



South Coast Area Transit

Committed to a Cleaner Environment

September 1, 1999



The Honorable Charles W. Campbell  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
Ventura County Superior Court  
800 S. Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009

RE: **1998/1999 Ventura County Grand Jury Report: *The Ventura County Transportation Commission and Its Role in Public Transit***

Dear Judge Campbell:

The SCAT Board of Directors authorized submittal of the following responses to the report recommendations at the Board meeting of September 1, 1999. We would like to commend the Grand Jury for recognizing and supporting the important role of public transit in the county. It is unfortunate that the 1998/1999 Grand Jury has disbanded, as SCAT staff could have provided some of the information provided below during their study of public transit. It would also be helpful in SCAT's planning and marketing efforts to have been able to ask questions of the jurors regarding some of the recommendations.

SCAT is required to respond to recommendations R-3 through R-14 and R-16. Additionally, the body of the report contains some factual errors with one being related to SCAT. South Coast Area Transit is referred to as "*Southern California Area Transit*" in a section heading within the body of the report. This error warrants correction to avoid confusion by any reader.

Below is listed each Grand Jury recommendation and the response from South Coast Area Transit. Additional information is provided in an effort to further clarify the responses.

***Recommendation R-3: Require transit decision-makers to use public transit regularly.***

**Although we agree with the implied reason for the recommendation, it will not be implemented as it is not reasonable.**

SCAT has no authority or enforceability to *require* transit decision-makers to use public transit regularly. Some of the SCAT Board members do use public transit on a regular or occasional basis but SCAT cannot *require* them to do so.

We would agree that all elected officials should use public transit at least occasionally so they have a broader knowledge of the system, but transportation mode is a personal choice. It is also not always feasible to use transit regularly due to the numerous meetings and locations that elected officials must attend during the course of a business day.

***Recommendation R-4: Increase percentage of budget for marketing and advertising to attract automobile drivers.***

**We wholly disagree with the recommendation, as the intent has already been implemented without budgeting additional funds.**

The Grand Jury apparently did not have all the information necessary regarding SCAT's advertising efforts. SCAT's Advertising/Promotion budget of \$90,000 includes funds to produce an annual radio and television advertising campaign, production of brochures (design and printing), purchase of promotional give-aways, production and distribution of direct mail pieces, etc. Unlike the VCTC marketing budget, as cited in the Conclusions section of the report, there is a separate line item in the SCAT budget of \$40,000 for printing of schedules and tickets.

SCAT is the only transit agency in the county to have a Bus Sponsorship Program that offers trade agreements with local radio stations and television/cable stations. The stations receive a "mobile billboard" in exchange for SCAT receiving air time, with no cash outlay. Nine of SCAT's 42 buses are used in this exterior advertising program that furnishes SCAT with advertising on eleven radio stations in Ventura County and on Jones Intercable. SCAT receives approximately \$340,000 worth of air time annually to air the commercials that is not reflected in the budget because it is all done in trade. When including the trade value in the overall budget, advertising/promotion expenses represent nearly 5% of the operating budget (excluding schedule printing costs). This far exceeds the typical 2% that businesses budget for marketing purposes, and the 1% that is mentioned in the report.

The annual advertising campaigns typically include a general awareness campaign and a specific campaign targeted to a particular service, i.e., extended evening service, expanded paratransit service, etc. The campaigns always have a message directed at automobile users to encourage them to use transit for specific trips (work, school, etc.) and often have an environmental message as well. SCAT generally produces special radio spots for Clean Air Month in May or Try Transit Week in September and offers a 25¢ fare to all riders to promote transit usage.

SCAT occasionally produces direct mail campaigns to promote a particular service. The last direct mail campaign promoted the extended evening service. SCAT targeted postal carrier routes that were near bus routes to attract non-users. The targeted approach has a good response rate because it reaches the people that are within walking distance of a bus stop. Coupons are generally used to measure the response to evaluate the effectiveness of the direct mail campaign.

Previous marketing research has shown that SCAT passengers most frequently hear about SCAT through printed schedules, radio advertising and television advertising. SCAT discontinued purchasing print advertising on a regular basis because other forms of media yield higher results

for the cost. Newspaper ads are more of a shotgun approach to marketing as it often reaches people that are not located near bus routes and therefore less likely to use public transit.

Additionally, it will take more than advertising to attract people to transit and to get them out of their cars in western Ventura County. There is little traffic congestion in this area and virtually no parking fees, which creates a *disincentive* to using public transit. With low density population in suburban/rural areas, such as the SCAT service area, it is difficult to provide a high level of frequency of bus service due to funding constraints. If a person could get from their origin to destination in the same amount of time via the bus as they do in a car there would be a greater incentive for using public transit.

***Recommendation R-5: Improve access to transit scheduling and other information on the Internet for the benefit of employee transportation coordinators and the public.***

**We agree with the recommendation, and it was recently implemented.**

Since its launch two years ago, the SCAT web site ([www.scat.org](http://www.scat.org)) has had a hyperlink to the *Transtar* routing system through the Ventura County Transportation Commission web site. An individual can input their trip information (origin, destination, day, time, etc.) and receive an itinerary that will route their trip, including all transfers. This system also provides information that includes transfers to other systems in the county.

SCAT has recently completed an update to the SCAT web site to include each printed schedule in a manner that a person can view the schedules individually. The update was prepared in response to recent requests by the public for the schedules. A person will be able to use the schedule in the same manner as if they had a copy of the printed schedule. Additionally we have added information regarding use of the new bike racks that have been installed on the buses. All printed schedules include the web site address.

It should also be mentioned that a high percentage of SCAT passengers are transit dependent and from low income households that do not have internet access and therefore SCAT must provide schedule information in a variety of ways, and languages, not just via the internet.

Southern California Rideshare (SCR) works regularly with the Employee Transportation Coordinators (ETC) in the County to provide information as needed. SCAT staff maintains a good relationship with SCR staff to keep them updated on changes in SCAT service. It would be a duplication of effort and expense for SCAT to also work directly with the ETCs.

***Recommendation R-6: Make route information available by phone 7 days a week for 16 hours a day.***

**Although we agree with the intent of providing information by phone, it will not be implemented as this is an ineffective use of public funds.**

SCAT service operates 17 hours each weekday and just under 15 hours per day on weekends. A live operator is available to provide route and schedule information Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (9 hours per day, 259 days per year). The Ventura County Transportation Commission’s Dial-a-Route service is available weekdays 7:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. (11 hours per day) to also give information over the phone for SCAT service as well as other transit service in the County. Additionally, as stated above the SCAT web site has schedule information available 24 hours a day for those individuals with Internet access.

SCAT currently provides information by phone 2,331 hours per year and to increase the hours consistent with the hours of bus service would add an additional 3,587 hours per year. It does not seem logical to offer route information by phone during hours that the buses do not run so the calculations are based on the hours of actual service (17 hours on weekdays and 15 hours on weekends). We have excluded in these calculations the six (6) holidays a year where no bus service is provided. Two additional full-time employees would be required to accommodate these additional 3,587 hours of phone coverage. The cost of the additional personnel would be approximately \$65,260 per year. This cost is high to cover the low productivity hours in order to provide information for a small volume of calls.

SCAT has investigated another option – to contract with a telephone answering service that would provide schedule information during the hours that the SCAT office is closed. In checking with a local agency, they declined to provide the service due to the fact that it would require training of about 24 telephone operators which would consume substantial training time and that the requests for information could potentially be more lengthy calls than they can handle. This option was explored as a way to track the volume of calls during these non-peak hours to better analyze the need for expansion of hours for telephone information dissemination.

SCAT also has schedule information in Guide-a-Rides (boxes attached to the bus stop sign pole with schedule displayed) at over 150 bus stops. The major bus stops have Guide-a Rides as well as some less frequently used stops due to their location. A passenger can use this information just as they would a printed schedule. This information can be accessed by anyone walking up to a bus stop at any time.

Additionally, SCAT schedules are available in about 150 locations throughout the SCAT service area. These schedule outlet locations include city halls, libraries, hospitals, hotels, restaurants, and other businesses.

***Recommendation R-7: Redesign schedules to make them easier to interpret.***

**We wholly disagree with the recommendation, and it will not be implemented because the format SCAT uses for bus schedules, or timetables, is an industry standard.**

Although it is widely recognized that schedules are typically difficult to understand for new riders, there is a large quantity of information that must be disseminated. After years of experience, the transit industry has adopted the format used by SCAT and we are not aware of

any effective way to make it simpler to understand. For this reason, SCAT provides training on “how to read a schedule” for new riders.

Virtually all schedules printed for transit agencies nationwide have the timepoints (major bus stops) listed across the top of the schedule and the trip times beneath each timepoint heading. Some transit agencies compile schedules into a booklet format and others, like SCAT, use individual schedules. It is more cost effective to print the schedules individually because when there is a change in one route only that timetable has to be reprinted rather than a whole booklet. Many agencies have changed from the booklet format for that very reason. Other agencies charge a fee for the schedule books. SCAT believes that the schedules should be free to customers and therefore uses the most cost effective method possible.

As mentioned above, transit schedules are initially difficult to understand because of the nature of the numerous timepoints and trips throughout the day. Once a person is trained to read a schedule they seem to have no problems. SCAT offers a mobility training program that includes teaching groups and individuals how to read a schedule and explains the features of a bus (farebox, headsights, etc.) so that the “unfamiliarity fear” is overcome before the first bus trip.

Additionally, there are numerous bus stops that are not listed on schedules but transit passengers know their stop is between the two timepoints, and therefore know what time they need to be at the bus stop. The SCAT Customer Service Assistant is available by phone or in the office, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., to provide the stop locations and times to those who are unable to read a schedule.

***Recommendation R-8: Arrange with newspapers to print schedules on a regular basis every week, as theater schedules are printed.***

**We wholly disagree with the recommendation, and it will not be implemented as it is not feasible.**

SCAT staff contacted the sales representative at *The Star* to determine the feasibility of this recommendation considering the extensive volume of schedules for SCAT routes. Having an ad run every week, like theater schedules, is impossible because there is not enough display ad space in the entire newspaper to accommodate the SCAT schedules. A set of schedules is included with this response.

The alternative available would be to have the schedules inserted in each newspaper that is printed for the *Ventura County Star* and the *Oxnard Star* (53,309 total daily newspapers for the two editions). This would provide coverage to the entire SCAT service area but also there would be some areas that SCAT does not serve such as Santa Paula and Fillmore that would receive the inserts. The insertion cost for 52 weeks (once a week) to include all eight individual schedules in each newspaper would be \$501,744.36 (\$9,648.93 per week at the 52 week rate). There would be an additional cost for printing the schedules to be inserted. The printing costs would be approximately \$775,000 per year to print enough schedules for 53,309 issues each week. One insertion of schedules would include more schedules than SCAT currently prints for the year.

A cost of over \$1.2 million to advertise the schedules weekly is grossly excessive for this shotgun approach to marketing SCAT. Unlike movie schedules, major route and schedule changes only occur the first Sunday of July, and minor changes may occur the first Sunday in January when necessary. Therefore it is more logical for those interested in using transit to pick up a printed schedule, have the schedules mailed to them or view them on the Internet.

***Recommendation R-9: Contact major employers, mall operators, schools and public agencies about subsidizing employees' bus costs.***

**We agree with the recommendation, however it will not be implemented by SCAT as it is already being done by Southern California Rideshare.**

When Rule 210 was in effect, SCAT had an arrangement with various governmental agencies and businesses that provided either free or discounted SCAT tickets to their employees with the agency/business subsidizing the cost. According to the Southern California Rideshare (SCR) staff, with the demise of Rule 210 approximately 80% of the employers discontinued this practice because they are not required to provide a trip reduction program. The program was very cumbersome for many employers and with the downsizing of many organizations, staff resources were not available to manage the program.

Southern California Rideshare staff continues to routinely promote subsidized transit fares with employers and therefore is a duplication of effort for SCAT to contact employers. The passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) created new tax incentives for employers. With this recent change in the tax laws SCR staff is seeing a resurgence in employer subsidy programs.

SCAT provides discounted multiple-ride tickets and monthly passes so that individuals that use the bus occasionally to frequently pay a lower fare than the cash fare of \$1 for Adults, 75¢ for Students, and 50¢ for Seniors/Disabled/Medicare. Passengers can save 20-45% over the cash fare by purchasing the pre-paid fare media. The more an individual rides the bus, the greater their savings. Therefore anyone, regardless of their employer's commitment to transit, can receive reduced fares.

***Recommendation R-10: Use staff members and volunteer speakers to address high school students, senior citizen groups, service clubs and social clubs on transit options available.***

**We agree with the recommendation, as it has been implemented for many years.**

SCAT has a Transit Education Program that includes classroom presentations by staff. SCAT provides a free Boarding Pass for classes so their return trip from an education field trip (libraries, museums, and historical sites) is at no cost. The class therefore only pays one-way and they learn how to use the bus as part of the educational experience. The classroom presentations are generally to elementary school classes to teach them the rules of conduct and

familiarize them with riding the bus. The Oxnard Public Library, Gull Wings Children's Museum and Carnegie Museum offer a "triangle tour" and helps SCAT promote the program to schools in the Oxnard area. With the filling of a position in December 1998 that had been vacant since January 1995, SCAT has been able to be pro-active in conducting more classroom presentations.

SCAT also uses staff (administrative staff and bus operators) to speak to high schools groups for career day, service club meetings, ARC-Ventura County groups, and other various groups as we are invited. We will continue doing so as requested and will offer our service to groups that we feel could benefit from further information about SCAT.

The pending expansion of the paratransit service in October 1999 has presented an overwhelming opportunity for staff to request speaking opportunities with groups of senior citizens about fixed route service and paratransit service options. SCAT staff will go to senior mobile home parks and apartment complexes as well as senior centers to make presentations.

***Recommendation R-11:      Redesign the booklet describing paratransit for the elderly and disabled, perhaps as separate folders specific to each city and the County.***

**Although we agree the transportation directory needs to be updated with correct information, it is not a SCAT project.**

The *Directory of Senior & Disabled Transportation Services* is a Ventura County Transportation Commission project. Each transit operator and private transportation service provides the service information to the VCTC for inclusion in the booklet. SCAT also provides input via the VCTC Transit Operators Committee (Transcom) and agrees there must be an improved publication containing correct information for all the services.

The VCTC is in the process of updating the publication for an October release.

***Recommendation R-12:      Insert bus and train schedules in City Council proceedings on television.***

**We agree with the intent of the recommendation however it will not be implemented in the manner suggested, as it is infeasible.**

SCAT has eight different bus schedules for the 14 routes. Each printed schedule is two-sided and they range in size from 8 1/2" x 7" to 14" x 17" which makes the schedules too cumbersome for insertion in the City Council proceedings to be of any value as an informational tool for passengers.

SCAT staff is investigating use of bulletin boards on the public access channels and the government access channels to increase awareness of SCAT. Only the most basic information

can be provided in this format. It would include the jurisdictions served by SCAT, the phone numbers to call for information and the web address. Many of the stations provide this type of advertising at no cost or minimal cost and SCAT will attempt to implement this idea in the future to meet the intent of the recommendation.

***Recommendation R-13: Maintain close contact with CalWORKS to respond in a timely manner to new workers' transportation needs.***

**We partially agree with this recommendation, and it has been implemented.**

The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) is a member of the CalWORKS Advisory Committee and shares appropriate transportation information with SCAT as it applies to our service area. SCAT was not invited to participate on the committee but will evaluate any requests in service as they are received. Additionally, the county Unmet Transit Needs process will bring forward information on transportation needs of new workers.

SCAT receives federal and state funding annually to operate the bus system. It is difficult to make any major changes during the year without funding to cover an increase in service. SCAT has an annual planning process that provides opportunities for the public to provide input on service changes and to make service requests. Staff levels and vehicle requirements have to be considered with any change in service.

***Recommendation R-14: Work closely with California State University at Channel Islands to help them limit automobiles on Lewis Road.***

**We agree with the intent of this recommendation, however the VCTC (not SCAT) is coordinating this effort.**

California State University at Channel Islands is located outside of the SCAT service area and therefore out of the SCAT jurisdiction. The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) is starting a VISTA shuttle service on August 30, 1999 that will have connections with SCAT buses at the Esplanade Mall and the C Street Transfer Center at Centerpoint Mall.

SCAT and the VCTC work together closely to ensure that transfers between systems (SCAT and VISTA) are timed appropriately to allow for maximum use of the University Shuttle.

***Recommendation R-16: Provide well-lit shelters with benches at bus stops, with large maps and schedules posted, to make bus stops more visible and more comfortable.***

**Although we agree with the recommendation, it cannot be implemented by SCAT as the bus stop locations are not SCAT property.**



SCAT bus stops are owned and maintained by the jurisdiction of the location and therefore SCAT does not have jurisdiction to implement this recommendation. Generally the member jurisdictions review the usage at all the stops to develop guidelines for installation of appropriate amenities. Such amenities include benches, shelters, trash cans and Guide-a-Rides (displays the schedule for the appropriate route). The SCAT member jurisdictions have generally been very responsive to requests from SCAT for improvements to particular stops based on requests from the passengers.

The following is a summary of activities in each SCAT jurisdiction:

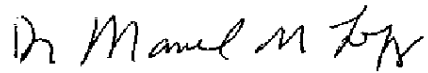
- The City of Port Hueneme has bus shelters with benches at every bus stop in their jurisdiction.
- The City of Oxnard has been upgrading their stop amenities over the past several years and now has numerous shelters with benches and trash cans. Some stops have only benches and some very low usage stops only have a sign.
- The City of San Buenaventura is currently involved in establishing a bus stop upgrade program to install shelters and benches. Many of the city's bus stops already have benches that will be replaced with the upgraded design however there is currently only one bus shelter in the city.
- The City of Ojai has only a few shelters, as their design criteria are very strict. There have not been any developers to-date that have been successful "selling" their plans to the City Council for implementation. The City of Ojai is expected to work with service organizations to upgrade the stops within the city.
- The County of Ventura has made some stop improvements in the past on a case-by-case basis however does not currently have a plan for future improvements on a large scale.

SCAT has made available to member jurisdictions pass-through federal grant-in-aid funding for bus stop bench/shelter programs. The particular design, sites and other architectural issues are left to the member jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction has adopted sign ordinance, architectural compliance and other measures to insure community acceptance of transit amenities within the respective community.

Additionally, the placement and ownership of "street furniture" is an area that requires substantial oversight as to maintenance and other organizational support/personnel to prevent liability for accident and/or personal injury. Such is an area that is surveyed by insurance carriers to determine additional premium as this is an area of claims development. Each jurisdiction must give consideration to this issue when planning installation of bus stop amenities.

Again, thank you for your interest in the Ventura County public transit systems and for allowing us the opportunity to provide a response to the recommendations made by the 1998/1999 Ventura County Grand Jury.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Manuel M. Lopez". The signature is written in a cursive style with some capitalization.

Dr. Manuel M. Lopez  
Board Chair

Attachment (schedules)