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1. VISION STATEMENT

A bus service providing sustainable, efficient, effective, and environmentally friendly transit service that serves the needs of a community by circulating through local destinations within a community or business district and providing better access to higher-capacity local and regional transit services.

2. MODAL OVERVIEW

Community Bus service is typically deployed to better meet the needs of individual communities and neighborhoods, improve general circulation within a fixed local area and access to higher-capacity transit systems or transit centers. Community Bus service may be shuttles, smaller-sized buses, or full-sized 40’ buses, which provide either short, fixed-route service. Community Buses typically have unique brand differentiated designs and appearance to match the characteristics of the community it serves. Buses may be operated by public or private entities. Community Bus service is typically deployed in lower-density residential developments, central business districts, and provides connections between residential areas and schools, shopping malls, employment centers, and recreational areas. Figure 1 shows a typical Community Bus route in a central business district.

VTA currently operates four shuttle lines from light rail stations, two community bus lines in Los Gatos, and eight Altamont Commuter Express shuttles (using 40-foot buses; see Figure 2 for a view of this bus) from ACE rail stations. These lines typically provide access to employment centers from light rail and commuter rail stations. The Transportation Fund Clean Air, Bay Area Air Quality Management District and participating employers operate the service allowing them to be free to the public. For
its Community Bus lines, VTA uses 28-foot shuttle-type vehicles holding up to 25 seated passengers and two wheelchair passengers at a time. Figure 3 shows an example of VTA’s existing Community Bus. Bus stops, vehicles, and marketing materials are specially branded to reflect the unique nature of the service.

3. PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The design, implementation, and operation of all Community Bus service shall result from a comprehensive planning process. Prior to implementation all potential new lines or service changes shall be subject to an initial planning study to determine the feasibility and structure, and identify local commitments and funding necessary. The following Service Design Guidelines are part of this process for planning, designing, implementing and monitoring new service. Specific steps to evaluate existing and proposed service are as follows:

EXISTING SERVICE EVALUATION

Step 1 – Assess existing service versus established service standards
Step 2 – Devise and implement an Improvement Plan, if necessary

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW SERVICE

Step 1 – Conduct market research and estimate ridership and revenue potential
Step 2 – Identify and design Community Bus route alignments
Step 3 – Establish bus stop locations
Step 4 – Design stops, facilities, and street improvements
Step 5 – Develop an operating plan and implementation schedule
Step 6 – Develop a marketing plan and brand management strategy
Step 7 – Monitor service performance (see Existing Service Evaluation)

4. COMMUNITY BUS POLICIES

4.1 COMMUNITY BUS PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The primary criterion for evaluating Community Bus routes is boardings per revenue hour, which indicates how well the route is utilized given the amount of service provided (i.e. total revenue hours operated). It also indicates the appropriateness of the transit capacity offered, given the existing demand. This standard is set at 20 boardings per revenue hour, including both weekdays and weekends, as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Standards Policy Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 1 Performance Standard for Community Bus Route

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line Type</th>
<th>Average Boardings Per Revenue Hour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Bus</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table note:

A These are examples of the performance standards as presented in VTA’s annual Route Productivity evaluation. The performance standards will be updated to reflect annual average ridership performance.
The goal for Community Bus lines is a 20 to 25% farebox recovery ratio, which is consistent with the VTA Board-adopted objective for all routes in the system.¹

4.2 MARKET RESEARCH AND RIDERSHIP/REVENUE FORECASTS

Prior to the implementation of new service, VTA shall undertake a market research to comprehend market needs and ridership potential, based on major trip generators, community demographics, and origin and destination patterns within the community. The steps shall be to identify the:

- Major trip generators and origin and destination patterns within the community.
- Type of infrastructure improvements needed.
- Optimal routing design and desired service characteristics (i.e. acceptable travel times, type of vehicles, service span, and days of operation).
- Potential locations along the route that generate maximum ridership and revenues.

Even though a market may exist for a given route, the ridership and revenues may not be sufficient to satisfy VTA average boardings per revenue hour requirements and board approved 20 to 25% fare box recovery goal. Thus, VTA shall conduct a ridership and revenue analyses on potential new routes and service segments to assure they meet the performance standards. Considerations in these analyses are as follows:

- Ridership estimates shall be developed through a comprehensive planning process using VTA’s Countywide Transportation Model, Transit Service Planning Tool (TSP) and other Direct Demand Models or forecasting methodologies². Local jurisdictions shall have access to these tools through the Improvement Planning (IP) Process.

- Revenue projections shall assume that fares will be consistent with VTA’s fare policy.

4.3 EXISTING SERVICE CRITERIA AND POLICIES

An existing line not meeting the noted standards shall be subject to an Improvement Plan (IP) to build ridership, increase fare revenues, and/or reduce operating costs and inefficiencies. Any modifications to a service must be designed to produce results that achieve both standards.

Existing Service Policy Notes:

- Community Bus lines that do not meet principal goals or productivity standards shall be subject to the development of an IP. IPs may include the following recommendations:
  - Conduct a planning study and develop route changes to improve ridership (e.g. by better serving key trip generator areas) and reduce operating costs (by re-routing around unproductive segments);
  - Reduce service hours or revenue miles operated, particularly during off-peak periods, until service meets the minimum standards;
  - Relocate bus stops to maximize potential riders based on existing land use and development patterns;
  - Improve marketing efforts; and

¹ Some community buses may be jointly funded by public and private sources. In this case, the total subsidy from private sources and the fare revenues combined shall produce a farebox recovery of at least 20 to 25% of the total cost to operate service. If a service is fully funded by a private entity, the farebox recovery ratio shall be 100%—with outside entities covering all operating costs.
² The model approach shall be approved by VTA staff.
» Temporarily stop service on particularly unproductive segments or stations.

• Community Bus lines that do not meet VTA standards, and where local conditions do not and will not offer improved productivity levels, shall be scaled back to lifeline service levels or terminated.

4.4 NEW SERVICE CRITERIA AND POLICIES

All new service shall be provided provisionally, subject to an annual review at a minimum. New service shall be given one year to reach the standards in Table 2. Lines that do not meet the performance expectations and that do not have an approved Improvement Plan (IP) shall be discontinued.

New Service Policy Notes

• New or converted Community Bus lines (i.e. feeder line converted to smaller vehicles) shall be implemented in order of priority, based on ridership potential.

• Fares for Community Bus programs will be applied consistent with VTA fare policy.

• For lines not meeting the standard, local jurisdictions may enter into a long-term funding agreement with VTA to provide an operating subsidy such that a minimum farebox recovery rate of 20 to 25% is achieved. ³

• Expanded service levels beyond those reasonably supported by planning or market studies, or those implemented on behalf of private entities shall require 100% cost recovery. Outside entities shall cover all operating costs not met by collected fare revenues; or shall cover 100% of the cost if no revenues are collected.

5. COMMUNITY BUS ROUTE DESIGN

Community Bus routes typically provide local circulation within a fixed area, providing links with major transit stations or centers, central business districts, activity centers, and residential areas. Figure 4 shows an example of a Community Bus route. Community Bus services for VTA shall:

• Be customized to meet local community needs.

• Penetrate and provide local circulation within key community areas, such as central business districts, and lower density residential areas.

• Provide service to as many major trip generators as possible within the localized community, while operating at optimal efficiency by avoiding circuitous configurations and low productivity segments.

• Link to at least one large community core activity center (i.e. shopping, employment, and/or recreational center).

• Provide feeder service to major transit hubs, designated transit centers, or railway stations.

• Be designed to facilitate easy and quick transfers between other Community Bus lines or higher capacity transit.

• Consider demographics, land uses, trip patterns, public input, and prior findings from VTA studies in route design.

• Be simple and easy to understand.

• Operate bi-directionally as they are considered the optimal and preferred configuration, and shall be the first design option pursued in service design, with one-way loop routes considered only if the

³ This rate is based on a similar approach used for other jointly funded services, such as DASH, Great America Shuttle, and River Oaks Shuttle, where the employer or participating agency subsidizes 25% or more of the route operating expenses.
following conditions exist:

» Physical constraints prohibit paired bi-directional stop locations;

» The community prefers a one-way loop route and the one-way travel time does not exceed 20 minutes; and

» The Community Bus route exceeds the noted farebox and productivity standards.

Any proposed route changes (i.e. route deviations, out-of-direction segments, extensions) shall be subject to technical evaluation (e.g. using the Service Management Plan formulas or other similar formulas) and shall be considered feasible only if they maintain efficient transit service.4

Figure 4 shows an example of a Community Bus/shuttle service route, providing local circulation through downtown areas and connecting to regional transit centers.

6. COMMUNITY BUS STOP LOCATION

The bus stop is the most prominent icon of public transit. The functionality, safety, and visual appearance of stops are critical to attracting and maintaining transit riders in any location. Guidelines for Community Bus stop locations are as follows:

• Bus stop location shall be selected to maximize ridership potential and provide

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4 Service on private property will be considered only under special circumstances and will require a written agreement with the property owner that holds VTA harmless for pavement damages.
direct and safe access between stops and surrounding land uses. Stops shall be provided at optimal (key) locations along the route and shall link origin-destination pairs. The exact location shall be based on the results of planning studies. Potential Community Bus stop locations are shown in Table 2.

- Stop placement shall meet VTA’s Bus Stop Placement Policy requirements as outlined in the Community Design & Transportation (CDT) Manual (Appendix A).

- Bus stops shall be provided in pairs, to the extent possible, in locations that are not more than a five-minute walk apart, including intersection-waiting time, to facilitate efficient transfers (see Figure 5). Offset stops may be adopted if higher ridership can be gained by staggering them.

- Stop location shall have adequate sidewalk width to accommodate ADA standards and requirements. Stops shall not be placed on streets without sidewalks or on streets where the sidewalks are not wide enough to meet ADA requirements.

- Bus stops shall be provided in locations with sufficient red-curb space for buses to move into and out of the stop.

- On-street parking considerations include the following:

  » Optimal bus stop locations, as determined by planning studies and the need to serve critical commuting locations, such as downtown malls and nearby office parks, shall have priority over on-street parking spaces in those locations; and

  » Potential high-ridership stop locations that cannot be provided because of on-street parking spaces and that result in a reduction of potential ridership may prohibit VTA from serving those areas.

- All new developments should be built such that the building faces and entrances are close to the street and bus stops. In addition, parking should be placed behind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Area</th>
<th>Potential Stop Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial/Public Area</td>
<td>• Adjacent to major trip generators as defined by planning studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adjacent to schools, medical facilities, and other community-serving public and private facilities. Obtaining optimal locations at these facilities may require operations on private rights-of-way such as parking lots or streets; in these situations, local jurisdictions will aid VTA in securing appropriate agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A balance shall be created between the number of stops within private facilities to meet demand and the increased travel time from each stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Areas</td>
<td>• At strategic intersections that foster connectivity to community attractions, including schools, medical facilities, and other public and private facilities such as entertainment and recreational centers, and shopping areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• At locations defined by criteria contained in VTA’s CDT Program Manual of Best Practices for Integrating Transportation and Land Use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• As a joint city and VTA led effort to secure the necessary ROW, facilities and configuration to implement service.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5 Community Bus Stop Pairs — Pedestrian Connections
or in-between adjacent buildings.

7. COMMUNITY BUS STOP AND SUPPORT FACILITY DESIGN

Bus stops are the primary link between the community and the transit service provided, and create a sense of permanence. Community Bus stops shall incorporate the following features:

- At a minimum a bus pole and bench and designs that are fully compliant with ADA accessibility standards and requirements.
- Shelters, where adequate right-of-ways exist, passenger usage warrants, VTA resources permit, and/or the community provides/subsidizes it.5
- Designs that are in accordance with requirements for nearside, midblock, and farside stops as detailed in the CDT Manual.
- Sufficient land and curbspace space to allow a 40-foot local bus to use the stop in the future.
- Special branding to distinguish the unique nature of the Community Bus service (see Section 11, Specialized Branding/Marketing).
- Cohesive community identity/theme to integrate well with the surrounding buildings and community.
- Appropriate support facilities, such as layover areas, red-curb space, and signage, that comply with ADA requirements at transfer locations to:
  » Allow for safe and easy pedestrian flow;
  » Provide for adequate signage and visual cues;
  » Accommodate waiting transfer passengers;
  » Permit seamless and quick transfers; and
  » Accommodate multiple transit modes simultaneously at a single facility (see Figure 6).
- Direct pedestrian and bicycle linkages to the surrounding community.
- Operator break and bus layover facilities

5 Private or city provided shelters shall be considered per VTA's Shelter Policy, as contained in the CDT Manual. For new service requested by a city or cities, and which meets VTA's sustainability goals, the city shall seek a developer or other contributions to provide shelters at stops where riderhip demands warrant a shelter.
(ROW) at the starting and ending points of the route, which includes locating layover facilities as close to the end of the terminal.

- Bicycle parking is required at all stations per VTA’s adopted Bicycle Plan. Bike rack and locker design, placement and number of racks shall comply with the Bicycle Technical Guidelines.

8. OPERATIONS DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT

An operating plan describe how a particular transit service shall be operated. Among other components, it specifies the type of route operated, the hours of service to be provided, the spacing of stops, and minimum headways. The proposed Community Bus operating plan for the VTA are shown in Table 3.

9. VEHICLE CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Community Bus Operating Plan Details</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route Type/Structure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Arrangements for Requested Service</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farebox Recovery</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Span of Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Headways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Stop Spacing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community Buses typically range in length from 20 to 30 feet, with varying seating capacities and typically do not permit standing. The vehicles deployed for Community Bus service are propelled by gas, although hybrid electric or fuel cell units are becoming more commonplace. In 2006 VTA placed an order for 50 new Community Buses. The buses are 28-foot long gas-fueled vehicles with seating capacity for 25 passengers and space for two wheelchair riders (see Figures 7 and 8 for the look of VTA existing Community Bus; Figure 9 shows the look of the new VTA Community Bus). Community Bus vehicles are specially branded to reflect the particular community or area served. Recommended VTA Community Bus characteristics are shown in Table 4.

### 10. SPECIALIZED BRANDING/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Community Bus Operating Plan Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated Operations with Other Transit Providers</td>
<td>Coordinated with other operators to the extent possible, especially during the off-peak, when frequencies are considerably longer to facilitate timely and easy transfers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fares</td>
<td>Consistent with VTA fare policy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Stop Maintenance</td>
<td>Performed pursuant to the policies outlined in the CDT Manual and the Ad-Shelter Program. Public-private partnerships shall also be pursued.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Figure 7** Existing VTA Community Bus/Shuttle (48 Winchester)

**Figure 8** Existing VTA Community Bus/Shuttle (River Oaks LRT Shuttle)
Table 4 Recommended VTA Community Bus Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vehicle Characteristic</th>
<th>Recommended Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Type</td>
<td>28’ Shuttle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor Height&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Normal (equipped with ADA-compliant lift)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating Capacity</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating + Standing Capacity</td>
<td>27 (includes 2 wheelchair slots)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Number of Doors</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propulsion System</td>
<td>Gas-powered with potential for alternative fuels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branding</td>
<td>Specialized to distinguish services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle Racks</td>
<td>Buses will be equipped to accommodate bicycle racks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table note:
<sup>a</sup> In the future VTA will pursue low-floor fleet.
MARKETING

To distinguish Community Bus service from other local buses, Community Buses and related infrastructure (e.g. stops and signs) are often specially branded and designed to match the surrounding community. VTA already employs an array of various designs and branding for its Community Bus services, with vehicles, bus stops, and printed marketing/informational materials uniquely branded. Accordingly, VTA Community Bus services shall:

- Employ specialized branding on all Community Buses/shuttles, bus stops, and related infrastructure to differentiate it from local bus services and to accentuate the unique nature of the service (see Figure 10); and

- Adopt similar branding, coloring, and imaging on all marketing and promotional materials for Community Bus service including system maps, bus schedules, posters, direct mailing, news releases, city promotions, newspaper ads, and kickoff events.

It is noted that Community Buses painted with specialized liveries and colors shall not be used on local or other bus routes, unless in an emergency situation. This will prevent confusion among riders.