and providing a non-stop bus from the Fremont BART station to Downtown San Jose.
- Continue to reallocate resources from low-productivity transit services to improve transit services that are likely to attract greater ridership.
- Work with connecting transit services to coordinate schedules and connections, and fare structures.

Finally, the RIDE Task Force proposes that staff provide the Board of Directors with annual updates on the status of efforts to improve ridership including a comparison of goals and results.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board could select only some of the RIDE Task Force’s recommendations for future consideration and implementation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The fiscal impact of implementing proposed RIDE Task Force recommendations would need to be identified and budgeted when plans and programs are developed and approved.