

**ATTACHMENT B**

July 12, 2013

The Honorable Brian J. Back  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
800 S. Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009

**RE: VENTURA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY  
REPORT REGARDING SENIOR TRANSPORTATION IN VENTURA COUNTY**

Dear Judge Back:

At today's meeting the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) directed me to provide this response to the report of the Ventura County Grand Jury entitled Senior Transportation in Ventura County.

The VCTC was established in 1989 by SB 1880 (Davis), and as amended in 2004 by SB 2784 (Pavley), consists of the members of the County Board of Supervisors, a mayor or council member from each of the incorporated cities, one citizen member appointed by the Board of Supervisors, and one citizen member appointed by the City Selection Committee. Its public transit responsibilities as provided under state law include the making of an finding that there are no public transit needs that can reasonably be met (including achieving a state mandated farebox recovery) for agencies that want to use some of their Transportation Development Act funds for street purposes, and approving the allocation of Federal Transit funds within each Urbanized Area in the County. The Commission also serves the Consolidated Transportation Service Agency (CTSA), which is established to facilitate the coordination and provision of specialized and social service transportation.

The Commission also operates express bus service between most of the cities in Ventura County, and provides connecting service to Woodland Hills and destinations in Santa Barbara County. It also manages the community Dial-a-Ride services in the Heritage Valley. Many of the riders on those services are seniors. In addition, the Commission brokered an agreement between the transit operators in the County to provide transfers between the Dial-a-Ride services for persons who are disabled and unable to use the fixed route bus system.

As required by the Grand Jury, the attachment provides specific responses to each of the Findings and Recommendations contained in the report. We have not responded to item R-03, which is specific to the County Board of Supervisors, not the Commission. As noted in our specific responses, the Commission does not have the authority to direct how each of the cities, the County, or Gold Coast Transit, provides transit services. The Commission does continue to support, encourage, and plan, with our partners, for the improvement of transportation in Ventura County, and strategically use its limited resources to encourage improvements to all parts of the system.

Sincerely,

Darren M. Kettle  
Executive Director

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**VENTURA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
RESPONSES TO FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
CONTAINED IN 2012-2013 GRANT JURY REPORT  
"SENIOR TRANSPORTATION IN VENTURA COUNTY"**

**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 disagree. The primary source of transit operating funds in California is distributed to cities, counties (for their unincorporated population), and transit districts based on their population to provide public transportation services. The funds are to provide public transit for all segments of the community. The state allows amount of flexibility in the provision of those services, but also requires that all fixed route services must get 20% of the operating costs from fares, and specialized transportation services to the elderly and disabled, as well as transit services in census defined rural areas must get 10% of the operating costs from passenger fares. The individual cities, the County, and Gold Coast Transit (for Oxnard, Ventura, Port Huemene, Ojai, and part of the County) use these funds to provide for all their transit needs. Each city provides the services it feels are tailored to the wants, needs, and expectations of their city residents, and maintains independent services which are responsive to their communities. VCTC, as a countywide agency, plans and supports VISTA (Ventura Intercity Service Transit Authority) to provide intercity and intercounty transit services. As noted in Fact FA-04 of the Grand Jury Report, the geography of the county tends to support this outside of the contiguous Oxnard-Ventura urbanized area. At the same time, the transit operators do provide connecting paratransit for trips for the disabled, and VCTC provides hourly services connecting all the urban areas as well as the Heritage Valley and Santa Barbara.

While there is a wide range of transit services, the services are limited, in terms of when the services operate, and where they go. The fact that there are limited amounts of service countywide also mean that there are frequently wait times between connecting trips. The Commission and the providers have made efforts in the past, and are continuing to work on programs and projects to provide additional services, improve connections, and reduce wait times. However, these efforts are constrained by the relatively low levels of intercity demands and high costs of providing the trips – conditions which have been a challenge in the past and will continue to be so in the future. As noted above, all public transportation services must be operated in an efficient manner in order to continue qualifying for transportation funds.

Travel for seniors within the individual agencies using the Dial-a-Ride services has been available and by combining it with other services (in some communities the federally mandated Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) services, in others with general public services), the agencies have been able to meet the mandated efficiencies and provide the most transportation feasible. Within the Gold Coast Transit (GCT) area, established 40 years ago to provide fixed route transit service in and among those jurisdictions, the agency provides a consolidated ADA paratransit service which also serves all seniors in the service area. Similar services are provided by the Ventura County (for unincorporated portions of the County) and the Cities of Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley, and Moorpark, although Thousand Oaks allows seniors to use the service fewer hours than disabled and charges them a higher fare. Camarillo and the Heritage Valley provide general purposes Dial-a-Ride within their communities. Services have been uneven and limited on weekends and evenings – in part because of the historic challenges of achieving the mandated

farebox recovery rates. Those communities with limited weekend and evening services are working on trials to expand into those hours, and in the past few months Camarillo, Moorpark, and Thousand Oaks have all taken actions to extend services, which will be subject to annual review.

*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 disagree. While the fixed route bus services provide much of the transit service in Ventura County, including service for many seniors who appreciate the flexibility and low costs that it provides, there is paratransit (dial-a-ride) service available in every community in the County. The connections between communities, including hours of operation and timed transfers, have shortcomings, and while transit planners continually work to improve the coordination and increase hours of service, without significant increases in funding and the ability to attract sufficient levels of ridership to achieve the required farebox recovery rates, this challenge will continue. Given the limited transit funding available to the county, and the relatively low levels of ridership in some parts of the County, it is likely that there will always be some places and times with no reasonable travel options. There are a wide range of transportation services available, and they are increasing every year. As noted above, this year, Moorpark and Thousand Oaks are adding fixed route Saturday service, and Camarillo Sunday Dial-a-Ride services. This will improve connections with the VISTA 101 and VISTA East bus routes. In addition, Moorpark is extending its senior and ADA service until 8 pm on weekdays, operating two additional hours every weekday. This year the County and the City of Moorpark (as well as Westlake Village in Los Angeles County) began contracting with the City of Thousand Oaks to provide senior and ADA services to those cities and the communities of Newberry Park and Agoura Hills. While not a single system, the centralized operations and dispatching have greatly improved intercommunity mobility in that area.

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

Agree. VCTC has long recognized that there is a growing demand for additional transit services and access by all segments of the population, including transit dependent groups such as youths, disabled persons, low income persons, and seniors.

*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 disagree. Because of the fact [Grand Jury Report Fact FA-04] that Ventura County has a number of physically, culturally, and socio-economically different communities, it also has a number of unique transit services. In the western portion of the County, Gold Coast Transit provides a uniform system providing fixed route and demand responsive services for the four cities and adjoining unincorporated communities. In other cities which are not so geographically and socially close, the services are provided by the individual communities.

As noted earlier, most non-disabled senior transit riders use the general public transit, generally fixed route services. VCTC has provided Federal grants to several agencies to provide "travel training" to seniors and disabled persons to help them better understand how to use the transit systems. At this time, the biggest challenge the program has is enrolling seniors and disabled persons in the "one-on-one" travel training provide by VCTC.

***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.***

Partially agree. While most bus riders, including seniors typically use only one or two of the nine public operators (plus services operated in Eastern Ventura County by the Los Angeles Metro and Los Angeles City Commuter Express) in Ventura County, persons who travel between communities are faced with different service and operations. Riders, including seniors, who are unable to use the public transit systems due to cognitive or physical limitations can be ADA certified which provides one call-one fare paratransit service countywide (although because of the service differences, transfers are required). 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. VCTC's Transit Operators Committee (TRANSCOM) has recommended that the Commission approve a Federal grant request for a demonstration service for seniors using volunteer drivers in 2013.

While having different fares and regulations governing transit, including senior transit, uniformity may make things more easily understood for those who travel between communities, but may also adversely impact others – by raising fares or age limits to get universal agreement. There is a desire on the part of all transit operators to work toward this uniformity. The agencies in the East County are working on a Memorandum of Agreement, which includes a goal of increasing uniformity of fares and hours of operation. In the West County, Gold Coast is the primary transit provider, with a single, consolidated operation.

#### **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 creation of a new independent, non-elected County administrator who is primarily an advocate, would be largely duplicative of the VCAAA and the Senior Commissions and staff which exist in most cities in the county. As a County position, the "administrator" would not be a part of the transportation process, nor the VCTC programs. The County is only has authority and responsibility 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 also serves as the Consolidated Transportation Service Agency (CTSA) which seeks to improve coordination and cooperation of public and private transit operators countywide. VCTC also has an annual process to obtain citizen and community recommendations for improvements to the transit system as part of a state mandated "Unmet Transit Needs" process. Key to this process is the review by the VCTC Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee/Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (CTAC/SSTAC) which includes citizen members from the county, the ten cities, and social service agencies countywide (including the VCAAA). CTAC/SSTAC is the committee which must analyze and approve VCTC's mandated Unmet Transit Needs findings annually.

VCTC, in cooperation with the County, the ten Cities, Area Agency on Aging (AAA), and social service agencies approved a Human Services Transportation and Transit Service Coordination Study, and continues triennial updates as required by Federal law. The study includes recommendations to improve all paratransit services in the county, and improve uniformity. Several of those recommendations have

been implemented. VCTC approved a Countywide 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.

*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.*

Partially Agree. VCTC works cooperative with the VCAAA, and has provided the VCAAA with funds to provide limited transportation services which supplement the existing public transit services, and expects to continue that productive relationship in the future. VCTC also funds a "travel training" program to assist riders, specifically including seniors, in learning how to use the bus services in the county. Neither the Federal Transit Administration nor the State provides VCTC with funds which are exclusively available for senior transportation, and the Commission feels that as it works with the local agencies to improve transit, all riders, including seniors will benefit.

*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.*

Agree. As part of the Human Services Transportation and Transit Service Coordination Study, VCTC adopted a recommendation that all transit providers use of a standard age for senior transportation programs. This will require a number of agencies, including the VCAAA to use 65, instead of younger ages, to define seniors for transportation programs. The authority to make this determination is one for each operator, and is made in the context of the community's needs. VCTC sees the opportunities for additional improvements in the standardization of the requirements for participation in the senior programs, and based on the Commission actions in response to the 2013-14 Unmet Transit Needs process, will be working on implementation of those improvements.

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

No position. The VCTC is increasing its staff to better plan for and administer transit in the county. The Commission has no position on the staffing of the VCAAA.