

TO: James L. App, City Manager
FROM: Mike Compton, Director of Administrative Services
SUBJECT: Presentation of North County Transit Study
DATE: December 7, 2004

Needs: For San Luis Obispo Council of Governments to present the North County Transit Study to Council and public.

Facts:

1. The San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (COG) commissioned a study of transit services in the North County.
2. LSC Transportation Consultants undertook the study under their guidance and administration.
3. The study was previously distributed to all councilmen and council-elect for their information and review.
4. Progress of the study has been monitored by the North County Transit Committee composed of:

City of Atascadero	voting member
Regional Transit Authority	voting member
City of Paso Robles	voting member
County of SLO	voting member
COG	non-voting member

5. The Council has appointed an ad hoc committee, Mayor Frank Meham and Councilman Duane Picanco, to review the study and provide feedback to the Council.
6. The ad hoc committee met with staff on November 15th to review and discuss the study.

Analysis
and
Conclusion:

This is a presentation only. No formal action is expected from the Council at this time though the Council may wish to provide direction/feedback to staff.

Fiscal
Impact:

None at this time.

Options:

- a. That the Council defer taking action on any specific recommendation until the study has been presented to the Atascadero City Council in January 2005; or
- b. Amend, modify, or reject the above option.

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

NORTH COUNTY TRANSIT STUDY FISCAL YEARS 2005-06 TO 2014-15

Draft Report

Prepared for the

San Luis Obispo Council of Governments
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Prepared by

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October 15, 2004

LSC #037710
NCTS Draft Report

Federal transportation statutes require that the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG), in partnership with state and local agencies, develop and periodically update a long-range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which implements the RTP by programming federal funds to transportation projects contained in the RTP. In order to effectively execute these planning and programming responsibilities, SLOCOG requires that each transit operator in its region, which receives federal funding through the TIP, prepare, adopt, and submit to SLOCOG a Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP).

The preparation of this SRTP has been funded, in part, by a grant from the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), through Section 5303 of the Federal Transit Act. The contents of this SRTP reflect the views of the local jurisdictions, and are not necessarily those of USDOT, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), or SLOCOG. The local jurisdictions are solely responsible for the accuracy of the information presented in this SRTP.

North County Transit Study Executive Summary

The San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) in partnership with the Cities of Atascadero and Paso Robles, the County of San Luis Obispo and the San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority (RTA), retained LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. to prepare a ten-year (2005-06 to 2014-15) North County Transit Study for the northern portion of San Luis Obispo County.

STUDY AREA

The study area includes that portion of the county along US Highway 101 north of the Cuesta Grade, encompassing the incorporated cities of Atascadero and Paso Robles, as well as the unincorporated communities of Santa Margarita / Garden Farms, Templeton and San Miguel.

EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

Existing services include:

- Countywide Dial-A-Ride service provided by the RTA Runabout program;
- Commuter service between San Luis Obispo and Cuesta College (with two runs to San Miguel) provided by RTA Route 9;
- Fixed route and Dial-A-Ride service within Paso Robles provided by PRCATS;
- Fixed route El Camino Shuttle (ECS) and Dial-A-Ride service within Atascadero provided by Atascadero Transit; and
- Subsidized taxicab service in Templeton (the "Templeton Taxi"), provided by Paso Robles Cab Company.

In Fiscal Year 2002-03 ridership levels and operating subsidy of each public transit service totaled:

<u>Service</u>	<u>One-Way Passenger-Trips</u>	<u>Operating Subsidy</u>
RTA Runabout	18,393	\$702,769
RTA Route 9	123,441	\$593,697
PRCATS Fixed Route	111,711	\$344,270
PRCATS Dial-A-Ride	7,158	\$103,237
Atascadero ECS	37,743	\$134,934
Atascadero Dial-A-Ride	29,145	\$233,205
Templeton Taxi	9,195	\$104,864

ON-BOARD PASSENGER SURVEY

In the latter part of January 2004 and early part of February 2004, LSC conducted an on-board survey of transit riders on the North County transit services. The purpose of the survey was to determine rider characteristics, trip purposes, trip origins and destinations, riding habits of the passengers, perceptions of services and potential improvements. These surveys also found that the majority of respondents use the bus system for work purposes (although there were a large

amount of students on all the services except for the Templeton Taxi program), and a large proportion of respondents stated support for increased and/or implementation of service on weekends.

SERVICE RECOMMENDATIONS

A total of twelve regional transit service alternatives and six service alternative scenarios were analyzed, including analysis of annual operating data needs, ridership impacts and performance reviews. The study includes the following recommendations:

Phase I Fixed Route Service Improvements

- Combine PRCATS Route C and El Camino Shuttle Routes into a Single Local Route – This will increase the convenience of public transit as a mode for travel between Paso Robles, Templeton, and Atascadero by eliminating the current need to transfer at Twin Cities Community Hospital. It will also expand the times when services are available, as well as the areas served by the local route. Finally, it will allow Route 9 services to be improved.
- Streamline RTA Route 9 – This will reduce overall running time by approximately 10 minutes per run on most runs. As an example, the typical in-vehicle travel time between downtown Paso Robles and downtown San Luis Obispo will be reduced from 83 to 73 minutes.
- Review Efficiency of the Templeton Taxi Program – Increased reporting and oversight of the Templeton Taxi program will provide information necessary to assess future modifications to the program.

Phase II Fixed Route Service Improvements

- Implement 60-Minute All-Day Service on Route 9 – This will greatly improve the convenience of regional transit services by providing consistent service at the same time past the hour over the course of the day, and by increasing the number of weekday runs from 11 to 16 in each direction on weekdays and from 3 to 4 on Saturdays. Travel time for regional trips will be reduced by roughly 15 percent. For example, a Paso Robles resident commuting by bus to San Luis Obispo will save a total of 26 minutes per day (13 minutes in each direction) in reduced travel time, while Templeton residents will save a total of 20 minutes per day (10 minutes in each direction).
- Revise Joint Local Route to Serve New Areas – With the southern portion of El Camino Real in Atascadero served by hourly Route 9 service, the joint local route can be revised to serve Morro Road between El Camino Real and Atascadero Lake and Park. This corridor has many potential transit trip generators, including medical offices, apartment complexes, the library and the park. In Paso Robles, the joint local route can be revised to provide new service to Niblick Road between Ramboulet Road and Creston Road.
- Provide Mid-Day San Miguel Service Through PRCATS Contract – Provision of this service through PRCATS will reduce SLORTA deadhead requirements and lower contract operating costs. This element could also be expanded to serve other North County areas beyond the study area, such as Shandon.

CAPITAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- New Atascadero Transit Center – A high-priority element of the North County system will be an attractive and functional transit center in the downtown Atascadero area. The expansion of services and increased need for coordination of routes will make a new transit center in Atascadero the key transit facility in the regional network. Optimally, this facility would be shared with other public or private uses.
- Improve Passenger Amenities – This element will include bus stop improvements such as curb, gutter and sidewalk in order to allow operation of a wheelchair ramp from a low-floor bus.
- Transit Vehicles – The operating plan will not impact the number of transit vehicles required, however, it is recommended that low-floor transit buses be considered once a sufficient number of stops are improved. “Clean diesel” strategies are recommended for the North County buses, including the use of ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel. Smaller gasoline-powered vans should be replaced with same when warranted.
- Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) – Implementation of AVL technology should be pursued for the North County transit services, as this technology provides dispatchers and passengers with real-time information, drivers with a silent alarm functions, and automatic announcement of major stops.

INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Memorandum of Understanding Between Atascadero and Paso Robles for Joint North County Local Service – A Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Atascadero and the City of Paso Robles will be needed to establish the joint local route, including the sharing of joint costs (such as marketing and bus repainting), sharing of farebox revenues (if one set of runs generates more revenues than the other), reporting of operational and ridership data, and other operational or financial issues.
- Conduct North County Transit Marketing Study – Particularly with the establishment of the joint local route, there is a strong need for expanded marketing of North County services. The currently-proposed 5313b marketing grant for the Paso Robles marketing study should be expanded to yield a North County regional marketing plan.
- North County Transit Goals – Through a series of goal-setting exercises and ongoing discussion, the following goals were identified as appropriate for the North County transit program:
 - Provide safe, convenient, comprehensive public transit services to North County residents, so long as service can be provided in a cost-effective manner.
 - Where cost-effective, maximize the convenience of the North County public transit network by providing as direct services as possible.
 - Where cost-effective, coordinate the operations and management of transit services.

- Maximize the effectiveness of transit services by encouraging use of fixed route services where feasible.
- Provide services to help attain regional goals to expand mobility for transit dependent populations and increase access to job opportunities.
- Coordinate the SRTP Planning Process – The schedule of SRTP preparation should be adjusted to allow plans to be developed for Atascadero, Paso Robles, and the North County Region simultaneously, by delaying the next Paso Robles SRTP study until Fiscal Year 2008-09.
- Joint Service Procurement – Optimally, a single contractor would provide all services, in order to maximize service efficiency. The only true way to identify if this is also the most cost-effective way is through a joint procurement process, which in turn requires that all services be let for bid simultaneously.
- Strengthen Regional Coordination Through the North County Operators Committee – The role of the North County Operators Committee should be strengthened. In addition, the Committee should undertake joint efforts, such as joint planning, marketing and/or procurement of contractor services. It is not the recommendation of the Consultant that full consolidation of all North County transit programs (such as through establishment of a transit district) be pursued.

FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following financial plan elements have been identified:

- Provide Consistent Transit Fares in North County – At present, the fare structures provided by the individual service providers have resulted in a confusing overall set of fares. In addition to the differing fares charged by the various programs, some programs require a transfer fee while others do not. In order for the North County transit system to best function as a system, it is important that a simple and consistent fare program be established for all services.
- Share Regional Farebox Revenues with Participating Jurisdictions for Purposes of Calculating TDA Minimum Farebox Ratio – A mechanism is recommended to allocate regional farebox revenues, for purposes of calculating farebox return ratio. This strategy could substantially help in attaining new higher required farebox ratios.
- Provide Transit Services Through Existing Local, State, and Federal Funding – Existing transit funding programs will be relied upon over the plan period to fund ongoing operating costs. Additional 5307 regional funding will be required to fund the Phase 2 expansion of Route 9 services. County funds are assumed to be used to compensate Paso Robles for the subsidy requirements of the mid-day San Miguel service provided as part of Phase II of the service improvements, as well as the costs associated with joint local route service into Templeton. An FTA 5309 grant should be pursued for the Atascadero Transit Center and for bus fleet improvements.