

To: Regional Transportation Commission
From: Linda Wilshusen, Executive Director
Re: Public Hearing on Coordination of Paratransit Services in Santa Cruz County

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC):

1. Hear presentations from the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, the agency responsible for providing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated paratransit services, and from Community Bridges, the designated Consolidated Transportation Services Agency and the agency contracted to provide ADA paratransit and other paratransit services for the elderly and people with disabilities;
 2. Receive testimony from the public about paratransit issues and solutions;
 3. Direct staff to meet individually with stakeholders regarding recommendations for a short-term Task Force to improve coordination of paratransit services in Santa Cruz County; and
 4. Direct staff to return to the April RTC meeting with recommendations regarding the Task Force's work program, including membership, focus, timeline, staffing, facilitation and budget.
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BACKGROUND

At the January RTC meeting, the RTC approved a plan submitted by Commissioner Wormhoudt ([Attachment 1](#)) to hold this public hearing as an opportunity for current and potential users and others associated with the various paratransit services to express their perspectives about paratransit service issues and potential solutions. Commissioner Wormhoudt also proposed convening a short-term Task Force to address paratransit coordination. Entities supporting the public hearing include: Senior Network Services, Seniors Council, Volunteer Center, Community Action Board, Central Coast Center for Independent Living, Cabrillo College Stroke Center, Ombudsman Advocate, Californians for Disability Rights, Central Coast Alliance for Health Board of Directors, Elderday, Commission on Disabilities, Long Term Care Interagency Commission, Seniors Commission, Metro Accessible Transportation Services Forum, and the Elderly & Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee. Their letters are attached ([Attachment 2](#)). This public hearing was advertised in local newspapers and promoted by a variety of social service providers and advocacy groups.

The Regional Transportation Commission has requested that the public hearing focus specifically on issues affecting the provision of service, and that the public provide their ideas for potential solutions.

Presentations

Santa Cruz Metro and Community Bridges will each make 15-minute presentations summarizing the issues from their agency's perspective. Written materials that these entities requested to be included in this packet are attached and referenced in this staff report. The group of social service providers that advocated for this forum will speak under the public comment period. Senior Meal Site/Meals on Wheels staff have developed a survey to provide input to the RTC by those unable to attend the public hearing and will present the survey results and possibly some videotaped testimony during the public comment period.

DISCUSSION

Seniors and people with disabilities have varying specialized transportation needs. This segment of the population is expected to grow rapidly over coming decades as baby boomers age.

In 1982 Community Bridges (formerly called Food and Nutrition Services) was designated by the SCCRTC per California Statutes and Code of Regulations Article 7-6680 as the Consolidated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA). The primary role of the CTSA is to ensure that specialized transportation services in the area are consolidated and coordinated to provide improved efficiency and effectiveness of those services (CA Government Code 15975).

The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that "it will be considered discrimination for purposes of the ADA... for a public entity which operates a fixed route system to fail to provide paratransit and other special transportation services to individuals with disabilities." It further states that level of services must be comparable to the level of transit services provided to those without disabilities, to the extent practicable. This unfunded federal mandate outlines specific service criteria for paratransit service and places limitations for the financial burden of public transit entities.

Current Paratransit Services

About 100,000 specialized transportation trips per year in Santa Cruz County are provided by Community Bridges and its subcontractors to senior mealsites, elder day care facilities, rehabilitation centers and to medical sites both in and out of the county. According to Community Bridges, funding for these non-ADA **LiftLine** trips is provided primarily by MediCal with Transportation Development Act, Elderday and other sources completing the funding picture.

About the same number of trips is provided by Community Bridges and its subcontractors through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated paratransit contract with Santa Cruz Metro. The ADA, which became federal law in 1990, requires that the public transit service provider, Metro, provide transportation services complementary to its fixed route transit (bus service) for those unable to ride the bus. This ADA Paratransit service is called **ParaCruz**.

Other public and private providers, such as the Volunteer Center and the Santa Cruz Veterans Service Office, offer a relatively small number of rides above and beyond those currently coordinated through Community Bridges.

Related Documents

Every four years the state requires the RTC to develop an *Action Plan for Specialized Transportation Services*. The most current Action Plan was submitted to the state in December 2001 and is attached (Attachment 3). Excerpts from the *2001 Regional Transportation Plan* related to coordination of paratransit services are included as Attachment 4.

Attachment 5 is a copy of a presentation by Legal Counsel to the Metro Board in December 2003. SCMTD plans to reference these legal requirements in its presentation. ADA-mandated paratransit is governed by federal laws regarding the type of service that must be provided, the service area, eligibility for the service, the process for establishing eligibility, minimum levels of service, response time, fares, hours/days of service, capacity constraints, trip purpose restrictions, wheelchair size, no-show policies and due process rights.

Information from SC Metro on revenues and fares is also attached (Attachment 6).

In 2000, Santa Cruz Metro contracted with MultiSystems to prepare a *Comprehensive Operational and Financial Audit* of its ADA Complementary Paratransit Service. The Final Task 14 Recommendations and Summary are attached (Attachment 7). SCMTD staff plans to bring the full report to the public hearing and it can be made available to the Task Force.

In 2002, Metro implemented recertification policies and procedures to ensure that only the eligible riders receive ADA Paratransit services. Attachment 8 is a staff report on recertification efforts that Metro staff asked to be included in your packet. In addition, Metro has provided copies of various staff reports and memos from its ADA Recertification Study which can be made available to Commissioners upon request.

Community Bridges has submitted information on costs, revenues, ridership and coordination (Attachment 9).

Clay Kempf, Executive Director of the Seniors Council/Area Agency on Aging has prepared a paper entitled *Improving Specialized Transportation Services in Santa Cruz County: A Historical Review and a Call to Action for Meeting the Challenges of the New Millennium* (Attachment 10).

A group of social service providers which advocated for this public hearing have prepared a letter for the Commission (Attachment 11).

Current Paratransit Challenges

The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (Metro), Community Bridges and the various agencies working with seniors and disabled individuals have been grappling with a number of

challenges in the network of paratransit services for some time. There is pending action in a few areas.

ADA Paratransit Service Provider – Since the inception of ADA Paratransit in 1992, Metro has contracted ParaCruz service to Lift Line under the umbrella of Community Bridges. Community Bridges provides about 55% of the ADA rides and subcontracts out the remainder to private taxi operators: Yellow Cab Company in Santa Cruz and Courtesy Cab in Watsonville. In consideration of legal and operational issues, the Metro Board is in the process of discussing whether to change the way its ADA paratransit service is operated. Options include operating ADA paratransit services in-house using Metro staff and vehicles or taking only the scheduling and dispatch portions of the operation in-house and continuing to have the vehicles operated by contractors. These options are due to be considered by the Metro Board at its February 27th meeting. Both the Metro's Accessible Transportation Services Forum (MASTF) and the SCCRTC's Elderly & Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee (E/D TAC) have recommended that the Metro board consider the conclusion of this Paratransit Public Hearing process before making final decisions about service providers for ADA Paratransit (see Attachment 2 and Item 16 in this packet).

Costs and Funding Availability – A variety of funding sources are used to provide the various ADA and other paratransit services. All funding sources are limited and some are shrinking. Meanwhile costs per rider and the number of rides have been rising. Santa Cruz Metro has the continual challenge of balancing the costs of its fixed route system as well as the costs of its ParaCruz service. Community Bridges has the challenge of operating a multi-faceted system with a variety of fluctuating revenues and rules.

Co-Mingling/Ridesharing – Some trips funded by different programs have similar schedules and origin/destinations. Currently Metro and Community Bridges are reassessing Metro's requirement that ADA Paratransit trips can not occur on vehicles carrying non-ADA paratransit trips. Discussions have focused on the increased efficiency and potential cost savings that may occur if ridesharing were allowed.

Coordination – Regardless of how specialized transportation services are provided, they must be coordinated in a fashion that is easy to use by the clients. Many of the clients are the most frail and vulnerable in our society and are confused about fares and trip prioritization. Most non-ADA rides are for specific trip purposes do not have a fare. There are two exceptions: the co-pay of \$8 or \$15 for taxi scrip with no specific requirements for trip purpose, and the requested \$10 donation for out-of-county medical trips provided by the American Red Cross. ADA ride fares are \$3 per one-way trip and are not prioritized by trip destination.

Balance – Provision of paratransit services is complex, but it is important to remember that the above issues impact real people whose lives depend on a basic level of mobility. Striking a balance between consumer/community needs, legal requirements, costs and operational needs will take a thoughtful effort by all parties.

Next Steps

As approved by the SCCRTC at their January meeting and outlined by Commissioner Wormhoudt's letter (Attachment 1), staff will meet individually with various stakeholders and return to the Commission's April 2004 meeting with a proposed work program for convening a short-term Task Force to address coordination of paratransit services. For the April 2004 staff report, staff plans to reiterate key issues identified in this staff report and include any others brought forward at this public hearing or in the stakeholder discussions; recommend which key issue/s should be the focus of the Task Force work; and recommend membership and a timeline for the Task Force. Staff's initial concept is that the Task Force would have a broad-based membership, would be given a focused agenda, and would be asked to develop recommendations to the Commission after a designated period of time, perhaps as short as three months. It may be beneficial for the meetings to be facilitated by a third party; United Way has already agreed to provide facilitation services, if needed. Staff welcomes Commissioner input on these initial concepts.

SUMMARY

The Regional Transportation Commission has requested that a public hearing be held to provide an opportunity for the public to testify about paratransit issues and solutions. This staff report includes background information from a number of perspectives. As follow up to this public hearing, staff recommends returning in April with recommendations on formation of a short-term, inclusive Task Force to continue the work of improving the coordination of paratransit services in Santa Cruz County.

Attachments:

1. Letter dated 12/17/03 from Commissioner Wormhoudt
2. Letters supporting the Paratransit Public Hearing
3. Action Plan for Specialized Transportation, 12/02
4. Excerpts from the 2001 Regional Transportation Plan
5. Legal Requirements for ParaCruz
6. Santa Cruz Metro Budget Information
7. *2000 ADA Complementary Paratransit Comprehensive Operational and Financial Audit Recommendations and Summary*
8. Metro Staff Report on One-Year Review of ParaCruz Recertification
9. Community Bridges Materials
10. *Improving Specialized Transportation Services in Santa Cruz County* by the Executive Director of the Seniors Council/Area Agency on Aging
11. Letter from Six Social Service Agencies

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