



July 12, 1999

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

Re: 1998-99 Ventura County Grand Jury Reports titled: *The Ventura County Transportation Commission and Its Role in Public Transit; and Human Services Agency*

Dear Judge Campbell:

On July 9, 1999 the Ventura County Transportation Commission discussed the two reports noted above and authorized me to transmit the following responses to the recommendations. The Commissioners noted that occasional reviews done by outside agencies are always useful and the efforts made by the Grand Jury are appreciated. Although most of the Commission's responses are Nonconcurrency or Partial Concurrence, it is not because the Commission disagrees with the Grand Jury's intent but rather that these things are already done or in progress.

While VCTC is only required to respond to the Grand Jury Report Recommendations, it should be noted that the Report itself contains some factual errors which warrant correction. In responding to the Grand Jury it is important to remember that the Federal and State funds available for transportation purposes come with regulations and requirements that are complex, difficult for the public to understand and sometimes contradictory. For example, the Transportation Development Act (TDA), which is the main source of state money used for local transit services includes farebox or productivity requirements that in effect limit the transit services that can be operated in the County. Specifically, the corrections to the document are as follows:

1. "VCTC" Report Page 15: There are currently four, not two, VISTA routes in operation; the report does not mention the VISTA East service. Also, there is another VISTA route about to start the second year of its demonstration program service period, that is, the Conejo Connection. Finally, a new demonstration VISTA service with two additional routes will be started on August 30th, when shuttle service to the California State University at Channel Islands opens.
2. "VCTC" Report Page 17: The agency being discussed is the South Coast Area Transit (SCAT) agency, not the "Southern California Area Transit" as mentioned in the report.



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3. "VCTC" Report Page 20: The annual Unmet Needs process is a State, not Federal, requirement for the allocation of local transportation funds that is determined by following complex State regulations. According to statute only after public transit needs WHICH ARE REASONABLE TO MEET have been met can the remaining funds be used for local streets and roads. The Ventura County determination of "Reasonable to Meet" requires a number of tests to be met including ridership, farebox, etc., in order to comply with the applicable sections of the Public Utilities Code and the California Code of Regulations.

VCTC staff acknowledges that the statutes are confusing and difficult to understand perhaps explaining the Grand Jury's erroneous statement regarding the extension of the SCAT El Rio bus route. Since SCAT had already budgeted an additional bus to serve the El Rio area in FY 1999/2000 and included consideration of the requested route extension in El Rio as part of the SCAT Systemwide Evaluation Study which recently got underway there were no Unmet Needs with respect to this route. From the Grand Jury comments contained in the report, it appears that they do not understand that this service addition is being considered and will be implemented if warranted. No new service is added without first evaluating the need, cost-effectiveness and ridership potential.

- "VCTC" Report Page 20 and "Human Services" Report Page 3: VCTC does not staff CalWORKS offices or Career Centers; we train their staff to use the transit information and Smart Card systems. Also, in addition to ensuring transit and bus pass information is readily available, VCTC staff serves on CalWORKS Advisory Committee and communicates with the program administrators.
- "VCTC" Report Page 20: The 20% farebox recovery requirement cited for Thousand Oaks in the report is used incorrectly. The purpose of the 20% farebox requirement, under state law, is to make sure that "cost-efficient" transit services are provided and to discourage less than efficient services from operating. Under a strict interpretation of the statutes the City of Thousand Oaks could shut down their bus system and use 100% of their funding for local streets and roads. Commendably, the City recognizes that their bus system is needed and public service for their transit dependent residents and they have, therefore, chosen to subsidize the fare revenue, on a per passenger basis, from their general funds. The Grand Jury Report also implies that the TDA funds provided through VCTC become part of the city's General Fund. This is in error; all TDA funds (which are audited annually) are held in a separate account and can only be used for specified transportation purposes.
- "VCTC" Report Page 21: Bullet # 1 states correctly that VCTC gears its efforts towards providing transit to those people who cannot drive or the transit dependent, such as those



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struggling to get off welfare. The Commission, however, has absolutely not "given up" on attracting the driver out of his car. One example of VCTC's efforts is Metrolink where passengers do have a choice of travel modes and through VCTC's efforts of providing commuter rail service, they have chosen to take the train. In addition, the Conejo Connection VISTA service is geared to get commuters out of their automobiles and the new VISTA CUSCI services, scheduled to begin on August 30th has been designed to establish a "green campus" by limiting cars driving to and from the campus. VCTC also initiated a countywide Guaranteed Ride Home Program to encourage people to use transit instead of their cars. It should also be pointed out to the Grand Jury that these efforts had flourished despite the fact that the Air Quality regulations mandating employer programs are no longer in place.

- "VCTC: Report Page 21: Bullet # 2 states that the unmet transit needs process is used by VCTC as the justification for transferring public transit funds to roads and bridges. This is incorrect. All materials and staff reports for the public hearing on transit needs clearly state that local street and road needs are not considered in determining which transit needs are reasonable to meet. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the Unmet Needs Process has resulted in numerous transit improvements in Ventura County, including: VISTA service, Metrolink service, Senior Nutrition Transportation service, and SCAT's extended evening hours and other improvements.

Below are the Grand Jury recommendations contained in both reports and the responses approved by the Ventura County Transportation Commission on July 9, 1999:

"VCTC's Role in Public Transit" Report

Recommendation R-1: Set up Public Transit as independent departments in each jurisdiction. -does not apply to VCTC.

Recommendation R-2: Revisit definitions of Unmet Needs to coincide with current and anticipated conditions. Partial Concurrence:

Each year, the Commission reviews its adopted definitions that are used in the annual Unmet Transit Needs Public Hearing process as required by the Transportation Development Act. While it may be possible to enhance or update the adopted definitions, the existing definitions are based on statutory requirements. The purpose of these definitions is to provide objective



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criteria by which new proposed transit service can be evaluated. The next time the definitions are scheduled to be reviewed and (re)approved is between January and March, 2000.

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

We agree it is important for decision makers to use public transit services and in fact many of them do on a regular or occasional basis. Since this recommendation is entirely a matter of individual choice, it is unenforceable and outside of VCTC's purview.

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

In the recently adopted VCTC budget for FY 99/00, the increased funding for marketing purposes established in the FY 98/99 budget was continued. A new marketing consultant was also retained for FY 99/00 to provide fresh ideas and creative ways to do more advertising and service promotions. In addition, staff regularly sends out public service announcements and press releases to all media about the public transit that is available.

VCTC also contracts with the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), specifically the Southern California Rideshare section to market the transit, vanpool and carpool services. VCTC also contributes to the Metrolink marketing budget through our annual payment. VCTC also provides a significant community awareness program directed at schools throughout the county and at other community outreach events. While we always try to improve these efforts it should be noted that VISTA ridership increased by 19% last year and Metrolink ridership on the Ventura County line grew by 10%.

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

VCTC firmly supports improvements on the Internet for increased access to transit information, both for the general public and for employer transportation coordinators. The VCTC's web site, including the nationally recognized transit router, was selected as one of 100 best web sites by ITS World (an international publication). The web site is available 24 hours a day and VCTC staff has provided assistance for CalWORKS staff and others in making sure they can effectively utilize the site. The VCTC web site address, www.goventura.org, is printed on all VISTA buses and marketing materials.



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

We agree it is important that information about services, bus routes and schedules be available by telephone to the maximum extent that is cost-efficient. The Dial-A-Route Information Center was established for just this purpose. There is an answering machine available for messages and the information operators promptly return calls. The Grand Jury report erroneously states the hours of operation of the Center; the Information Center is open eleven hours each weekday, from 7:00 am - 6:00 P.M., which are the days and hours needed most for this service. The messages received after the current operating hours are regularly monitored and more operator time will be added if an increase in the number of calls requires it.

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

Transit timetables must include a lot of different information and it is agreed they can sometimes be complicated for the new rider to decipher. The schedules are designed in the standard and most used timetable format for transit operations. Regular transit riders have no difficulty using a transit schedule. However, staff will continue to work with its marketing consultant this year to see if changes can be made in the schedule format that maintain the integrity of the timetable while making it easier for the new rider to use.

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

It would be very expensive and not cost-efficient to pay to print bus schedules each week. Bus schedules are complex and the numerous lines would require very large and prohibitively expensive ads and would not necessarily be convenient for the public to use. Since schedules remain relatively stable throughout the year so that riders can depend on the times for work, school, child care, etc., a printed schedule which can be folded is much more convenient. Unlike movie ads where the schedule and attractions change weekly, the bus systems are not "for profit" ventures. When system schedules are changed, VCTC widely distributes the information to the public, including press releases to newspapers and radio stations.

Recommendation # 9: Contact major employers, mall operators, schools, and public agencies about subsidizing employees bus costs. Nonconcurrency:

This activity is already performed for VCTC by SCAG's Southern California Rideshare agency



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on an ongoing basis under contract. This activity continues despite the removal of Air Quality regulations requiring employer participation.

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

VCTC staff already makes presentations to all the above groups; we go anywhere we are invited and we sometimes "invite" ourselves if we believe VCTC's presence will be useful and informative. VCTC also sets up an informational booth at most municipal events and festivals throughout the county containing printed information and marketing materials.

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

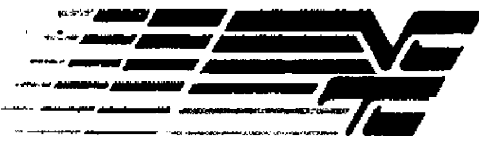
Last year was the first time the VCTC's Senior/Disabled Transit Services Directory was prepared and made available in Ventura County. Staff is already working on a new, improved version of the booklet. It will continue to be divided into individual city and County sections. The new booklet is expected to be available in the Fall of 1999 to coincide with paratransit improvements initiated by VCTC that are taking place throughout the County.

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

All of the cities and the County already have these schedules available at the city halls and other appropriate locations, such as libraries and senior centers. Placing a bus or train schedule on television would not provide the public with useful information. A better use of city council or television proceedings would be to "market" transit or the Dial-A-Route phone number or web site address where the public can get schedule information at their convenience.

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

Staff is working closely with CalWORKS on this important issue to assure new workers can use



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public transit whenever possible. VCTC staff participates on the CalWORKS Advisory Committee which allows for communication among all the affected agencies. VCTC works closely with the Ventura County CalWORKS program to provide transit assistance to their clients. This includes training CalWORKS staff in use of Transtar, the regional transit routing program that allows for individual trip planning. VCTC has also provided CalWORKS the computer equipment and software needed to issue the Countywide Smart Card "Passport" monthly pass, which is accepted on all transit systems in the County. The equipment has already been placed in one of the CalWORKS Career Centers (in Oxnard), and seven more Centers will be equipped by VCTC this year.

Recommendation R-14: Work closely with California State University at Channel Islands (CSUCI) to help them limit automobiles on Lewis Road. Partial Concurrence:

Staff is already working closely with CSUCI and other local agencies to accomplish this goal. VCTC has approved a Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperative Agreement with CSUCI/CSUCI Site Authority and has organized a transportation project coordination committee with participants from CSUCI administration and other involved local agencies to make sure the improvements are implemented as soon as possible. On August 30, 1999, new VISTA bus shuttle service to and from the campus will begin from the Camarillo Metrolink Station and the Centerpoint Mall in Oxnard.

Recommendation R-15: Shorten wait times and extend hours that buses run. Nonconcurrence:

Transit services and schedules are evaluated each year to make sure they meet the maximum demand while still operating in the most productive and cost-efficient manner, as mandated by State regulations. On a regular and continuing basis, local and intercity transit operations are improved as much as possible to coordinate schedules between operators. For the past several years we have lengthened hours, as needed, such as the recent extension of SCAT service into the later evening hours, and the addition of Saturday service on most VISTA lines.

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. Partial Concurrence:

Anything that improves the comfort of bus passengers is important, both to retain the existing riders and to add new passengers. The placement of bus shelters and benches is the



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responsibility of each of the cities and the County for the unincorporated areas, and VCTC has worked closely with the local jurisdictions to obtain funding for this purpose. VCTC has installed "Guide-A-Ride" bus schedule information signs at VISTA bus stops throughout Ventura County, which have up-to-date schedule and fare information. Shelters/bus benches have been installed in most cities where feasible and VCTC has some funding for additional countywide shelters/benches and bike racks which should be installed in FY 1999/2000. It is important to remember that not all sites are suitable for benches and shelters; the width of the sidewalk must be considered when shelters are installed to keep access clear for pedestrians and especially for people traveling in wheelchairs.

Recommendation R-17: Increase local and commuter transit service to major employers, schools, and regional transit transfer points. Nonconcurrency:

As noted in the response to Recommendation # 15, transit services and schedules are evaluated each year to make sure they meet the maximum demand while still operating in the most productive and cost-efficient manner, as mandated by State regulations. On a regular and continuing basis, local and intercity transit operations are improved as much as possible. If and when there is sufficient demand for additional services they will be added.

Recommendation R-18: Extend Metrolink trains to serve Ventura. Concur:

VCTC is prepared to extend Metrolink service to East Ventura, specifically along the Santa Paula Branch Line. VCTC has been working with City of San Buenaventura staff on this issue and expects that the matter will come before the San Buenaventura City Council this summer. If the Council decides to proceed, VCTC will take the steps to develop the Metrolink platform and implement the extended service.

Recommendation R-19: Coordinate Metrolink and Amtrak schedules for all day use. Partial Concurrence:

Ventura County is very fortunate to be served by Metrolink commuter trains and Amtrak intercity trains. Their respective schedules are already coordinated. Through an arrangement with Amtrak, VCTC makes special "step-up" coupons for use by Metrolink monthly pass holders that allows them to use the Amtrak trains for a nominal charge. At VCTC's request, this "step-up" feature is expected to be extended to Metrolink 10-trip ticket holders by October, 1999. Should the City of San Buenaventura opt to have Metrolink service extended, VCTC staff will work with Amtrak to permit the "step-up" coupon to be used at the Fairgrounds Intercity Rail Station.



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Recommendation R-20: Consider a Santa Paula Branch line for future rail service to Santa Clarita. Nonconcurrency:

All long range VCTC plans as well as the SCAG Regional Transportation Plan already include passenger service on the Santa Paula Branch Line to Santa Clarita and Palmdale.

Recommendation R-21: Develop and implement a coordinated fare system so riders have to pay only once. Nonconcurrency:

VCTC has already developed and implemented a coordinated fare system, the Countywide "Passport" bus pass, or Smartcard. The Smartcard was developed with the cooperation of all other bus providers in Ventura County and the fare structure was coordinated in the same manner. Smartcard fare revenues are shared among the operators based on usage.

Recommendation R-22: Extend the "Smart Card" to riders on rail services. Partial Concurrence:

VCTC staff has been working with the other four member counties in Metrolink to extend the Smartcard onto the Metrolink system, into parking garages, and for the purchase of some items such as coffee and newspapers. VCTC, in cooperation with LACMTA, OCTA, SCRRA, LADOT, CSUCI and Caltrans has submitted a "Letter of Intent" to the FTA for such a project. Implementation of such a project will depend on the availability of federal funds, something which cannot be predicted or relied upon at this time.

"Human Services Agency" Report

(Note: only the first of the three recommendations in this Grand Jury Report concerns transportation and was responded to by VCTC).

Recommendation # 1: CalWORKS and public transportation officials must work closely together to better serve the specific needs of CalWORKS clients. CalWORKS could survey its client's needs contiguously and pass this information onto transit officials. Partial Concurrence:

VCTC works with the Ventura County CalWORKS program to provide transit assistance for



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their clients including, training for CalWORKS staff in use of Transtar, and providing access to the regional transit routing program that allows for individual trip planning. VCTC has also provided CalWORKS the computer equipment and software needed to issue the Countywide Smart Card "Passport" monthly pass, which is accepted on all transit systems in the county. The equipment has already been placed in one of CalWORKS Career Centers (in Oxnard), and seven more Centers will be equipped this fiscal year. VCTC will take consider any information provided on CalWORKS clients' transportation needs as a part of the FY2000/2001 Unmet Needs Process.

Thank you for your interest in the Ventura County Transportation Commission and for providing us with the opportunity to seek corrections in the report and provide a response to each recommendation.

Sincerely,

Ginger Gherardi
Executive Director

cc: Marvin J. Reeber, Foreman 1998/99 Grand Jury
All Ventura County Cities
County of Ventura
SCAT
Human Services Agency