

**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY  
BOARD AGENDA LETTER**



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

**Agenda Number:**  
**Prepared on:** 9/16/04  
**Department Name:** Public Works  
**Department No.:** 054  
**Agenda Date:** 10/5/04  
**Placement:** Departmental  
**Estimate Time:** 20 min  
**Continued Item:** YES  
**If Yes, date from:** 9/21/04

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Phillip M. Demery, Director  
Public Works

**STAFF CONTACT:** Scott McGolpin, Deputy Director  
Public Works Transportation, 568-3064

**SUBJECT:** Consideration of a Revised Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Grant in Support of Enhanced Transit for the Santa Ynez Valley, 3<sup>rd</sup> District

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**Recommendation(s):**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- A. Support the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) Board of Directors' approval of the proposed amendment to the 1999 Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Grant (CMAQ) to fund operation and maintenance costs associated with the first 3 years of the Santa Ynez commuter bus service (a.k.a. Valley Express).

**Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:**

The recommendation is primarily aligned with Goal No. 1, An Efficient Government Able to Respond Effectively to the Needs of the Community, and Goal No. 2, Develop strategies for economic vitality and while maintaining environmental quality.

**Executive Summary and Discussion:**

SANTA YNEZ COMMUTER BUS SERVICE (a.k.a. VALLEY EXPRESS)

The Board is asked to consider supporting the SBCAG Board of Directors approval of proposed amendments to the 1999 CMAQ Grant to fund operation and maintenance costs totaling \$330,000 associated with the first 3 years of the Valley Express. A recommendation to support this amendment is a statement in

support MTD's efforts to start this commuter bus service. There would be no fiscal impact to the County from this action.

MTD is proposing four commuter express routes as part of the Valley Express service expected to launch in Fall 2004. Attachment A contains a map of the proposed route. This map shows the elimination of previously proposed stops in Santa Ynez and the Hwy. 154/Hwy. 246 Park and Ride lot. As discussed below and in the letter dated September 23, 2004 from MTD (Attachment B), staff from the County and MTD had reservations about the viability of attracting ridership from these areas.

Work schedule and lifestyle data from large employers such as Raytheon, Cottage Health Systems, UCSB and the County has been utilized to structure routes and schedules for the service. Additionally, MTD has met with Traffic Solutions to ensure the Valley Express provides equivalent or improved service when compared with the Clean Air Express commuter bus service currently serving Buellton.

Four (4) 40ft.-45ft. over-the-road style coach busses equipped with bike racks will make 4 trips in the morning between the Santa Ynez Valley and the South Coast, and 4 return trips in the evening. Stops in the Valley will be located in the Cities of Solvang and Buellton.

By limiting the total number of passenger pick-up locations, MTD is able to keep travel times minimized. Delivery points are clustered so that excessive stops do not add unnecessary time as well. The following schedule illustrates travel time data and where delivery points are clustered at major employment centers in the South Coast. The travel times indicated are based on field tests conducted in the actual bus at the actual time the busses will travel.

#### Clustered Delivery Points & Travel Time Data

- Solvang to Downtown S.B. in 49 minutes
- Solvang to Cottage Hospital (via Goleta Old Town) in 57 minutes
- Solvang to Raytheon in 44 minutes
- Solvang to UCSB in 48 minutes

#### Cost Comparison

Staff has compared the cost of traveling in a single passenger vehicle, a vanpool and the Valley Express to better understand the potential for this new service to capture riders. This analysis shows that travel from the Cities of Solvang and Buellton by bus is highly competitive from a cost standpoint. However, the analysis shows that traveling from Santa Ynez or the Park and Ride Lot at Hwy. 154/Hwy. 246 by bus was *not* competitive with other transportation options. Therefore, these two previously proposed stops have been eliminated from the Valley Express service.

The cost of the new service will be approximately \$7.00 round trip when a rider purchases a "10 Ride Pass." This pass enables a rider to transfer FREE to any MTD bus service on the South Coast. When compared to a single passenger vehicle traveling from Santa Ynez to Santa Barbara *via Hwy. 154* there is no cost advantage

realized by taking the Valley Express. However, significant cost savings can be realized if one utilizes the Valley Express from Solvang to Santa Barbara via U.S. 101. By choosing the bus, a user could save up to \$75/month or up to \$900/year.

For a commuter reaching Santa Barbara from Solvang, a vanpool would have a cost advantage of approximately \$30/month. However a distinct advantage of the Valley Express is for a user who might drive their car 2-3 times/week and elect to ride the bus the remaining days. For this type of choice rider, the Valley Express would save them money. The Valley Express charges a user only when they board the bus. A vanpool operates like a subscription service. Whether you ride it or not, you still pay to belong to the vanpool. Therefore, if one elects to drive their own car, they still pay for their seat on the van.

### Benefits

MTD estimates that 15 passengers will board each bus during the first year of operation. It is expected that during the roll out phase of any new service, ridership levels may be low but ramp up over time to higher levels. During year one, MTD estimates the service to carry 30,600 passengers which would remove an estimated 10,700 vehicle trips from the local roadway system. This calculation is based on an SBCAG factor which assumes 35% of the total ridership took the bus over driving their car.

The removal of over 10,000 vehicle trips reduces traffic congestion on Hwy. 246 and U.S. 101. Air quality is improved due to a reduction in overall emissions. Finally, people will save money and are more productive during their commute time. This is a particularly valuable benefit given substantial increases in the cost of housing and gas in the county.

### Recommendation

Staff is recommending your Board support the SBCAG Board of Directors' approval of the proposed amendment to the 1999 CMAQ grant to fund operation and maintenance costs associated with the first 3 years of the Valley Express. Staff further recommends that the following conditions be attached to your support for the amendments:

1. The County requests that the service be evaluated after the first year of operation. Objectives would include a review of service refinements to reduce travel time, gain cost savings and attract new riders.
2. The County is concerned about future funding after the first three years of Valley Express Service. The County would find it very difficult to provide additional MTD subsidies without reductions in other priority transportation services.

**Mandates and Service Levels:** Staff analysis associated with performance reviews of the shuttle service is a budgeted task within the Public Works position of Alternative Transportation Manager.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:** Board support of this program does not impact County fiscal resources in the short term. However, beginning in year 4 of operating the service, CMAQ operations and maintenance

funding for this service will be eliminated. Depending on the success of the service and its ability to generate revenue sufficient to sustain the service, other transportation funding such as Measure D sales tax revenues or Transportation Development Act revenues may be required to help pay for ongoing costs.

**Special Instructions:** Please forward a certified stamped Minute Order approving this action to the Public Works Transportation Division, attn: Matt Dobberteen.

**Concurrence:** Planning & Development

**Attachments:**

Attachment A-- The Valley Express: Santa Ynez and Santa Barbara

Attachment B-- Correspondence from MTD dated September 23, 2004