



Attachment 2
County of Santa Cruz

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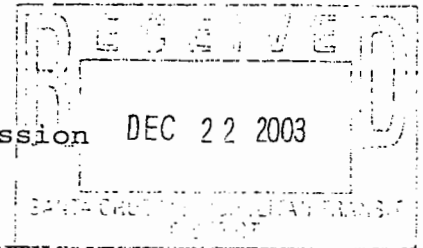
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THIRD DISTRICT

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FOURTH DISTRICT

MARK W. STONE
FIFTH DISTRICT

December 17, 2003

Jan Beautz, Chairperson
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
1523 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060



RE: PARATRANSIT SERVICES IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Dear Chairperson Beautz and Members of the Commission:

As Commissioners are aware, concerns regarding the provision of paratransit services in Santa Cruz County have been growing. There are concerns regarding the quality of service provided by the main paratransit agency, Community Bridges, and there are also concerns regarding the Transit District mandate preventing the co-mingling of rides paid for by different funding sources on one paratransit vehicle. In addition, the Transit District is considering taking the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) funded services in-house, which would result in two paratransit agencies operating separate services in the County. Users of paratransit services as well as providers of social and health services to these customers are expressing a good deal of concern about the inefficiency and instability of these vital services.

The Commission has a long and deep interest in the provision of paratransit services in the County. Not only do we fund Community Bridges with over \$500,000 a year, but we allocate over \$5,000,000 per year to the Transit District, which is expending over \$2,000,000 a year out of its budget for ADA paratransit services.

This commitment to paratransit on the part of the Commission predates the passage of the ADA. The Commission has long recognized the need by seniors and, especially, the disabled for specialized transportation services and has been willing to help fund these services. Over the years other programs have developed focusing on different populations in need of these services and the paratransit agency has expanded the services it supplies. The passage of ADA, with its legal and financial

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impacts, has fundamentally altered the context in which paratransit services are provided. Not only are the legal requirements strict, but the financial implications are major.

The complexity of the various paratransit programs and their various funding and legal requirements makes the provision of services difficult enough. Now, however, the situation has reached near crisis proportions due to the budgetary cutbacks faced by all the funding agencies. Customers of paratransit services, often some of the most needy of our residents, are not only facing service reductions but, in addition, potential changes in the way services are provided that very well may make it more difficult and confusing to use the services that are left.

I think there is general agreement among funders, service providers, and consumers that one consolidated, cost-effective, efficient paratransit agency would be the best way to provide these services to the community. Though budgetary, legal, and structural problems may make this a difficult goal to attain in the short run, over the long-term I think this is the goal we should seek. In addition, I think the Commission is in a good position to assist in the process of working towards this goal. Although the Commission has funded paratransit services for many years, we have not been actively involved in recent debates concerning the best way to provide these services and are likely to be viewed as an objective body by advocates for various positions.

Therefore, I think it is necessary and important at this time for the Commission to act to bring together the various parties concerned about paratransit services and to help structure a process that can resolve the long-term issues. In relation to the more immediate issues, I don't think it would be beneficial for the Commission to get involved in the on-going discussions between the Transit District and Community Bridges regarding the provision of services under the current contract.

A number of community representatives have requested a summit to start working on the issues confronting paratransit services. As I see it, the name of the gathering isn't as important as the holding of it, and I would prefer to organize it in a format that has worked for us in the past. Therefore, I would suggest that we hold an evening public hearing on the date of our February, 2004, meeting to consider the problems currently facing paratransit services in the County and the future of these services.

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In my view, this public hearing would be the start of the process of seeking long-term solutions to the problems facing paratransit services. I would hope that after hearing from the public and all interested parties, the Commission would direct our staff to meet with the various stakeholders and return to the Commission within a relatively short time with a work program for responding to the long-term paratransit services issues and also with a recommendation for the membership of a broadly-based task force, as suggested by many community members, to be established to seek mutually agreed upon solutions to the major problems that exist.

My first concern is with the seniors and disabled users of paratransit services and the transportation problems they face during these times of budgetary cutbacks and programmatic confusion. We have a responsibility to them to provide the most user-friendly, cost effective, efficient service we can. I would hope that the Commission can be helpful in finding a long-term plan to realize these objectives.

Therefore, I recommend that the Commission take the following actions:

1. Set an evening public hearing on February 5, 2004, to take testimony from the public and other interested parties on the problems currently facing paratransit services in Santa Cruz County and the future of these services; and
2. At the conclusion of this public hearing, direct staff to meet with the various stakeholders and return to the Commission by our April, 2004, meeting with a work program for responding to the long-term paratransit services issues and, also, with a recommendation for a broadly-based task force representing all stakeholders, as suggested by many community members, to seek mutually-agreed upon solutions to the major problems that confront the paratransit system.

Sincerely,



MARDI WORMHOUDT, Supervisor
Third District

MW:lg

cc: ✓ Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District
Community Bridges

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Seniors Council
Alliance for Health
Seniors Network Services
Ombudsman Advocate
Cabrillo College Stroke Center
Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee
Human Resources Agency
Health Services Agency
Volunteer Center
MASTIF
Lifeline Advisory Committee
Elderday
Red Cross
Santa Cruz Transportation Company

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