



To: Advisory Committee Enhancement (ACE) Task Force Members

Re: Advisory Committee Enhancement Process

Date: February 19, 2009

Dear ACE Task Force participant:

On behalf of the entire Board, I would like to thank you for your time and thoughtful participation in the Advisory Committee Enhancement (ACE) Process. As you know, this process was launched by VTA's General Manager, Michael Burns, in August 2008, to solicit committee input on steps that could be taken to improve the effectiveness of the advisory committees. It was initiated in response to findings in the VTA organizational assessment from 2007, as well as the California Bureau of State Audit (BSA) report of 2008, that suggested VTA and the Board should consider taking action to demonstrate they value the expertise of advisory committee members, and to ensure that committees are engaged and involved early in the policy development process.

Last month, VTA's Administration and Finance (A&F) Committee received an update on the progress that has been made in the ACE process. As I understand it, committees have drafted mission statements and reviewed their bylaws to gain greater focus and ensure alignment with VTA's new Vision, Mission, and Values. I commend you all for the work you have done so far, and look forward to future updates.

When talking about future projects, whether they are the proposed Bus Rapid Transit changes, future light rail lines, SVRT or better aligned paratransit and bus services, the board will rely on information coming from the Advisory Committees and our staff. Our ridership and the voters of Santa Clara County depend on us to make the best decisions with the best information we have. Challenges and opportunities abound, and working as a team, we will chart the best course.

The ACE Task Force meetings are an important step in making our work count. It was insightful to meet with some of you last Thursday during the Chairs/Vice-chairs meeting. One take-away I left with is to let you, advisory committee members, know how your advice impacts the decisions of the Board of Directors. I appreciate learning that and will do my best to communicate back to your committees.

In regards to the ACE Task Force, please let me clarify how I envision the structure and charge of the group. I've been asked to appoint a chair to lead these meetings, specifically, I was asked to appoint a VTA Board member as chair. Rather than take either of those two options, I have asked VTA to retain the services of Carmen Clark, a professional facilitator with Carmen Clark Consulting. Carmen's expertise includes the type of defining work the task force will engage in as the next step in the ACE process. She will guide the initial task force discussions that will help provide clarity and focus necessary so that you will be able to develop further recommendations on enhancing the advisory committees' effectiveness. After Ms. Clark has worked with the task force to focus the discussion, Jennie Loft and Stephen Flynn will continue to facilitate the ACE process.

A second important item raised last week was that the advisory committees are interested in hearing from Sam or I on how we think the advisory committees could be more effective. I believe at this time we do not want to prejudice your thinking, but, rather, we encourage you to brainstorm your thoughts and evaluate them based on best practices and practical constraints. I know the Administration and Finance committee looks forward to reviewing your recommendations at their May meeting. After A&F has had the opportunity to review your proposals, it will determine the next step in the process, which depending on the situation, may include submitting one or more of the recommendations to the board, asking the task force for clarification, seeking a management response, etc.

One additional request brought up at our meeting last week with the committee chairs, was for Sam and/or me to attend the ACE taskforce meetings. Unfortunately, due to my teaching schedule, I am unable to attend a meeting that ends by 1 pm. Sam has a conflict for next Wednesday. Nevertheless, we both would like to attend a future meeting. Perhaps one of your future meetings could shift hours so we can attend.

I want to assure you that the Board and VTA have taken to heart the concerns expressed by the Advisory Committee members. Concrete steps have been taken to begin to respond to those concerns, such as having a standing report from CAC and PAC at the Board meeting, and creating a consolidated workplan to show the flow of policy proposals as well as routine business through the various level of committees up to the board. We know there is more that can be done to improve the process and look forward to hearing your collective input on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Dolly Sandoval
VTA Board Chair