

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Coastal Express Policy Committee Meeting Update

MEETING DATE: July 7, 2010

AGENDA ITEM: 6

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive report on Coastal Express Policy Committee Meeting of June 25, 2010.

STAFF CONTACT: Scott Spaulding

DISCUSSION:

The Coastal Express provides daily public bus service between Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, serving Oxnard, 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 SBCAG Board approved \$1.5 million in regional Measure D funds to fund SBCAG's share of the service through the end of Measure D in 2010. Since the Coastal Express was launched, ridership has increased dramatically, from 40,000 annually to a projected 300,000 in 2010, and the number of commute hour bus trips has increased from eight to seventeen. The Coastal Express helps relieve congestion on Highway 101 between Santa Barbara and Ventura counties by providing commuters with an alternative to driving on 101.

The Coastal Express Policy Committee is comprised of SBCAG and VCTC board/commission members and each agency's executive director and traditionally meets once a year. The committee was formed under an MOU executed by SBCAG and VCTC and provides recommendations to the VCTC board on issues such as service changes and fares.

Two important items were on the June 25 Policy Committee agenda. The first was a presentation of the concept of augmenting existing service with additional commute hour service designed and funded by SBCAG using Measure A South County Interregional Transit funds. Since its inception the Coastal Express has provided daily bi-directional bus service that serves both choice riders that commute from Ventura County to the South Coast as well as transit-dependent riders. While many commuters use the Coastal Express, it is not specifically designed to serve the commuter market. By way of comparison, the successful Clean Air Express bus service operating between the North County and the South Coast offers more direct service with fewer stops, and as identified in the Measure A Strategic Plan, five times the ratio of bus seats-to-commuters during the crucial 7AM-8AM arrival period. The Clean Air Express offers premium express service with a one-way daily trip fare of \$7.00 versus \$2.50 for the Coastal Express. With the demand for improved commuter bus service self evident in the congested 101 corridor during the morning and afternoon rush hour, and Measure A South County Interregional Transit funding now available, VCTC and SBCAG staff are developing plans for how to best provide additional peak hour, express commuter bus service while

maintaining an integrated service that offers clear and easy to use choices to current and potential customers. A plan will be presented to the South Coast Subregional committee this fall and at a special meeting of the Coastal Express Policy Committee in September. The target date for implementing the expanded peak hour service is early 2011.

It is anticipated that costs for operating expanded peak hour express service would be funded from the Measure A South Coast Interregional Transit program and these estimated costs have been included in the first 5-year Measure A Program of Projects adopted by the SBCAG board last month. The South Coast Subregional Committee will ultimately review and make recommendations to the full board on the Coastal Express service expansion plans and the proposed expenditure of the South Coast Interregional Transit funds.

The second important issue presented to the Policy Committee involved the recently-initiated effort by VCTC to take a comprehensive look at how local and regional transit is provided in Ventura County. Currently seven different transit operators provide fourteen distinctly branded services, and there is a widespread consensus that organizational and institutional alternatives need to be developed and examined to determine if there is a more effective and efficient way of providing transit both within Ventura County and to/from adjacent counties. The Coastal Express is the largest service provided by VCTC and will be affected by any changes to VCTC's organizational structure or transit operations responsibilities. The process for developing alternatives is expected to be completed by November 2011 and periodic updates will be brought to the South County Subregional committee throughout the study period.

The next Coastal Express Policy Committee meeting is scheduled for September 24, 2010 at 1:00 PM in Carpinteria.

COMMITTEE REVIEW: None