

Date: July 26, 2007
Committee Meeting Date: August 9, 2007
Board Meeting Date: August 30, 2007
Board Memorandum: Action

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

THROUGH: Michael T. Burns
General Manager

FROM: John H. Ristow
Acting Chief CMA Officer

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Operations Analysis Revised Bus Service Operating
Plan

RECOMMENDATION

Review and recommend that the VTA Board of Directors adopt the Revised Bus Service Operating Plan for implementation in January 2008 as described in Attachment A.

BACKGROUND

This memorandum provides a summary of the input received through COA public outreach efforts and presents an overview of the Revised Service Operating Plan.

In April 2007, VTA released a Draft Service Operating Plan, which proposed significant revisions to its Bus Transit Network. The Draft Plan was the product of the Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA), an 18-month effort to develop transit investment policy, evaluate market opportunities and identify improvements to VTA's transit system. After an intensive period of public outreach activities, VTA staff has developed a Revised Service Operating Plan for consideration by the VTA Board of Directors at its August 30 meeting.

DISCUSSION

The VTA Board is expected to consider a revised COA proposal at its August 30, 2007 meeting. If adopted, the first phase of service changes will begin in January 2008. A revised draft proposal was released to the public on July 25 and was followed by public meetings in downtown San Jose.

The COA incorporated both market research studies and policy development efforts into the formulation of the Draft Plan. Market research studies included a survey of VTA bus and light rail passengers in late 2005 and early 2006. The passenger survey asked

customers for suggestions of how to improve VTA services. The two highest-rated suggestions by VTA riders for improvements to the system were to “offer more frequent service” and “provide real time information”. Also, a telephone survey of Santa Clara County households was conducted to gain a better understanding of the general travel market. The results of that survey were analyzed to identify customer attitudes towards transit and estimate the market potential for increased ridership. Among other conclusions, the survey revealed that 68 percent of the overall travel market in Santa Clara County was not tolerant of transit features such as walking to a stop, waiting for a bus or transferring between buses.

An in-depth examination of VTA’s existing transit operations and performance was also performed in the data analysis phase of the COA. It revealed that a select few lines within VTA’s 70-plus local and express routes were carrying the vast majority of riders. While these lines tend to perform well, the vast majority of VTA services are underutilized, contributing to the overall farebox recovery rate of just under 14 percent. Board policy establishes a target farebox recovery rate of between 20 and 25 percent.

Finally, the Transit Sustainability Policy was developed with VTA committees and the Board of Directors in late 2005 and early 2006 to help guide the formation of the Service Operating Plan Proposal. The policy establishes performance measures for evaluating the effectiveness of transit services and seeks to define a core area where transit investment will thrive. A selection of the key Core Principles for the COA are presented below:

- Operate service when and where there is sufficient mass of demand to meet ridership and revenue expectations.
- Increase transit mode share by focusing resources to target markets where transit can compete.
- Define a core transit network of services that serve a variety of trip purposes, and a market-based network of services that serve specific customer needs.

Each of these efforts became inputs into the Draft Service Operating Plan developed by a consultant in early 2007 and released to the general public in April. The Draft Plan was developed under the premise that a revised bus transit network will be cost neutral. In other words, overall system service levels will remain the same. The goal is to increase ridership and improve farebox recovery through more efficient use and distribution of the equivalent resources. Through measures such as eliminating or consolidating unproductive route segments, the proposal generates resource savings. These savings were then reinvested into the areas of the system that are most productive and offer the best opportunities for ridership growth.

Revised Bus Service Operating Plan

The Revised Bus Service Operating Plan contains 36 discreet changes to the first draft proposal released in April. These changes range from modifications to routes or frequency to the introduction of new bus lines. Many of the changes are the direct result of community and stakeholder input. Others are continued refinements of the original

proposal. All of the modifications are consistent with the larger COA objectives of increasing ridership, raising VTA's farebox recovery ratio and improving service efficiency. While several routes have been enhanced and new routes introduced, the revised proposal maintains the core network of 15-minute peak frequency that is critical to improving transit's competitiveness. In addition, the revised proposal solidifies the Community Bus program through conversion of existing routes or the introduction of new lines. Express Bus services are enhanced in more markets than the first proposal. The most significant changes in the revised proposal, along with stakeholder concerns, are presented in Attachment B.

While considering the Revised Service Plan, it is important that stakeholders understand that the COA is not a one-time only exercise but rather the framework for a process of continual improvement of transit services in Santa Clara County. Towards this end, the service standards developed as part of the Transit Sustainability Policy earlier this year will be employed as a means of measuring the effectiveness of COA-related changes when VTA evaluates and revises transit service for January 2009 implementation.

The COA process and the outreach to stakeholder groups had the effect of raising the awareness of several issues that VTA and the Board should consider over the coming months. Among these issues are the following:

Marketing and Public Information – The challenge of educating the public about service changes occurring in January 2008 and promoting VTA's new Bus Transit System will go hand-in-hand. The outreach conducted as part of the COA has established a database of concerned citizens. The market research information should also prove invaluable as VTA delivers its message to loyal customers and potential new riders.

Light Rail System – It is possible that the market and operational research that contributed to modifications of the bus network can also be applied to the Light Rail System. This research could be combined with the rail simulation software currently under development by VTA consultants in an effort to explore the effectiveness of express trains, passing tracks, extensions and other potential changes to today's system.

Community Bus Outreach – The revised proposal will introduce 10 new Community Bus lines this January in addition to those recently implemented in Morgan Hill and Gilroy. The routing and service levels for these new lines should be viewed as an initial program and VTA is committed to returning to each community to evaluate their performance, identify marketing opportunities, exploring future changes in routing and service levels and identifying new markets.

Express Bus Opportunities – A review of rider input materials makes clear that many Express Bus lines have fiercely loyal ridership. The revised proposal maintains enhancements for Express services to Fremont BART and South County. Future consideration should be given to other emerging markets. Also, proactive marketing campaigns and partnerships with employers that are already offering long-distance bus service are areas of further opportunity.

COA Public Involvement Program

Public outreach and involvement activities have been an integral component at every phase of the COA. With the release of the Draft Plan, VTA staff initiated an intensive 90-day period of public input, highlighted by 10 public workshops throughout the county. The objective of the public outreach program was to distribute the Draft Plan to a wide audience, allowing stakeholders the opportunity to understand the proposed service changes. Subsequent meetings and presentations then would allow for questions and answers along with opportunities for public input. VTA customers were notified of the Draft Plan through widespread distribution of a brochure as a supplement to VTA's Take One monthly informational newsletter.

In addition to the brochure, meetings and presentations, the VTA web site contained a significant level of information including PowerPoint presentations, Board Memoranda and summaries of analysis and proposals at the route level. An e-mail address, coa@vta.org, was established as another avenue for public input into the Draft Plan. To date, VTA has received over 800 comments through email, standard letters, petitions, phone calls and comment cards submitted at public meetings. A Compact Disc (enclosed) containing all of this input is included with this memorandum.

The focus of COA public meetings has been on providing the public with information and receiving input from stakeholders. The centerpiece of the input process was a series of 10 public meetings throughout the county in San Jose, Campbell, Gilroy, Mountain View, Palo Alto and Milpitas. Over 300 people attended these meetings, highlighting issues and providing invaluable insight towards a Revised Draft Plan. In addition to public meetings, VTA staff offered to present the Draft Plan to city councils throughout the county. Working with representatives from the Policy Advisory Committee, VTA staff presented the Draft Plan and a summary of the Organizational Assessment to 11 city councils and the Board of Supervisors in May and June. Finally, staff met with stakeholder groups to discuss specific elements of the Draft Plan.

The public involvement program is anticipated to conclude in August with a public meeting scheduled for August 7 in Downtown San Jose followed by VTA advisory and standing committees. The August 30 VTA Board meeting will be the final opportunity for public discussion.

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