

Date: February 12, 2008

Committee Meeting Date: March 13, 2008

Board Meeting Date: N/A

**BOARD MEMORANDUM**

**INFORMATION ITEM**

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

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

**FROM:** John H. Ristow  
Chief CMA Officer

**SUBJECT:** Bus Rapid Transit Strategic Plan: State-of-the-Industry Review

---

**FOR INFORMATION ONLY**

**BACKGROUND:**

VTA is developing an integrated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network linking activity centers throughout the county. The BRT Strategic Plan will study candidate BRT corridors identified in VTA's long-range plan, Valley Transportation Plan 2030 and the recently completed Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA). The goals of the BRT Strategic Plan are to: 1) establish a brand identity for VTA's future network of BRT services; 2) evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of developing BRT facilities in the candidate corridors; and 3) develop an action plan for implementation in each corridor.

The BRT State-of-the-Industry Review is the first task of the larger BRT Strategic Plan. The Review is intended to provide examples of industry best practices in the following areas:

- Typical elements associated with BRT service;
- BRT projects in a variety of urban and suburban applications;
- Range of BRT services and their effectiveness;
- Latest BRT technologies and strategies; and,
- Potential mobility, operational, and environmental benefits and efficiencies delivered by BRT services.

A case study approach is used to highlight key lessons learned that may be comparable and applicable to VTA and Santa Clara County. Key elements and strategies employed elsewhere can help make BRT more efficient and effective in serving the needs of Santa Clara County and its residents.

## **DISCUSSION:**

While Bus Rapid Transit projects exist worldwide, VTA asked the consultants to restrict their research to North American models with special relevance to Santa Clara County. As a result, the BRT projects examined in the industry review are recently completed projects in Boston, Eugene, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Oakland and Vancouver, British Columbia.

Each of the case studies provides valuable lessons that are instructive for VTA as it pursues implementation of a BRT network throughout Santa Clara County. Key lessons learned for VTA and Santa Clara County are identified below, with more detailed analysis in the full report.

### **General Observations**

- Communities with land uses and demographics similar to Santa Clara County can support BRT, which even has the potential to grow corridor demand.
- BRT service can yield ridership increases and attract drivers out of their cars.
- There is no one correct way to implement BRT. Innovative ideas abound to address each corridor's challenges.

### **Design and Development**

- BRT routes that operate in mixed flow traffic lanes with transit priority can still achieve improved reliability, user confidence, and higher ridership.
- Side lane bus operation (adjacent to parking) is a workable strategy for BRT.
- Stop spacing is often based on maximizing user access and minimizing travel time.
- Close cooperation between operators and the city and Caltrans staffs are important for project success.

### **Transit Operations**

- All-door boarding can significantly lower station dwell times and improve trip times.
- A variety of ways exist to overlay local and BRT service within the same corridor.
- BRT must operate at lower headways and for longer spans of service than local buses.

### **Branding and Identity**

- Prior to beginning service, a marketing campaign to introduce BRT and its distinctive features to the public can be very effective.
- BRT should be clearly and obviously distinguished from other bus services, even those sharing the same routing, to position it differently from local service.
- Passenger shelters can employ distinctive designs to increase awareness of BRT.
- Pressures may exist to utilize BRT vehicles on non-BRT routes – this can erode the branding and uniqueness of the specialized BRT services.

VTA will periodically bring study products to the TAC and PAC for review and work with individual cities on specific project elements.

Prepared by: Steven Fisher, Senior Transportation Planner