

Response to Fiscal Year 2012-2013 Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Senior Transportation in Ventura County

Report Date: May 23, 2013 Responding Agency/Dept. Board of Supervisors

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and by: Victoria Jump Title: Director, Area Agency on Aging

FINDINGS


- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: FI-03, FI-05
- I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: FI-01, FI-02, FI-04
(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefore.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered R-02, R-03 have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered R-05 have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered _____ require further analysis.
(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.)
- Recommendations numbered R-01, R-04 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: October 1, 2013

Signed: _____


Peter C. Foy, Chair of the Board of Supervisors

Number of pages attached: 4



Findings

***FI-01.** The Grand Jury found that senior transportation in the County is inadequate. There is little coordination among the ten cities in the County and/or the 10 transportation companies, making it difficult, if not impossible, for a senior citizen to travel easily.*

Partially agree.

The Board of Supervisors strongly supports the need for senior transportation and acknowledges that there is an opportunity for increased coordination and collaboration across all modes of public transportation, for all ridership groups. However, although each jurisdiction is responsible for providing public transportation to its residents, much coordination is already occurring.

The County of Ventura along with the Cities of Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme and Ventura formed Gold Coast Transit (GCT) 40 years ago to provide fixed route transit service in and among those jurisdictions. Although GCT is mandated to also provide federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service in addition to fixed route service, they have expanded the ADA service to include all seniors. This is a higher level of service than is required by law. The County provides funding for senior/ADA services in the unincorporated areas of the east county, the Heritage Valley, and contributes to HELP of Ojai for senior/disabled transportation. Currently the cities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks along with the County of Ventura provide intercity ADA service among those jurisdictions which connect with GCT, and it is planned to add seniors to this service in the near future.

State Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds are derived from ¼ percent of the sales tax collected statewide and then returned to each county for distribution to each city and the county (for the unincorporated areas) based on population to provide public transportation services. All fixed route services must make 20% of the operating costs in fares in order to continue receiving TDA funding. Specialized transportation services to the elderly and disabled may also be funded with TDA funds but they are still considered public transportation services rather than social services, and they must make 10% of the operating costs in fares. Therefore, all public transportation services must be operated in an efficient manner in order to continue qualifying for funds.

Finally, the Ventura County Transportation Commission provides funding to the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging to provide non-emergency medical transportation for seniors needing to travel from one city to another where coordination does not exist as well as to out of county medical appointments. This transportation is not intended to serve as emergency transportation in lieu of an ambulance and is not available for seniors to use to attend social activities or to go shopping. However, transit passes on dial-a-ride and the fixed route system are available for seniors looking for or going to work. Additionally, through a separate funded programs transportation is provided free of charge to seniors attending the congregate meal program.

FI-02. The Grand Jury found that mobility and transportation options are limited to the existing bus routes, and there is little or no coordination of the time schedules.

Partially agree.

In addition to the existing bus routes, demand response/reservation based paratransit services are available to senior and disabled passengers in all areas of the county. Some of the coordination efforts could be improved. The Facts (FA-05 and FA-07) used to make this finding are based on the Beverly Foundation's mission to enhance mobility for seniors. However, the Beverly Foundation website recognizes and states that municipal services nationwide must serve the public at large and conform to funding requirements. They further state that cities and counties will never be able to serve all the needs of this special population, and they recommend supplemental transportation programs for seniors through a volunteer driver program funded with grants.

FI-03. The Grand Jury found that the aging of the county population impacts accessibility to essential services and cultural events.

Agree.

FI-04. The demand-response transit services are found in all ten cities, although each city's service is independently operated and functions differently. This has been found to be very confusing and in some cases potentially dangerous to seniors. In Thousand Oaks, the service is for seniors only. However, in the Heritage Valley seniors, children, farm workers and others are allowed the use of this service.

Partially agree.

As stated above, GCT paratransit services for seniors and disabled are operated consistently throughout the Cities of Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Ventura and the unincorporated areas in between. Each of the other cities establishes the level of service for their citizens based on outreach and advocacy therein. Thousand Oaks has a fixed route bus service but also provides paratransit service for senior/disabled individuals in their city and surrounding unincorporated areas. Because Fillmore and Santa Paula have no fixed route bus service within their city, they provide paratransit to the general public which includes seniors.

FI-05. The Grand Jury found that many bus routes, fees, stops, and schedules differ so profoundly that this is confusing to many. The cognitive limitations of many senior citizens add to this issue.

Agree.

Seniors who can't navigate the public transit systems due to cognitive or physical limitations can be ADA certified which gives a higher level of paratransit service countywide. As the Beverly Foundation noted, supplemental grant-funded services using volunteer drivers would be a good solution for many seniors who have special needs above those of the general population. Currently, the Ventura County Transportation Commission provides funding to the Ventura County Area Agency on Aging to provide non-emergency medical transportation for seniors with severe cognitive impairments who are not appropriate for the dial-a-ride system. Additionally, VCTC also provides funding to Mobility Management Partners and Gold Coast Transit for mobility training and, starting

this year, is also providing funding to Mobility Management Partners to develop a volunteer driver program for seniors.

Recommendations

***R-01.** The Grand Jury recommends that an independent, non-elected County administrator be assigned to oversee the collaborative efforts of all the senior transportation modalities in the County and produce strategies to simplify senior transportation. This administrator would seek consensus with the independent companies and city transportation agencies with a goal of consistency in the areas of availability, acceptability, accessibility, adaptability, and affordability. Further, the administrator would develop an advisory board comprised of senior bus-riding citizens to point out the opportunities for improvements. In addition, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors should be encouraged to ride a bus route once per year to determine needs and the effectiveness of the programs.*

Disagree. The VCTC is the appropriate entity for the recommended role and therefore this recommendation will not be implemented by the County.

The Board of Supervisors agrees there is a need for increased coordination and collaboration for seniors and all modes of public transportation. However, the Board of Supervisors is responsible for transportation services in the unincorporated areas of the county, and each city is responsible for providing transportation within their city limits. The Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) is the body which oversees all transportation matters countywide. VCTC is comprised of a Councilmember from each of the 10 cities, all 5 members of the Board of Supervisors, and 2 at-large citizen members. VCTC also serves as the Consolidated Transportation Service Agency (CTSA) which seeks to reach consensus with all public and private transit operators countywide. VCTC also has a Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) which includes citizen members from the county, the 10 cities, and social service agencies countywide. CTAC is the committee which must analyze and approve VCTC's mandated Unmet Transit Needs findings annually. VCTC, in cooperation with the County, the 10 Cities, Area Agency on Aging (AAA), and social service agencies approved a Human Services Transportation and Transit Service Coordination Study which made recommendations to improve all paratransit services in the county. Many of those recommendations have been implemented. For example: The City of Thousand Oaks and the County of Ventura consolidated their dial-a-ride services into one seamless operation to serve senior and disabled individuals in Thousand Oaks and adjacent unincorporated communities; a coordinated approach to automated dispatching and scheduling of trips on paratransit systems countywide was implemented; travel training programs for agencies/organizations and their clients was expanded. VCTC approved a Regional Transit Study in 2013 which includes recommendations to streamline all transit, including senior transportation services, and which includes those recommendations not yet implemented from the Human Service Coordination Study. All jurisdictions are currently working together to improve these services.

While we believe that the VCTC is the appropriate coordination body of transportation systems within Ventura county, members of our Board have ridden on our county public transportation systems and concur on the value of periodically assessing these systems on a first-hand basis.

R-02. In cooperation with the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) and Ventura County Area Agency on Aging (VCAAA), programs should be implemented that are designed to assist senior citizens with transportation within their cities and throughout the County.

Agree. This recommendation has already been implemented. See FI-05 above.

R-03. The Ventura County Board of Supervisors should allocate specific funding for senior transportation.

Agree. This recommendation has already been implemented as the County currently funds several programs which directly benefit senior riders.

In addition to the answer to R-01 above, the County funds the following programs for senior services in unincorporated areas and across jurisdictions: Gold Coast Transit ACCESS paratransit service, HELP of Ojai, Thousand Oaks Area Dial-a-Ride, Harbor-Beaches Dial-a-Ride, and VISTA Fillmore/Piru Dial-a-Ride. Through the unmet needs process and other feedback mechanisms, the County is engaged with VCTC in the evaluation of programs and coordination opportunities. Where improvements fall in the unincorporated areas and within the transit funding provided to the County we will continue to support such improvements.

R-04. The VCTC, working with VCAAA, should standardize requirements for participation in the senior transportation programs. They should also publicize the availability of programs that fulfill the transportation needs of seniors.

We agree with this recommendation however it is not within the authority of the County to implement.

Although the standardizations of requirements for participation in senior transportation programs such as fares, hours and age eligibility would be ideal, this is beyond the scope of the VCAAA. It is up to each transit provider to set their own fares, hours and age eligibility. The 2007 VCTC Human Service Transportation and Transit Service Coordination Study included the recommendation of the standardization of age across systems. VCTC and Thousand Oaks were the only providers that implemented the age eligibility at age of 65. The other providers currently have varying ages for eligibility. Although VCAAA's role in senior transportation is one of awareness and advocacy regarding issues that are specific to the elderly population, we welcome the opportunity to continue working with VCTC on these issues.

Regarding the recommendation that the VCAAA publicize the availability of programs that fulfill the transportation needs of seniors, this is something that the VCAAA currently does.

R-05. The VCAAA should plan for increased staffing to accommodate a growing senior population.

Agree. This recommendation has been partially implemented and will continue to be further implemented as appropriate in the future.

As additional Federal (Older Americans Act) funds have been awarded, additional staff has been hired. Programs and staff are specifically aligned with the Older Americans Act. Transportation is provided to the congregate meal sites with 90% of the funding coming from the Older Americans Act. Additionally, non-emergency medical transportation is highly leveraged with 50% of the funding coming from Older Americans Act funds and 50% of the funding from the Federal Transit Administration New Freedom funds.