

City of **SANTA CLARITA**  **TRANSIT**

**ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the Committee Meeting

**9:00 a.m.**

**Thursday, January 5, 2023**

**Meeting held via Zoom**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman, John Panico called to order the meeting of the Accessibility Advisory Committee at 9:10 a.m.

**MEMBERS & GENERAL PUBLIC PRESENT**

John Panico, Chairman

Arcy Torres, MV Transportation

Keith Curry, Vice Chair

Michelle Rush, MV Transportation

Adrian Aguilar, City of Santa Clarita

David Tamariz, MV Transportation

Grace Ferguson, City of Santa Clarita

Faustino Salvador, Access Services

Kathleen Herrera, City of Santa Clarita

Toshia “Tee” Griffin, Member of the Public

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA & MINUTES**

Keith Curry notes that since the meeting minutes from the previous meeting have not been distributed, the minutes from the previous meeting will be approved in the March meeting.

**MEMBER COMMENTS**

Keith Curry notes that the meeting has not met a quorum. John asks Keith if he has any comments, and Keith states he does not. Both John and Keith agree to proceed with agency updates.

**AGENCY UPDATES**

## **Adrian Aguilar, City of Santa Clarita**

Adrian provides updates on the events that Santa Clarita Transit has participated in during the holiday season. These events included the Veterans Day service to Knotts Berry Farm as well as the Holiday Light Tour. Adrian indicates that for the Veterans Day service to Knotts Berry farm did not have a lot of participation for 2022- seven participants total. Adrian indicated the decline in participation is linked to the changes that Knotts Berry Farm made to its promotion as well as where the holiday landed during the week. Adrian noted that Santa Clarita Transit will be rethinking that event for 2023.

Adrian continues to share that the Holiday Light Tour saw record ridership and participation for 2022. There were five vehicles used for the service and one vehicle used to collect the donations. Adrian was happy to share that a lot of food and donations were collected for the local food pantry. The debriefing for the 2022 Holiday Light Tour has commenced and discussions for the event in 2023 has begun. Santa Clarita Transit is hoping to bring in City volunteers.

**\*At this time, Adrian's feed froze. John and Keith agree to come back to Adrian once his connection is restored.**

## **Faustino Salvador, Access Services**

Faustino wanted to give kudos to Santa Clarita Transit and MV staff, as the month of December boasted an on-time performance of 94.9%, excessive late trips was at 0.04% and zero trip denials in the month of December. For the call center, the average hold time was 40 seconds, and the calls on hold for five minutes was 1.8%. No further updates. Open to any questions that anyone may have.

*Keith asks Faustino if numbers have increased since the leveling off from the pandemic?*

Faustino states that service is increasing and that we are currently operating at about 76-80%, depending on which contractor we are speaking about.

*Keith asks about the Palmdale/Lancaster area and how their service is doing.*

Faustino states that Lancaster and its new contractor, who is First Transit, is doing very well, that they are meeting all aspects of the key performance indicators and there are no issues.

*Keith asks Faustino to repeat the name of the new contractor, and when they were awarded the contract.*

Faustino states that First Transit has had the contract since last year. He does not have the exact date, but can get that information and email it to Keith.

*Keith asks about ridership in Santa Clarita.*

Faustino indicates that ridership is up, and that is something that MV Transportation can touch on. From his understanding they are currently at 80%, but he will let MV Transportation confirm that.

**\*After Faustino provides his updates, John checks to see if Adrian's connection has been restored. Adrian resumes with his updates:**

### **Adrian Aguilar, City of Santa Clarita**

Adrian continues to express that the Holiday Light Tour was a huge success in 2022 and that Santa Clarita Transit will be looking to expand it in 2023 and in the future as well.

Adrian shares an update from Gillig, a bus vendor/manufacturer, confirming that our vehicles will be going into production at the end of February. We expect to have them on site mid-March, and have new vehicles in our fleet in service at the end of March or beginning of April.

*Keith asks if these vehicles are cutaways, minivans or transit buses.*

Adrian states that these are transit buses. In terms of cutaways, currently Santa Clarita Transit has some on order, however, we have not received any production or delivery date updates from our vendors. The contract with the vendor was established in March of 2022, and we are coming up to the expiration of the contract. A decision needs to be made internally whether or not to extend the contract or cancel the contract. In addition to the contractor not providing production or delivery dates, the contractor has also notified the City that the cost for the vehicles has increased about 20%, which places them beyond the amount that was approved by the City Council. Unfortunately, although we have vehicles on order and we plan to place an order for additional vehicles, we do not have a date of when they will be delivered.

*Keith asks Adrian if the vehicles are CNG.*

Adrian states that yes, the vehicles are CNG.

*John asks if there are any updates on the hydrogen project.*

Adrian states that Santa Clarita is moving along with the Hydrogen Project, with the second-round interviews for the two bidders on the project scheduled for this afternoon. This is for the design and construction of the hydrogen infrastructure to be located at the Transit Maintenance Facility. Hoping to award the contract in March or early April. Once the contract has been awarded, we are hoping for an 18-month timeline for design and construction of the facility on site. Also planning to go before the City Council in March to request the approval to purchase two hydrogen powered buses. This will be in conjunction with our annual order for buses. We will be placing an order for additional transit buses and cutaways in addition to the hydrogen powered buses.

*John asks about whether or not the hydrogen facility will be available for the public to use.*

Adrian states that the facility is being designed to support a public station, and to expand the CNG public station to include hydrogen. Unfortunately, we currently do not have the funding for the construction to expand the public CNG station to include hydrogen, however the infrastructure of the design will be done so that once the funding is available, it will be a matter of expanding the CNG public station and connecting it to the existing infrastructure.

*John asks if there is any interest or plan for electric buses as well or if the focus is just on hydrogen.*

Adrian states that the City did look at electric buses, but given the range of electric buses it was found that the City would need 1.3 electric buses for every one CNG bus that was retired from service, which would significantly increase the size of the fleet. The other issue is the capital infrastructure needed to support the fleet, and would need to install charging stations at the McBean Regional Transit Center, Vista Canyon and possibly a third location in order to keep the buses charged and equipped to continue service throughout the day, as well as cause a need for significant route and layover time adjustments to routes and schedules. When adding up the costs for infrastructure as well as vehicle costs, hydrogen was deemed to be much more cost effective. In addition, hydrogen vehicles are a 1:1 replacement for the CNG vehicles. There would also have to be operational changes made to existing bus routes for layovers in order for the buses to charge, which would increase travel times and increase operating dollars.

*Keith asks is there will be a fare increase with the implementation of the hydrogen buses.*

Adrian states that while we are due for a rate increase, as we have not increased fares in over twelve years, there are no plans to increase fares in the immediate future.

*John asks about updates on any studies to change routes or get a study going for 2023.*

Adrian states that in December City Council approved adopted revisions to the budget, including appropriated grant funding for the update of the transit development plan. The plan is to release a request for proposal seeking a consultant to put together a plan that includes Vista Canyon, Five Point Valencia and the development atop of Whites Canyon/ Plum Canyon (Skyline) and Tesoro. We are hoping to kick this off before June.

*John asks about the service that picks up riders from their homes and takes them directly to a destination, and if that service is still going.*

Adrian states that the GO! Santa Clarita service that he is referring to is still operating. Ridership is continuing to increase. We are the point of reaching capacity with the four vehicles that we have dedicated to the program. We have exhausted the grant funding for the program, but have utilized savings from the regular budget to be able to continue that service. We are monitoring ridership and patterns, and we are planning to request of the City Manager and the City Council to make this a permanent service, which will require some additional funding and a budget increase. We are coming into the kick off of the budget cycle for FY 23-24, and that may be a project that is included in our upcoming budget.

*Keith asks about the road work on Golden Valley Road and the new Sheriff's Station being located on Golden Valley Road, and if there are any plans to incorporate an additional bus route to accommodate Golden Valley High School and the shopping center located up Golden Valley Road- Vista Canyon Shopping Center.*

Adrian states that service to Golden Valley High School is already in place. Additional service on Golden Valley Road near the Sheriff's Station will be one of the things that is looked at as a part of the Transit Plan update.

*Keith asks about the progress of the new Metrolink Station at Vista Canyon.*

Adrian states that the Metrolink Station is nearing the end of construction, and will hopefully be complete by March, although weather may be a factor in delays.

*Grace states that she spoke with Dianna, and because of the several days of rain, a two to three-week delay is anticipated, so possibly late March early April. Everything is looking great- the tunnel is built; camera systems are going up. Looking good to open in the spring.*

Keith asks about the rest of the Vista Canyon project.

*Adrian states that the project has been going in phases. A lot of the project is completed- two large apartment buildings constructed and occupied, single family housing. The first two to three phases are built and occupied. The park is done and has been turned over to the City. The focus has been on the housing elements. What we have yet to see constructed is a lot of the commercial space, so that will be the next focus. But in terms of the residential, that is already up or under construction.*

Keith asks if we are planning to run a bus route up Lost Canyon Road to accommodate that area, specifically the new Metrolink station.

Adrian states that we will have service there, as the train station is there. What the routes will look like, we don't know at this time. He would imagine that Los Canyon or Sand Canyon will be involved. The City is also designing a new bridge to connect the project to Soledad Canyon, so all of those pieces will go into the design of the route system for the area. That is also what we will be asking the consultant to assist us with.

*Keith states that the reason he is asking is because it is better to be proactive, as once the station opens it will draw heavy traffic. To counteract that traffic is to incorporate busing. Keith mentions the construction of the assisted senior living center, which will bring in the Access and Dial-A-Ride programs.*

Adrian states that transit service is already in place along Soledad for the assisted living center under construction, including Access, Dial-A-Ride and Go! Services. The issue with the current transit routes in and out of Vista Canyon is traffic and congestion. The current infrastructure does not accommodate for larger buses on Jakes Way. The only entrance would be through Sand Canyon near In-N-Out, and the bridge needs to be constructed. Golden Valley will also play into

the design of the route network as Golden Valley Road will eventually connect into Vista Canyon.

*Keith asks about the paving of Sierra Highway by Caltrans. Is the City asking for Caltrans to repave the entire length of Sierra Highway up to Vasquez?*

Adrian states that he is unsure of what Caltrans' plans are. There has been turn over in staffing and in their executive. The City working through the North County District, which includes Santa Clarita, Palmdale, Lancaster and the County of Los Angeles has started meeting with Caltrans on a regular basis to discuss these issues. I can try to get some more information and report back in March.

*Keith asks is there will be a bus route in the plans for the Five Knolls area.*

Adrian states that yes, there was service to that area including the Senior Center that was suspended due to COVID-19. We have been in discussion with the Senior Center about resuming that service. The different activities at the Senior Center have made it challenging to be able to get a bus into the area, but they are working to figure out a solution. That will also be one of the new developments that we will be looking at with the transit development plan.

*John asks if the former Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's station will be abandoned completely or will they be using it as an annex by the Library?*

Adrian states that the building is currently empty and is owned by the County, and he is unsure what their plans are for the building. He has heard discussions about expanding the courthouse or county services into that area. There aren't currently any plans that we are aware of.

*John asks about the Whittaker Bermite site- are they going to get the construction going to connect Via Princessa all the way through?*

Adrian states that all of that property is privately owned. A developer has purchased the property and is cleaning up the property in phases. There have not been any updates on the project.

*Keith asks the new area out Newhall Ranch Road towards the new FivePoints subdivision. How far does Dial-A-Ride, Access and transit go to serve that area.*

Adrian states that the area is County property and we are in discussions right now to be able to service the area. We will likely start with school day service, and that will open the window for Dial-A-Ride services. One thing they can do is to reach out to the homeowner's association who is subsidizing Uber and other ride share programs until transit services are established there.

*Keith asks Faustino if this also applies to Access.*

Adrian states that Access services will expand to that area once Santa Clarita Transit has fixed route service to the area.

## **Arcy Torres, MV Transportation**

Arcy states that MV has two fairly new CSRs. Eduardo started on November 3 and Joanna started on November 21. We are now fully staffed in the call center which has helped with maintain lower hold times. Since the last AAC meeting, Michelle Rush has been promoted. She started as a CSR, moved to a dispatcher and promoted back in September to Operations manager for the Paratransit Service. We are very fortunate to have her she is very well versed in trapeze. Yesterday she completed 13 years with MV. We do have a new driver bid. The driver's bid on a schedule yesterday and the new schedule will go into effect on June 7. No major changes. Some adjustments to the start times for some of the Dial-A-Ride and Access routes, but nothing that should cause any concerns from our patrons. Lastly, ridership for Access is at 70% pre-COVID levels. Before COVID, we were at 175 trips per weekday. Currently we are averaging 120 per weekday.

*Keith asks about the drop off from 175 to 120. How are the transfer trip numbers from the Senior Center?*

David responds that due to the minimal instance of people traveling from the San Fernando Valley or Antelope Valley specifically to the Senior Center, they do not track that information.

*John asks Michelle Rush to tell the group a little bit about herself and her experience with MV.*

Michelle states that she started in Santa Clarita as a CSR in customer service. She then when and got her license and went into dispatch for 11 years, mostly paratransit. She enjoys the puzzle of trapeze, and in September she transitioned into management. She is trying to pass on all of the knowledge to others in dispatch.

*Keith asks what trapeze is.*

Michelle states it is the software system that CSRs use to dispatch and route the runs for the transit service.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

*John asks about Kathleen, and asks her to introduce herself and her role with Santa Clarita.*

Kathleen states that she is new to her role in transit and recently transferred from the City Manager's Office, particularly the Communications division and becoming acclimated to all things transit. She decided to jump on the call this morning to learn more about the AAC.

*John asks Kathleen what her role is in Transit.*

Kathleen sates she is an office assistant and helps the transit team.

*Keith asks if Kathleen is the eyes and ears for Ken Striplin.*

Kathleen states no, not anymore.

*John asks if there is any additional new business.*

Keith states that he already touched on the new business with Adrian earlier in the meeting.

*Keith asks Adrian about the GO! service taking care of the unincorporated areas.*

Adrian states that the GO! program only operates within the City limits. The City has already started discussion with L.A. County for service at the Five Points area, the City has prepared some cost analysis for them to review. The City is hoping to have some service in the area in the next month or so.

*Keith asks Adrian about the funding for transit, and if he is receiving the funding needed for all of the projects and current needs.*

Adrian states that all of our capital projects are fully for the next ten years. Operations services at this level of service is also fully funded as of right now. However, the expansion of services to the newly incorporated areas, and new developments like Vista Canyon and Five Knolls will need to have additional funding approved by the City Council.

*Keith asks Faustino about the funding for Access.*

Faustino states that the funding for operational purposes is stable.

*Keith states that he has received many compliments since the pandemic, as we had two years of the pandemic to come back to a clean slate, and that services have been fine tuned and cleaned up. He has received a lot of positive feedback from drivers and riders.*

## **OLD BUSINESS**

*John begins the discussion on old business and asks Adrian if there have been any inquiries on membership for AAC.*

Adrian states that he has not had anyone reach out regarding membership, but that we will be focusing on recruitment. He also states that if anyone shows interest to have them please submit their information with their intention to join.

*Keith states that he has two people that he thinks are interested but he wants to be sure that they are familiar with the systems and understand the process.*

John states that we now have four or five members now.

*Grace states that Ms. Griffin has joined for public comment and has expressed interest in joining.*

John gives Ms. Griffin the floor.

## **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**Toshia “Tee” Griffin, Member of the Public**



*Ms. Griffin greets everyone on the meeting and asks Grace about driver comments at the end of the rides, riders get a survey regarding their experience. She had asked where that data goes once complete.*

Grace states that the information goes directly to Access.

*Faustino confirms Grace's statement.*

Ms. Griffin asks Faustino who is in charge of hiring drivers?

*Faustino directs that question to MV Transportation.*

Ms. Griffin explains that she has had issues when scheduling rides when she has appointments. She explains that when she schedules a ride and voices to the CSR at the time that the ride is for an appointment and provides the time to the CSR, and asks the CSR what time should she be picked up. They will often retort what time does she want to be picked up. She states that the CSRs should be the experts on providing timeframes for the patrons when they pose that question. She states that when she has asked why she is always late for appointments, she has been told that they have a lack of drivers. Ms. Griffin asks Arcy Torres if there have been new drivers hired? She understands that new CSRs have been hired, and she commends that she has noticed reduced hold times. She wants to know why there aren't more drivers to get people where they need to be?

*David asks if this question was specific to a recent trip or a trip a while back?*

Ms. Griffin states it was a couple weeks ago. She did not file a complaint about it because she was only five minutes late, however, she always stresses when she makes a request for a ride that it is for an appointment and she provides the appointment time. She stated that when she spoke to a supervisor at that time regarding why she is always late for appointments, the supervisor stated that to be honest with you it is due a lack of drivers.

*Arcy states that as far as driver training, it never stops. MV is constantly training and hiring drivers. And they lose drivers in the process. They do have drivers that will obtain their license and then leave. Arcy states that the issue is not necessarily that they are short drivers, but they do have call offs. Drivers were taking advantage of the California SPSL for COVID sick leave.*

Ms. Griffin thanks Arcy and asks about the payment services. She has tried all of the services to compare fairly. She enjoyed GO! The payment service that is automated for GO! that she can pay online. Why should she have to go offsite to load a TAP card for Access, where patrons with a regular TAP card are able to load the card online. With GO! she had an app service on her phone where she could make a payment and it was much easier. She tried using her phone with Access and she tapped her phone for Access payment, but it did not work the same. She had to call and was told not to do that for Access, it is only for GO! services. What can we do to better our payment system for the paratransit riders and seniors?

*David states TAP cards have a 15-digit number to create an account and utilize the app for reloading.*

Ms. Griffin states that yes, for regular transit service you can do that. However, for the discounted rates for Access, it does not recognize that on the app.

*David states that is correct. In order to receive the discounted rate, the patron has to load funds either at the senior center or at the transit maintenance facility in order to get the discounted price. He confirms that a discounted TAP card will not load to the app.*

Adrian clarifies for Ms. Griffin that the reason this is, is because the subsidized rate, or discounted rate, is a program funded by the City of Santa Clarita. That's why it creates a little confusion, because the discounted fares only apply to services within the City of Santa Clarita. That is also unfortunately why the loading of funds can only be completed by the Senior Center, who has an agreement for services with the City, and at the Transit Maintenance Facility. Adrian states that there are some programs that will be coming on line that we are looking at, and those programs may in the future have the ability to offer the reduced rate while using an application. But that those programs will not be in place in the next few months.

*Ms. Griffin thanks Adrian for the information.*

Ms. Griffin asks about the weight limit of 25 pounds. When scheduling a ride to go to the airport, the weight limit for luggage is 25 pounds, yet the airport's weight limit is 50 pounds. How are people using paratransit supposed to be able to utilize service to go to the airport and limit their luggage to 25 pounds?

*Adrian states that he will leave that question to Faustino since Santa Clarita Transit does not offer service to the airport.*

Faustino states that the 25-pound weight limit for luggage or other items that the patron brings onto the bus is the policy for Access. This is to accommodate all patrons using the service, however the driver will use discretion on arrival and if the patron is able to maintain control of their packages or luggage, then they would be able to bring that. However, if there is a large suitcase, that would not be allowed.

*John asks if it could be due to the size of the items?*

Faustino states that is correct. It is to ensure that the patron can maintain control of the items they bring aboard the bus.

*Ms. Griffin asks to speak with Faustino after the meeting to discuss the issue further.*

David states that they have to ensure that they are able to accommodate all passengers on the bus in order to not impede any other patron from being able to utilize the services.

*Michelle addresses the original question of appointment time. Rides are not scheduled based on appointment times. Trips are treated equally and as far as the service goes and are no one trip is given priority. Because it is a shared service you can be on the vehicle for up to 90 minutes for Dial-A-Ride, and 60 minutes for Access. We do share that patrons should allow for that time frame when scheduling. There is no cap on trips, which causes fluctuations in timeframes and timelines. Because of this, you may schedule your trip and are provided an estimate of time that*

*you will be on the bus. However, when the day of your trip arrives, there may have been additional trips added to the schedule after you booked your trip, which will adjust the time that you will be on the bus. This is why we tell patrons to account for the full possible time when scheduling trips.*

Ms. Griffin asks Michelle to also contact her after the meeting. She states that if they book her for an hour and fifteen minutes prior to her appointment time that should be sufficient. However, if they are 20 minutes late picking her up, then that has extended the timeline. She wants to know how we fix the issue when the scheduled pick up time meets the guidelines, but then the pick-up time is delayed it causes a late arrival.

*Keith states that we have to be aware that Ms. Griffin worked in transportation for 25 years, so she knows her ins and outs.*

*Keith asks Grace to please get the September meeting minutes out as well as today's meeting minutes so that we can make motions to approve in March.*

Grace states that she will get September's meeting minutes out today.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Keith makes the motion to adjourn. John seconds the motion to close the meeting.

### **FUTURE MEETING**

March 2, 2023, City Hall, Carl Boyer Room