

2006 Annual Report

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Transportation Commission's Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee (E/D TAC) continues to be active in reviewing specialized transportation planning activities, monitoring the community's transportation programs for elderly and disabled individuals, and promoting a coordinated effort for effective and efficient paratransit services for the elderly and disabled community in Santa Cruz County.

The E/D TAC met approximately every two months throughout 2006.

The main endeavors for the E/D TAC in 2006 were:

- ❖ Reviewing the Americans with Disabilities Act-mandated Paratransit service transition to the Transit District and evaluating the effect on the overall network of specialized transportation
- ❖ Reviewing paratransit services provided by the Volunteer Center and Community Bridges
- ❖ Reviewing the Transportation Development Act claims to the Volunteer Center and Community Bridges.
- ❖ Ensuring coordination between paratransit services
- ❖ Securing federal paratransit capital funds (Section 5310)
- ❖ Ensuring that specialized transportation needs were included in the Regional Transportation Commission's Legislative Agenda
- ❖ Reviewing local jurisdiction Article 8 Transportation Development Act claims for pedestrian related projects
- ❖ Reviewing and commenting on new development that impacts the existing transportation infrastructure

1. Implementation of ADA Paratransit Program

Implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated paratransit transportation program continues to be a focus for the E/D TAC as it comprises nearly one-third of specialized transportation services in Santa Cruz County and impacts the

provision of other specialized transportation services. Increases in demand for non-ADA programs are also a concern of the Committee.

One of the primary challenges faced by all specialized transportation programs could be how to meet potential increases in demand for the paratransit services in general. As people live longer and the population of seniors -- many of them with disabilities -- is expected to grow dramatically elsewhere in the state, due to the aging baby boomers, it is difficult to predict how this trend will play out in Santa Cruz County, where housing costs are high and the supply of senior facilities is low.

2. Program Development and Review

In 2006, the E/D TAC reviewed the Committee's prior year annual report, including the list of unmet specialized transportation needs. This year, The E/D TAC followed the progress of the Santa Cruz County Transportation Funding Task Force and encouraged members of the elderly and disabled community to participate in the evolution of a consensual policy for future decision-making in transportation funding policy. Members offered their advice and concerns, relative to transportation funding, to Fred Keeley, official Convener of the TTF.

E/D TAC members, in considering the refinement of an unmet needs list for formulating transportation funding priorities, produced a matrix of potential actions with the primary theme of a Mobility Management Center, with costs projected over a 15-year period.

The RTC approved the E/D TAC's recommendation to add four representatives from the elderly and disabled community to the newly formed Transportation Funding Task Force (TTF), under the direction of Fred Keeley. The E/D TAC agreed to take an active role in reaching countywide consensus on transportation funding policy, and continued to follow the progress of this task force.

Staff and members explored the issue of countywide taxi regulation and discovered that there were inherent conflicts and inconsistencies in the ways that each of the five jurisdictions regulated commercial taxi service. These conflicts and inconsistencies are a natural concern of this Committee, since the population of elderly and disabled depend upon taxi service as an important supplement to their public transportation services.

Further discussion of taxi issues generated a range of ideas on improving service to the elderly and disabled, including ordinance revisions, private taxi associations, more attention to special needs clients (mental health), and taxi stand strategies.

Members agreed to inform the Commission of their concern about taxi regulation

conflicts within Santa Cruz County and to request that the Commission express these concerns to authorities within each jurisdiction.

The Committee was informed by Santa Cruz city staff of the city's interest in modernizing at least two major vehicular intersections, both near the beach area. Staff proposed investigating the introduction of modern roundabouts for these intersections, arguing that these configurations are statistically safer than conventional intersections, and more efficient especially in areas of high volume, low speed traffic. Members agreed to follow the design proposals as they came before city officials, and to offer comments on the designs from the perspective of the elderly and disabled community.

E/D TAC offered advice and support to the City of Santa Cruz in its proposed development of Arana Gulch Park, specifically in support of the plan to include a paved, wheelchair-accessible pathway running the length of the park. Members agreed to a compromise between accessibility and environmentally-sensitive design.

The Committee submitted to Caltrans a letter of support for a Mobility Outreach and Education grant (2007-08) to assist the mobility needs of seniors, disabled, and low-income in meeting their transportation needs.

E/D TAC took under consideration a project sponsored by the California Highway Patrol and Metropolitan Transportation Commission to revise the standard traffic accident reporting form (555) used by most law enforcement agencies in the state of California. Proposed revisions submitted by CalPed would provide a more accurate database record of accident details, specifically traffic infrastructure, bicycles, and mobility devices.

The Committee again addressed the problem of inadequate sidewalks within the county, with special concern for wheelchair access and the importance of keeping wheelchairs out of the vehicle right-of-way.

Members of E/D TAC reviewed the draft Metro ParaCruz Customer Guide and offered comments and revisions prior to its submittal to the SCMTD Board.

A new chair and vice-chair were elected in 2006 for the E/D TAC, with John Daugherty as Chair, and Tom Crain as Vice-Chair. As vacancies arose, the committee recruited and recommended individuals to fill the positions. Overall, the member positions were full, while there were some vacancies in the alternate positions. A number of proposals were accepted in the interest of encouraging recruitment, such as contacting social service agencies and advertising in local newspapers. The E/D TAC provided input about the RTC's revised rules and regulations, including those for the Committee.

The Committee continued to use technology such as the internet to provide information to the public about the E/D TAC, its members and meeting agenda. Within the Committee, e-mail was used to distribute information about upcoming meetings, agenda items and other areas of interest.

3. Review of Grants and Contracts

The Committee reviewed and supported the 2006 Transportation Development Act (TDA) claims of both the Volunteer Center and the Consolidated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA). The quarterly reports of both agencies are regularly included in the E/D TAC packets, and each agency provides an update about their program at the meeting. In 2006, the committee received in-depth information from the CTSA about how TDA funds are spent, number of rides provided, etc.

Members continued to be informed about the federal New Freedom grant program, intended to extend transportation benefits to disabled Americans.

E/D TAC acted as a local resource in the review of applications for Section 5310 grants, a federal program intended for the purchase of vehicles and equipment to meet the transportation needs of elderly and disabled individuals. Members review applications for this program and provide advice to the Commission on whether to support specific grant requests.

A SCMTD representative informed members about the Section 5311 annual grant application process to fund non-urban transportation projects that would benefit elderly and disabled persons. Metro's new policies now include E/D TAC as a resource in the programming of these funds.

Members reviewed Transportation Development Act (TDA) claims for both the Volunteer Center and Community Bridges. The Volunteer Center uses these funds to operate a rides center coordinated with volunteer drivers, with priority given to persons in need of medical appointment transportation. Community Bridges operates Lifeline, an accessible transportation service that is non-profit; also included in their service is the distribution of Taxi Scrip, discounted taxi fares for elderly and disabled users.

Members expressed support for Metro's proposal to seek grant funding for extending transit (bus) service to include holidays, and agreed to send a letter of support to the grant-authorizing agency, Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District.

E/D TAC submitted to Caltrans a letter of support for a Mobility Outreach and Education grant (2007-08) to assist the mobility needs of seniors, disabled, and low-income in meeting their transportation needs.

E/D TAC responded to a request from the County Public Works Department to comment on two pedestrian projects paid for by TDA funds. These projects involve pedestrian and bicycle lane improvements for Calabazas Road, in Watsonville, and State Park Drive, in Aptos.

4. Coordination

Funding constraints by decreased tax-based revenues have continued to affect the Transportation Development Act (TDA) revenues for the Transit District, Community Bridges/Lift Line and the Volunteer Center. In addition, the Transit District's ½ cent sales tax has also been negatively affected by the economy. These funding constraints for both fixed route and specialized transportation had the following effect:

- Fixed transit routes have been cut, thereby cutting the ADA Paratransit service area
- ADA Paratransit services generally operate at minimum required levels.
- Demand for Taxi Scrip continued to exceed supply, making a waiting list.

Members and staff continued to follow developments in legislative policy related to public investment in transportation infrastructure. The Committee encouraged increasing the spending levels on transportation related to elderly and disabled users.

E/D TAC members offered advice and encouragement to Metro representatives, relative to bus route planning in the La Posada neighborhood of Santa Cruz. Members requested that Metro find alternatives to better serve the elderly and disabled population of this neighborhood.

The Committee expressed its approval of Metro's proposal to provide transit service on holidays, and sent a letter of support to the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District for an AB2766 grant application.

5. Community Forum

Throughout the year, the E/D TAC receives highlights from the SCCRTC meetings so that they may be kept informed about Commission actions, updates about the Transportation Development Act funds, relevant articles and news. In addition, E/D TAC members made announcements about the following related items: Senior's Council Unmet Needs process and 4-year needs assessment survey, In Home Supportive

Services Conference, California' Strategic Plan for an Aging Population, issues identified by California Health and Human Services, Aging/Safe Mobility symposium, Watsonville Hospital's Senior Health Fair, and a variety of related newspaper/newsletter articles.

Members reviewed and discussed revisions to Metro's ParaCruz Customer Guide, a publication intended to clarify policies and procedures in the use of ParaCruz services. One significant policy change shortened advance reservations for ParaCruz users from 14 days to 3 days in advance, primarily to improve efficiency and reduce the negative impact of ride cancellations.

6. Ongoing Areas of Interest and Identified Unmet Transit/Paratransit Needs

In 2007, the E/D TAC will continue to advise the Regional Transportation Commission, the CTSA Board of Directors and the Santa Cruz Metro Transit Board of Directors on transportation issues for elderly and disabled individuals in the Santa Cruz County community.

A list of unmet paratransit/transit needs was developed separately.