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Transit - Paratransit Coordinating Committee

AGENDA

Tuesday July 18, 2006 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
PRMD Conference Room 2550 Ventura Avenue
Santa Rosa

ITEM

- I. Introductions
- II. Public comment on items not on agenda
- III. Consent Items – DISCUSSION/ACTION
 - A. Approval of the agenda
 - B. Approval of May 16, 2006 Minutes
- IV. Reports – INFORMATION
 - A. Transit Agencies
 - B. SCTA Reports
 - C. Report on Transit Forum*
- V. Adjourn – ACTION

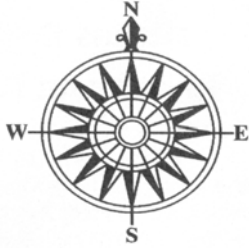
The next **SCTA** meeting is Sept 11, 2006
The next **TPCC** meeting is *Oct. 3, 2006 (*Transit Forum*)

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The TPCC agenda is available in pdf format and in MS Word.

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TRANSIT-PARATRANSIT MEETING MINUTES

May 16, 2006

2:00 p.m.

Dennis Battenberg	TPCC
Steve Birdlebough	Friends of SMART
Carol Bonfigli	Citizen
Beryl Brown	Earle Baum Center of the Blind
Gail Burge	Petaluma People Service Center
Robert Cuneo	Citizen
Jodi Curtis	Sonoma County Transit
Dan Dionne	Pride Industries
Sonja Drown	City of Healdsburg
Larry Hall	Citizen
Larry Henzerling	Community Resources for Independence
Donald Hughes	Volunteer Wheels
Michael Ivory	City of Santa Rosa Transit
Linda Picton	Trans Cultural Literacy
Jim Ryan	City of Petaluma
Katherine Taylor	Sonoma Co. Area Agency on Aging
River Tierra	Becoming Independent
Marsha Vas Dupre	SRJC Trustee/League of Women Voters
Jim Wagner	Sonoma County Transit

Staff present: Chris Barney, Nina Donofrio, Lynne March, Janet Spilman.

I. Introductions

Introductions were made.

II. Public comment on items not on agenda

Linda Picton of Trans Cultural Literacy reported that a rider with whom she is acquainted, who works at Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa and uses fixed route transit service, had to take the bus from work to south Santa Rosa Avenue, and that it took her 1½ hrs. to travel less than six miles. Ms. Picton cited this as an example of the inadequacy of fixed route service in Sonoma County.

Bob Cuneo asked for clarification of the policy regarding bringing shopping carts on to vehicles, particularly oversized carts that cannot be secured. He explained that because of this occurring recently, some people are under the impression the County is prohibiting any kind of shopping carts at all on all busses.

Jodi Curtis of Sonoma County Transit explained that this is a safety issue; a recent incident involved a passenger bringing oversized shopping baskets on to the bus, and it became a hazard. The policy guidelines establish a two-bag limit not exceeding 20 lbs. each. She reported that she had been unaware that passengers were bringing oversized shopping carts with heavy bags of groceries packed into them. Jim Wagner of Sonoma County Transit added that another issue resulting from transporting oversized carts is passengers who then demand a certain vehicle to pick them up to carry their load. The County cannot accommodate this.

Mr. Cuneo requested that service be made available to accommodate people in Petaluma and other outlying areas of the County who use paratransit service and want to attend and participate in next year's Human Race event. Ms. Brown suggested volunteer drivers. This would also apply to other community events.

Ms. Curtis responded that providing service to events outside of normally scheduled hours of service would constitute operating as a charter service, and that this is prohibited by law. The County risks losing their funding if they do this. She reported that a committee of the Federal Transit Administration is examining the language of the current legislation and looking into amending it to allow for public transportation to provide community bus service.

III. Consent Items – DISCUSSION/ACTION

- A. Approval of the agenda
- B. Approval of March 21, 2006 Minutes

These were approved as presented.

IV. Reports – INFORMATION

C. Transit Agencies

Santa Rosa:

Michael Ivory of Santa Rosa City Transit reported that the City is in the Request for Proposal process and responded to seven vendors who are interested in the process. Security surveillance cameras have been installed in all but two paratransit buses.

Petaluma:

Jim Ryan of the City of Petaluma Public Facilities and Services reported that the Short-Range Transit Plan was approved with comments by the City Council. The Council was generally pleased with paratransit service, but less so with the fixed route service. They have hired a consultant, Richard Davis, to help resolve ongoing mechanical issues with buses.

Bids are in and have been accepted for the Petaluma Transit Mall. Construction is anticipated to begin in early June. A pre-bid meeting is scheduled for May 25, and Requests for P's have come in, and staff will be taking this to City Council June 5, for fixed route and paratransit service to start July 1. Two proposals have been received for both fixed route and paratransit service, and one proposal for paratransit only.

Volunteer Wheels:

Donald Hughes of Volunteer Wheels reported that their agency has continued to have zero capacity denials. They just put a new paratransit van into service, and another is due to be received within the next month. It is anticipated that all vehicles will be equipped with a new radio system and GPS system by the end of this month. He confirmed that right now this equipment is scheduled to be installed in all the vans; staff is also looking into the possibility of installing it in the automobiles, as well.

City of Healdsburg:

Sonja Drown of Healdsburg Transit reported that the City of Healdsburg is currently reviewing its first ever preliminary Short Range Transportation Plan. It is anticipated that this will be presented to City Council at the first meeting in June.

A new bilingual transit brochure has just been published. A limited printing has just been completed, and with a few minor revisions, a larger printing will be completed in early June. Per the request of Chair Dennis Battenberg, Ms. Drown agreed to bring a few copies to the next meeting.

A new vehicle for paratransit service has just been put into service.

Sonoma County Transit:

Jim Wagner of Sonoma County Transit reported that shipment of new 40 ft. coaches is anticipated by June 9. These are upper-scale models that are very similar to Golden Gate Transit buses, and are planned to be used for express service, and longer trips. The second of two new paratransit vehicles just been received. The Copland Street project in Petaluma has been awarded, and construction is ready to begin. The Windsor Transit facility is out to bid. This will be a train depot. These bids are anticipated to be in by May 24. Construction is anticipated to begin in July. This project is projected to be completed in November or December. Some detouring and schedule adjustments in bus service are anticipated in light of the continuing construction on Highway 101 in Santa Rosa. The Summer Youth Pass is due to be released shortly. This will be a \$20.00 pass that provides service on any County route at any time beginning June 1 and through the summer.

Ms. Curtis reported that the County is also participating in the Bay Area Spare the Air program. Last year the County offered free fixed route bus service for the morning commute. This year service will be free for the entire day for the first three days of the program. The program begins June 1 and lasts through the end of October.

Chair Battenberg asked if this is mandated by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Mr. Wagner replied that participation is strongly encouraged. The MTC reimburses local jurisdictions.

City of Santa Rosa:

Michael Ivory of the City of Santa Rosa reported that the City will be participating fully in the Spare the Air program. There will be fueling/energizer stations. This is also true for Bike and Walk to Work Day. Ms. Spilman added that information regarding these programs which includes locations of all the energizer stations, is available online at www.511.org, the MTC transportation information website.

City of Petaluma:

Jim Ryan of the City of Petaluma reported that the City is likewise participating in the Spare the Air program; however, it is now under the purview of the Public Works Department, and not City Transit .

Golden Gate Transit:

Ms. Spilman addressed the group on behalf of this agency, and reported that they will be raising their fares in July.

V. SCTA Report

Ms. Spilman reported that staff has been heavily involved in the Highway 101 construction project. Staff has been attending related meetings at Caltrans and the City of Santa Rosa, as well as consultants and contractors. She noted that Highway 101 improvements will be a long-range project (10 years), and that the present construction (Highway 12 to Steele Lane) will be completed in two years. Following the present construction, the Highway 101 project scope will involve Steele Lane to Windsor River Road, and then south at the Wilfred interchange through the north end of Petaluma at the Old Redwood Highway exit, and then the Marin-Sonoma Narrows. Timing of the construction of these projects will depend on funding.

Ms. Spilman noted that there are many questions regarding the distribution of Proposition 42 funds. Ms. Spilman observed that there may be a time when the SCTA Board will have to act on this.

The programming cycle for the Transportation for Clean Air Fund has just been completed. Arterial projects, such as a roundabout in Petaluma, have been included. Staff is considering whether to move forward with a Countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Lynne March presented handouts of a press release announcing a public hearing for the Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging for funding proposals. Seniors are encouraged to attend. Katherine Taylor of the Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging referred to a second handout showing funding priorities for the Area Agency on Aging

Community Based Services Programs (CBSP). Surveys have conducted by this agency show that transit is a significant issue for the aged. Even though there has not been funding through their Federal funds, they are still very interested in transportation issues, and have decided to make an allocation (\$50,000) for the next funding cycle. This will go through the Request for Proposal process. Advocacy and training are also important.

Beryl Brown of the Earle Baum Center of the Blind reported that the Mayor is having a session for seniors June 7, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Mr. Ivory announced that the City of Santa Rosa will be attending this event, hosting a lunch, which will be focused on seniors and transit issues.

Ms. March then presented a report on the Current State of Transportation for People with Disabilities, and advised the Committee that the entire report is available on their website. Mr. Battenberg reported that California is ahead of most of the nation in addressing these issues.

Larry Hall raised the issue of zero-trip denial; noting that there are potential passengers who decline to ride between County and City transit because of the transfer policy, and inaccessibility, which he claimed is a form of trip denial.

Mr. Hughes responded that when he had referred to zero trip denials, he was referring to capacity denials. He confirmed that their agency is in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Ms. Curtis noted that passengers should not have to contact two agencies; if they allow sufficient time, Sonoma County Transit can make the appropriate arrangements and then contact the passenger.

Ms. Brown responded that the scheduling is not the biggest problem, the real issue is the additional time spent waiting and inconvenience of making transfers. She claimed to be hindered from traveling to many places because transferring adds 1½ to 2 hours to a trip. She noted that many seniors have difficulty waiting for one non-stop ride, let alone transferring to different vehicles and transit services.

Mr. Hall also raised the issue of the additional cost in fare to passengers living out of the area who have to travel to a transfer point in order to get service to their final destination.

Ms. Curtis noted that staff can examine coordination of schedules with Santa Rosa to make travel more efficient between these systems, and cut down on waiting time to transfer between services.

Mr. Hall addressed the need to maintain a “hand-off” policy, especially at night, where the transit service would not leave the passenger at the transfer point until their next ride arrives to pick them up. Mr. Wagner responded that when agencies are requested to “hand off” a passenger they will do so. Ms. Curtis added that the County’s policy is based on the East Bay’s policy of handing off passengers, and that, to the degree possible, given staff, the number of vehicles, and advance notification to the agency, they follow this policy and attempt to accommodate passengers. Mr. Hall cited a case that occurred approximately a year ago of a passenger being dropped off at a location that did not have paratransit service. Ms. Curtis responded that this would be a matter

to address to the City, and would be beyond the purview of what the County can respond to.

Chair Battenberg recommended contacting the local representative of Congress, noting that agencies are under a great deal of pressure to comply with ADA criteria.

Ms. March presented another informational item, which was a program for providing transportation to seniors. The Federal Transportation Authority (FTA) recently rolled out the Independent Transportation Network. The model for this program is to create independent community, membership-based, non-profit organizations that use advanced technology and both paid and volunteer drivers, to provide door-to-door service. They have creative methods for private funding; i.e., donating vehicles. There may be an opportunity to have this program locally in the future. Ms. Peterson added that this is a very innovative program, and that the Area Agency on Aging has been promoting it. She added that the program includes scheduling software, and that they offer startup money and matching funds. She noted that this program is designed to be over and above, and separate, from paratransit or fixed route service; therefore, it would not be competing with these services. At this time, this program is limited to ambulatory clients; but they are looking into working with taxi services and other services to include wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

Discussion ensued regarding limitations placed on these services by ADA regulations. Ms. March noted that the Independent Transportation Network (ITN) website (www.itn.org) reports that ¾ of Americans over the age of 65 live in areas that are not served by public transit. Mr. Ivory reported that he has contact information for a representative of Seniors, Inc. who is actively promoting this program and will speak with any agency representatives, for anyone who is interested.

Mr. Hall expressed the need for a balance between trip capacity and efficiency, and returned to the issue of transfers, and the time these take. Ms. Curtis responded that she and Mr. Ivory of the City of Santa Rosa would be working more closely with contractors to monitor service and examine schedules, in an effort to improve transfer service and reduce waiting time for passengers.

Steve Birdlebough reported that one of the other items referred to in the Current State of Transportation was flex service and route deviation. Ms. Curtis responded that the County does not provide this service. It requires the ability to allow for a specified number of deviations from the route, and incorporate the time into the schedule to make these stops. This type of service is used a good deal in new route startups and routes that do not service an area frequently, as well as in small communities.

Linda Picton inquired how the funding has to go into paratransit service so that fixed route service can be improved, and asked who to contact to get changes recognized. She cited the example of service from Sonoma, noting that the last bus leaves Sonoma at 7:00 p.m. She observed that if fixed routes were improved to everyone, then smaller, local service could run more frequently.

Ms. Curtis responded that the County examines demand vs. the cost of putting a fixed route bus in service at a particular route. Surveys are taken regularly to gauge how many passengers may take a given route. She said Mr. Wagner could be contacted regarding the issue of offering later bus service on a given route.

Chair Battenberg reported that he had recently received an annual report on transit from the MTC for the entire Bay Area, noting striking comparisons between funding for Sonoma County and other areas.

Ms. Marsha Vas Dupre asked if there was a method of public outreach to gauge how much transit ridership could be increased, based on public response. For example, she noted, could outreach be conducted to determine how many would take late evening classes at Santa Rosa Junior College if there were convenient transit service.

Ms. Curtis responded that the annual Transit Forum provides a platform to gather public comment on transit service. Mr. Wagner also noted that Routes 40, 44, and 60 would accommodate those who attend later evening classes at Santa Rosa Junior College. Ms. Curtis acknowledged the need for the County to be aware of transit needs of the public, citing the example of students taking Saturday classes at Sonoma State University. Mr. Ivory added that the City of Santa Rosa addresses these issues in their Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP). This is currently being evaluated. He noted that they are addressing not only the issue of transit for Santa Rosa Junior College students, but for Santa Rosa Plaza also, for those people who work until 10:00 p.m. at this retail center, and Coddington.

Chair Battenberg requested that the transit operators each bring at least a couple of schedules to the next meeting, in order to respond to specific questions regarding routes, scheduling and service.

VI. Adjourn – ACTION

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nina Donofrio