

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Coastal Express Political Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

MEETING DATE: June 4, 2008

AGENDA ITEM: 6

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive report on Coastal Express Political Advisory Committee Meeting of May 16, 2008 and status of service.

STAFF CONTACT: Jim Kemp, Scott Spaulding

DISCUSSION:

The VISTA Coastal Express provides daily public bus service between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, serving Ventura, Carpinteria, Santa Barbara, Goleta, and UCSB. Jointly funded by SBCAG and the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC), the service was started as a three year pilot program in 2001 and has grown to be a highly successful inter-regional bus service. In 2004, the Board approved \$1.5 million in regional Measure D funds to fund SBCAG's portion of the service through the end of Measure D in March 2010. Since the Coastal Express was launched, ridership has increased fivefold, from 40,000 annually to a projected 200,000 this year, and the number of commute hour bus trips has increased from five to twenty one. The Coastal Express helps relieve congestion on Highway 101 between Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, and will be particularly important during the Milpas to Hot Springs Highway 101 Operational Improvements construction project that will start in July.

The Coastal Express Policy Advisory Committee which is comprised of SBCAG and VCTC staff and board members met on May 16 and a copy of the draft meeting summary is attached. Highlights of the Coastal Express service include:

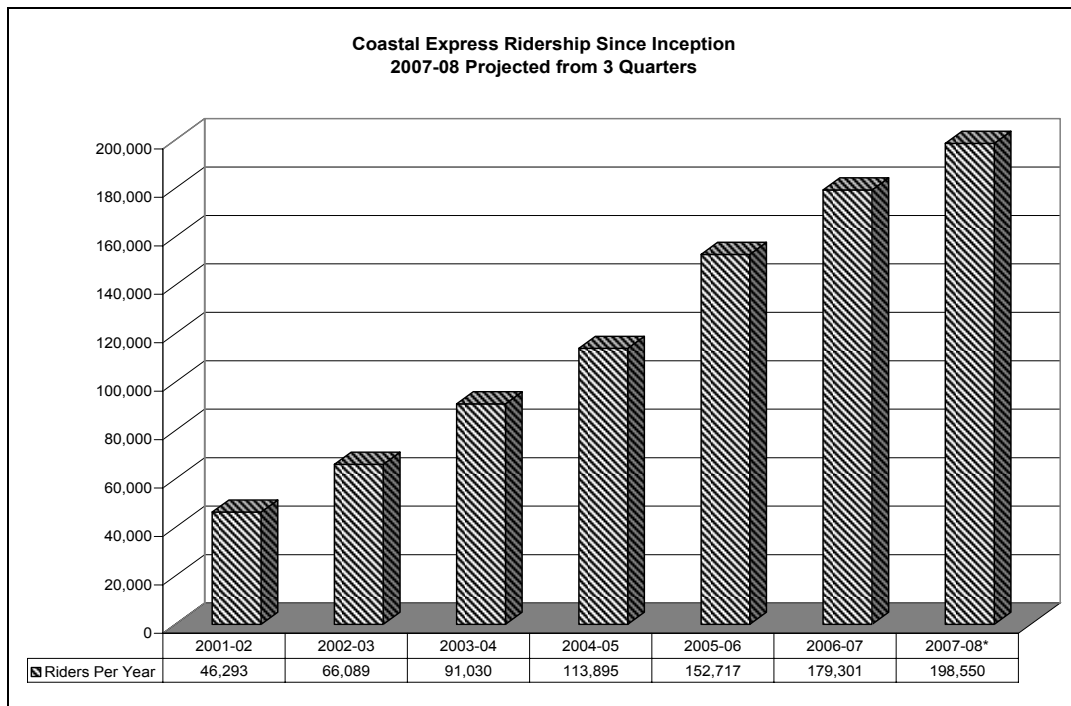
- Ridership is expected to increase about 15% from FY2007, following a steady trend of large annual ridership increases (see chart below)
- Service will increase significantly from FY2008 to FY2009; even with this additional service, some passengers will be forced to stand on several peak hour trips due to a lack of seating capacity.

Member Agencies

Buellton ■ Carpinteria ■ Goleta ■ Guadalupe ■ Lompoc ■ Santa Barbara ■ Santa Maria ■ Solvang ■ Santa Barbara County

- With the additional service and an adjustment to the contract to account for the escalation in diesel fuel prices, each jurisdiction's share of the cost is expected to increase from \$245,000 in FY2008 to \$384,000 in FY2009
- The Coastal Express farebox ratio is projected to remain at approximately 65%
- The Coastal Express Policy Advisory Committee directed staff to implement a fare increase, from \$2.00 to \$3.00 in the cash fare and from \$75.00 to \$110.00 in the monthly pass fare. The anticipated effective date for new fares is January 1, 2009 subject to approval by the VCTC board.

Although VCTC has access to ongoing funding sources to support the Coastal Express, SBCAG relies exclusively on Measure D to fund our share of the service. The \$1.5 million in Measure D funds approved in 2004 is expected to allow SBCAG to fulfill its funding obligation through March 2010. If Measure A is not adopted by voters in November, the Coastal Express will likely be terminated, putting hundreds of cars back on Highway 101 between Ventura and Santa Barbara. With the Milpas to Hot Springs Operational Improvements in full swing, this would compound the traffic congestion resulting from the highway construction project. The Measure A investment plan includes \$46 million for interregional transit services and if approved by voters would provide a secure funding stream to continue and expand interregional services like the Coastal Express.



COMMITTEE REVIEW: None

ATTACHMENT: May 16, 2008 Coastal Express PAC Meeting Summary

Draft
MEETING SUMMARY

COASTAL EXPRESS POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

May 16, 2008
Carpinteria City Hall

Policy Advisory Committee Members Present: Ventura County Supervisor Steve Bennett, Oxnard City Councilmember Andres Herrera, Santa Barbara County Supervisor Salud Carbajal, City of Santa Barbara Mayor Marty Blum, City of Carpinteria Councilmember Joe Aremandariz VCTC Executive Director Darren Kettle, SBCAG Executive Director Jim Kemp, MTD Assistant General Manager Jerry Estrada (*ex-officio*).

1. CALL TO ORDER

The committee selected Supervisor Steve Bennett to chair the meeting.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

3. MEETING SUMMARY

The Committee received the summary from the December 13, 2007 Policy Advisory Committee meeting without comment.

4. SERVICE INDICATORS REPORT

Ed Webster summarized ridership and fare revenue for FY2007 and FY2008, which have grown 9.6% and 6.8%, respectively, year over year through December. Ridership has increased significantly beginning in January 2008, to the point where several commute hour trips are at or over capacity. The Coastal Express is expected to carry over 200,000 passengers in the current fiscal year, making it VCTC's largest service.

5. ON BOARD SURVEY RESULTS

Ed Webster summarized the report on rider surveys conducted on-board in November 2007. He noted that VCTC conducts rider surveys annually but is considering moving to a biennial survey. Survey results were similar to prior years, with high levels of customer satisfaction.

6. COASTAL EXPRESS SERVICE LEVEL

Ed Webster reported on Coastal Express service levels and the growth in the amount of service provided since the Coastal Express was created in 2001. Normally service is added once per year in August, but this fiscal year demand has prompted additional service expansions. One additional express round trip to Goleta was added in August 2007, but due to a surge in demand, an additional three northbound and four southbound trips were added in March 2008. Even with this service expansion, ridership demand has continued to exceed seating capacity on some trips, resulting in riders having to stand on several morning and afternoon trips. On June 2, one additional morning northbound express trip to Goleta will be added to the service.

7. FINANCIAL REPORT

Ed Webster presented an update on Coastal Express operating expenditures and revenue for FY2007 and projections for FY2008. The significant service expansion in March 2008 and additional service to be implemented in August 2008 increased the projected annual expenditure for each agency from \$245,000 in FY2008 to \$384,000 in FY2009.

8. FUEL COST INCREASE

Under the current Coastal Express contract, the transit provider can request the VCTC board consider increasing the contract rate in response to external factors such as dramatic increases in fuel and/or insurance costs. The contractor, Coach USA, has asked for an effective hourly rate increase of \$2.50 to account for increased diesel fuel costs. The committee unanimously recommended approval of this rate adjustment to the VCTC board.

9. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN RIDERSHIP

Vic Khami and Scott Spaulding presented the staff report to the committee. Although the Coastal Express service has expanded regularly since the three year pilot program ended in 2004, demand on several commute hour trips continues to exceed seating capacity. The Coastal Express is characterized by demand that is largely unidirectional—north in the morning and south in the afternoon. Adding service to such a system is expensive in that an additional bus can only provide service where it is needed once every two hours, the length of time needed to travel from Ventura to Santa Barbara/Goleta and back again. The current schedule has ten morning commute hour trips from Ventura/Oxnard; existing ridership indicates current demand would support a number of additional trips.

The committee discussed the nature of the problem and how to identify additional funding to enable SBCAG and VCTC to increase service to meet demand. SBCAG funds their half of the net cost of the Coastal Express exclusively from Measure D, through a \$1.5 million authorization approved in 2004 to be spent over six years. Measure D expires in March 2010 but Measure A, a replacement to Measure D, is on the November 2008 ballot. If Measure A is adopted by voters, SBCAG will be able to not only fund their half of the Coastal Express program, but be able to increase service levels to meet demand.

VCTC relies on a variety of funding sources to finance the eight transit services and Metrolink rail system they operate. For additional funding to be provided to the Coastal Express, another program would have to receive less funding or additional TDA funds would have to be allocated to transit that are currently spent on streets and roads.

If Measure A does not pass in November, unless SBCAG can find additional funding the service will likely be terminated on April 1, 2010. Chair Bennett suggested meeting in January 2009 if Measure A does not pass so that VCTC can begin budgeting for nine rather than twelve months of Coastal Express service in FY2010.

10. FARE INCREASE

Darren Kettle provided a summary of the VCTC plan to bring a fare increase proposal to a joint VISTA committee, which would include members of all of the individual

service advisory committees. The joint meeting is scheduled for September 2008, which would allow the VCTC board to consider the committee's fare increase proposal at their November meeting. The Coastal Express advisory committee voted unanimously to recommend an increase in the cash fare from \$2.00 to \$3.00 and in the monthly pass fare from \$75.00 to \$110.00, to be implemented as soon as possible. VCTC staff indicated that the anticipated implementation date for the fare increase would be January 1, 2009. An increase in the fare from \$2.00 to \$3.00 would increase fare revenue by an estimated \$80,000-\$100,000 in FY2009, which would help offset the cost of providing additional service implemented in FY2008 and FY2009. Councilmember Herrera indicated his desire to increase the cash fare to \$4.00 as soon as practical and asked that this option be included in the VCTC fare adjustment process to take place in the fall of 2008.

11. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair at 12:30PM.