

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

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Committee Meeting

9:00 a.m.

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Carl Boyer Room, City Hall

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman, John Panico called to order the meeting of the Accessibility Advisory Committee at 9:05 a.m.

MEMBERS & GENERAL PUBLIC PRESENT

John Panico, Chairman

Manel Pushparajah, Member

Keith Curry, Member

Toshia Griffin, Member

Arcy Torres, MV Transportation

Michelle Rush, MV Transportation

David Tamariz, MV Transportation

Adrian Aguilar, City of Santa Clarita

Grace Ferguson, City of Santa Clarita

Faustino Salvador, Access Services

Barrett Tate, Access Services

APPROVAL OF AGENDA & MINUTES

John Panico calls the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

John states that he will start with a review of the minutes. John asks for comments or questions on the minutes

MEMBER COMMENTS

John starts the meeting with agency updates and passes the floor to Arcy Torres with MV Transportation.

AGENCY UPDATES

Arcy Torres, MV Transportation

Arcy shares that a new Ambassador is set to begin at the Senior Center to replace former Ambassador, Patrick. Her name is Deona. Hopefully, she will be able to help with the traffic and flow of passengers at the Senior Center. Additionally, there is a candidate for the Fixed Ops position, which has been vacant since July of 2023. There was a candidate that was in consideration before the strike, but that fell through when the strike hit. An offer has been extended to this candidate. He is reviewing the offer letter, and hopefully he accepts. If he does, we might have him start as early as next week or the following week, depending on his relocation process.

John thanks Arcy, and passes the floor to Michelle Rush with MV Transportation.

Michelle Rush, MV Transportation

Michelle shares that the new dispatcher, Alex, is released on his schedule so dispatch is fully staffed. One of our Access drivers, Douglas, received the Superior Service award last week for going above and beyond. We are trying to adjust with the trip counts going up. We did our new bid working with past months where we were averaging a 370-trip count. Last Wednesday we shot up to 434 trips. We are trying to get extra coverage on days when it is busier.

John asks if the company, MV Transportation, is still in Mill Valley as the home base and is still privately owned.

Arcy states that yes, they are still MV and privately owned.

John asks Arcy how many years she has been with the company.

Arcy states that she has been with the company for 25 years in June and in Santa Clarita since 2019.

John states that Michelle is relatively new.

Michelle states that she has been with the company for 14 years, and all in Santa Clarita.

John asks Keith if he has any questions for MV.

Keith states that he has a question to ask MV and maybe Adrian can chime in. How is MV's approval rating and is the contract with MV coming up for renewal?

Adrian states that we have not seen any increase in complaints. If you look at complaints before and after the strike, they are relatively the same. When you look at complaints overall, we average less than 0.3% of all calls coming into the call center are complaints. So overall it is good. In December, the City Council approved an extension of the MV contract through June 30, 2026.

Keith states that we have two years left on the contract and then you go to bid again?

Adrian states that yes, there is two and a half years on the contract and then we will be going out to bid.

John states that when you are in Los Angeles, MV has quite a few contracts. Don't they have the Antelope Valley too?

Arcy states yes, they have the Antelope Valley. They have several other contracts.

John states that its amazing that all of these other companies like First Transit were bought up by larger corporations. John passes the floor to Faustino Salvador, with Access Services.

Faustino Salvador, Access Services

Faustino states that they just awarded Santa Clarita an additional two years on their contract. For performance in February, we fell below our standard of 91%, ending at 90.9% which is just below standard. Excessively late trips were at .09%. The other KPI to mention is calls on hold more than five minutes ended at 3.7%, with an average hold time of 56 seconds, so good job to MV. Another highlight is that SCT driver Douglas Gomez received a recognition the superior service award for February. Gomez has completed more than 2,900 Access trips, has not had any complaints or negative observances, and most notably, has not had any accidents. We hosted the virtual community meeting and hosted more than 100 attendees. That is all I have to share.

John asks if anyone has any questions for Faustino.

Keith asks if there will be any fare increases with the contract renewal.

Faustino states that there are discussions regarding fare increases for riders from the City, but that is not involving Access and any increases will be shared and riders will be properly notified. As far as funding, there is an increase in funding. Specifically, \$7,260,241 was the amount for funding to Access from the City to provide service for the City of Santa Clarita.

Keith asks as it pertains to the City and MV, will there be any fare increases?

Adrian states that he is planning to provide an update on that.

Keith states that he will wait for Adrian to provide that update.

Faustino states that at this time Access has no plans to raising their fares for riders. We are waiting on notification from the City.

Toshia asks Faustino to clarify- Access is separate from the City, but Dial-A-Ride is a part of the City Transit, and Access and Dial-A-Ride are not the same.

Faustino states that she is correct- Access and Dial-A-Ride are separate programs, and Access is a separate entity from the City.

Toshia states, so Access is saying no fare increase, but Dial-A-Ride might have an increase?

Faustino states that she is correct. He also indicates that when there is a potential fare increase, they do hold public meetings so the public can provide feedback.

John states that they will return to the agenda, and review the meeting minutes from January for approval.

Keith makes a motion to approve the minutes.

John conducts the vote for approval of the minutes, and passes the floor to Grace Ferguson with the City of Santa Clarita.

Grace Ferguson, City of Santa Clarita

Grace shares the ride numbers for February- we had 2,186 for Access with 35 no-shows. For Dial-A-Ride, we had 5,494 and 163 no-shows. We are currently having a “No-Show” campaign, to educate our riders about our no-show policy. Phone messages have been recorded in English and Spanish and they have been uploaded to our phone tree. So before a rider is able to proceed with booking a ride, the no-show policy messaging is played to remind the riders. We are also going to be creating and distributing a flyer and doing a seat drop, along with continuing to send out letters to patrons that are repeatedly marked as no-shows. After the meeting, Grace will be doing community outreach at Valley Oaks Village Senior Apartments to educate them on Dial-A-Ride. Access will be there as well to provide information. Our TDP continues. Surveys were randomly distributed and collection has been completed. The results are currently being reviewed. The TDP company has also completed a draft line by line route profile sheet for Santa Clarita Transit, and City staff is reviewing that now. Grace opens the floor for questions.

John asks the time frame for the TDP.

Adrian states that currently the consultant is going over the customer survey data. We are planning to have some community meetings towards the end of March, which will be another opportunity for the public to provide feedback. For the overall timeline for the project, we are hoping to have everything wrapped up this summer.

Keith asks when the community meeting will be held.

Adrian states that the dates have not been set, but we are planning for the end of March.

John asks if there any other questions or comments for Grace, and then passes the floor to Adrian Aguilar with the City of Santa Clarita.

Adrian Aguilar, City of Santa Clarita

Adrian shares that this past Tuesday we had our Article VIII public hearing in Santa Clarita. This is the annual unmet needs hearing that Santa Clarita, the Antelope Valley and Catalina Island

conducts. We did we get a couple of comments, with the comment period remaining open for the next two weeks. If you go to the SantaClaritaTransit.com website, there is a link for the TDA Article VIII hearing, and that link provides an email address for the Metro staff member, Arminae Saint, who is coordinating this year's public meetings. There is still time to submit written comments. Metro has also scheduled meetings with a number of social service agencies in the region to solicit their feedback. The plan is to have all of this wrapped up in mid-May, and then the hearing panel will provide their recommendation to the Metro board. The other update that I have is on our bus delivery. We recently took delivery of three new CNG powered local buses. They were delivered in the last few weeks, and we are in the process of installing the fareboxes and going through that process. We are hoping to have the CHP out in the next couple of weeks to inspect them, get them registered and put them into service. We hope to have them in service by the end of March. These will take the place of vehicles scheduled to retire. Staffing wise, I wanted to share that we have a new staffer that has joined the team. Her name is Danielle Watts. Unfortunately, she wasn't able to be here today, but we will make sure that she is here for the next meeting so you can meet her. She is our newest Analyst. Finally, about fares. The City is currently in the process of a fare analysis. The last fare adjustment was in 2015. We are looking to make some changes to our fare structure. We are looking to increase the fares on all of our services, including the local, GO!, commuter and Dial-A-Ride services. In terms of the change, we are looking to increase the one-way cash fare on our local service from \$1.00 to \$1.25; the Dial-A-Ride will go from \$2.00 to \$2.50. The GO! service will go from \$2.00 to \$3.50. We will also be making some changes to our cash fares for our commuter service. The main reason for this is that, as I said, it has been quite a while since we have increased our fares. Part of our fare analysis was a peer review of agencies throughout the region and we were at the low end of the spectrum in terms of fares. Even with this adjustment, we will be in the mid-range in terms of what other agencies are charging for their services. A couple of other changes to our fare structure that I wanted to share- for patrons using TAP cards to pay for their fares, they will receive a discount on their cash fare. So rather than \$1.25 on local service, their fare will remain at \$1.00. For GO! and Dial-A-Ride service, they will receive a \$0.25 discount. The low income and subsidized fares will go from \$0.60 to \$0.75, which are only available on local routes. Another change we are doing, is we are proposing to eliminate our monthly passes and switch to what they call fare capping. So rather than having a monthly pass that you purchase, we would cap the amount of fare you would pay for a daily basis and a weekly basis. So, for example, local service, our new fare would be \$1.25. But our fare cap would be \$3.00 for the day. So, once you meet that threshold, you will no longer be charged a fare that same day. The cap on the weekly basis would be \$10.00. We are doing this in lieu of the monthly pass for a couple of reasons. The feedback that we've seen is that it has a particular impact on low income riders where they don't have to buy a monthly pass paying the \$34.00 all at once, they can essentially pay as they go and they still get the benefits of the fare capping. We will be introducing the fare capping on our local and commuter service, so the fare caps will vary on the commuter service based on the fare level. Same concept and same theory will apply to the commuter fare capping. Those are the major changes for fares. As far as our fare equity analysis, we have community meetings. We are planning to tie them into our community meetings that we will be holding for our TDP. Again, providing an opportunity for the community to comment on not only the Plan but also the proposed fare structure. We plan on adopting this adjustment with the City's overall budget which will be adopted by Council at the June Council Meeting when they adopt the budget. I will be sure to email information, and if there are any

groups or any community meetings you would like us to attend to share this information, please let us know and we will be happy to attend.

John asks a question regarding the Article VIII hearings- were there notices sent out?

Adrian states that Metro handled all of the required notifications as it is a Metro public meeting. We did post their notices on our website and on board the vehicles. Metro also included it on their social media.

John asks to clarify if it was posted to the City website or the City Transit website.

Adrian confirms that the notices were posted to the SantaClaritaTransit.com website.

John asks for clarification on the panel for the Article VIII committee- was it representatives from all over the County that are on the board?

Adrian states that the panel was made up of representatives from the City and the County. We had two meetings- the meetings in the Antelope Valley was made up of representatives from the City of Palmdale, Lancaster and the County. Here in Santa Clarita, it was representatives from the Council- the Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem and a representative from LA County.

John asks about replacing the retired buses- what happens to the older buses?

Adrian states that when a vehicle is retired, we remove some of the technology like fairboxes and hard drives, all City logos and markings from the vehicle. Then we will auction them off using a public surplus website. They auction the vehicles for us. A lot of them are purchased and placed back in service by other private agencies.

John asks for the buses that you are replacing are those diesel or gas buses, or are they all CNG buses.

Adrian states that all of our local fleet buses are CNG powered, so the buses that we are replacing are also CNG. We still have four to six diesel powered commuter buses, and those are scheduled to be retired within the next four years. At that time, we will be 100% CNG for the commuter buses. Adrian then asks Keith if he had a specific question regarding Vista Canyon.

Keith states that he read through the previous meeting minutes, and his question was answered there. The upgrades for Vista Canyon location will be made based on the ridership at Vista Canyon as opposed to the Via Princessa location.

Adrian states that yes, the Via Princessa location remains open and we are monitoring ridership at both locations. Staff's plan is to eventually close the Via Princessa station, but that remains to be finalized.

Keith state that he has read that the plan is to close the Via Princessa location and open a park at that location.

Adrian states that the City is currently in the design phase of a new park at Via Princesa on the other side of the tracks in the riverbed area. So that will be an open space park that will consist of soccer fields and pickleball courts. Other improvements include a tunnel that goes under the tracks to will provide access to the park area. They are still working on the feasibility, but there may also be an entrance coming from Soledad to the park area. The Via Princesa station, if it closes, won't necessarily go away. The platform would be removed but the parking lot and restrooms will remain and become part of the park.

John states that there is a train that goes from Los Angeles and stops at the Via Princesa station then goes back. They will need to adjust that schedule, right?

Adrian states that is correct, that schedule would be adjusted to stop at Vista Canyon.

John states that at this time, access to Vista Canyon is limited to small side streets and is pretty difficult to get in. Are they eventually going to have that bridge come across? That would help.

Adrian states that you can access the station from Sand Canyon. At the last Council meeting, the Council did approve the design some funding to complete the design of the bridge through Lost Canyon. The City does have grant funding in place for the construction. The hope is to get everything wrapped up and start construction in within the next 12 months. That bridge will feed right into the transit center.

Keith states that the only downside is that the residents that purchased all of those \$400,000 homes will now have a constant flow of traffic coming through their neighborhood. I am not sure if they anticipated that.

Adrian states that was all part of the design of that community. Right now, where the bridge is going, is zoned for commercial and retail, so there won't be any residents in that strip of area. But the whole development of that area was designed as a transit-oriented development, around the transit center and the station, which are the key anchors of the area. That is why the apartments are located where they are, there is proposed senior living that will be going in, and all of the homes are within walking distance of the transit center.

John asks about the new fare structure- is this something that other cities and Metro agencies are doing in lieu of monthly passes?

Adrian states that there is a push into fare capping countywide. Metro initially introduced it last September or October. We had hoped to implement it a few years ago, but with the pandemic we had to put it on hold. And then we had to wait for Metro and technology to catch up. Metro wanted to be the first one, and because they are the keepers of the technology, they were the first to implement this. But we will be the second agency to do this. We are hoping to have the fares effective July 01, but that is contingent on when Metro can activate that feature on our fareboxes. Again, it comes down to a technology issue. We are being told that there is additional programming that needs to be done, so we are working with Metro to get through that process. What the vision is for the entire County is that we will agree on a universal fare structure and we will be able to

implement this fare capping across the County. This would mean that it won't matter if you ride in Santa Clarita, Los Angeles, Glendale. The challenge is getting everyone to agree on the same fare structure. Even with the impending fare change, our fares are significantly lower than LA Metro, Foothill and a lot of other agencies. So, either they have to bring their fares down or we will have to raise our fares. We're not interested in doubling our fares, and I don't know that Metro is interested in cutting their fares in half. Until we can come to an agreement as a region, it's not going to happen. That is why we are moving ahead with this on our own.

John asks about the new person in Transit- is this a new position or an existing one?

Adrian states that it is a position that has been open for some time now. A previous employee was accepted to grad school in London, so the position has been open for quite some time now and we were finally able to get it filled. We have one other position currently open but we are hoping to get that filled soon.

John asks if there any additional questions from anyone for Adrian.

Toshia asks Adrian to help her with her TAP cards. One of her cards she has issues with loading at convenience, the other card, when she uses it, the driver tells her that is not the card she should be using.

Adrian explains the purpose and benefit of each card and provides Toshia with the clarification she needs to proceed with contacting TAP services to work with Access to correct the issue and synchronize her cards, as well as explaining the City's subsidized program and where she can load funds with the subsidized rate.

Manel asks about the registration and renewal process for the City's subsidized program.

Adrian clarifies that the application for the program must be done through the Senior Center, and once approved they will be added to an eligibility list. They will ask for updated information to renew eligibility every two years.

Keith asks Faustino a question regarding his rider 360- when he looks at it, he can see that he has been recertified for another three years. I believe someone said that they will be moving to a five-year certification in 2024. Is that correct?

Faustino states that is correct. That does not change your eligibility, but the next time you renew your certification it can be renewed for up to five years, rather than three.

John asks if Barrett Tate has anything to add?

Barrett states that no he has nothing to add.

Keith asks Faustino if Access does decide to do a fare increase, how much would they be looking to increase, and to please provide a hypothetical amount.

Faustino says that is not a decision that he makes and he is unable to provide him with any kind of hypothetical number. As soon as I know anything, I will share with the committee.

Toshia states that she wants to extend a big thank you to Grace and Faustino for setting up and coordinating the meeting today at her senior community. Previously, the community offered a local shuttle as one of the perks of living in the community, but they no longer offer that. So, I think it will be very beneficial for the senior to hear about the options they have with Transit and Access.

Manel also thanks Grace for assisting her with a ride for today's meeting and for always being so helpful.

Keith states that he was reading in the previous minutes that Adrian was going to reach out to the Senior Center about having a representative at the AAC. Although I am the Chairman of the Senior Center Advisement Council, I remember John Taylor used to represent the Senior Center, I was brought to this board in 1999 to represent the disabled community. If you speak with Kevin, and he cannot afford to send someone from the Senior Center to represent on this board, and since I am the Chair of the Senior Center Advisement Council, I could wear the two hats. If you want to discuss that with him.

Adrian states that he talked to him about it, and he did not have a problem with sending someone to represent the Senior Center, but that is where we left it. I will follow up with him and see if he is still interested in appointing someone.

John asks Adrian a personal question- your career with Santa Clarita has been a long one. Any plans for movement or retirement soon?

Adrian states that he has two kids in college, so he will not be retiring any time soon.

John moves on to New business

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

John announces the two new members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, Manel Pushparajah and Toshia Griffin. John asks if there are any questions on their appointments?

Adrian states that no, everything is set. He will work with Grace to send something out to the new members to make it official, and that as of today they are officially members.

John states that there are now four members of the AAC, and that they will check back in on Karen Manke.

Keith states that he has her number, and saw her recently at Walmart. She looked well but he will follow up with her.

Grace states that she tried calling her this morning but her voicemail isn't set up.

Adrian says that City staff will try to get in touch with her.

John asks if there is any additional new business, or if there are any questions or comments from members at this time.

Toshia asks Faustino if ridership has increased enough to be the cause of rides showing up late more frequently? She also asks if there is a person that monitors the Access and Dial-A-Ride routes that recognizes when there are issues with the routing, late trips, issues with transfer trips, etc. to troubleshoot these issues.

Michelle states that there are many variables that fluctuate constantly that requires staff to troubleshoot issues and there is a staff member that is constantly monitor the paratransit routing and trip schedules. Each day is unpredictable and we have to make the best that we can of each unexpected issue or change.

Toshia asks if it possible to build in extra time to locations to account for potential traffic or delays?

Michelle states that is not possible, but when rides are schedule they keep those potential delays in mind as much as possible to avoid issues, but there is too much unpredictability to effectively avoid all issues.

Adrian states that the other issue that factors into delays for Paratransit are the no-shows, and that is precisely why, as Grace mentioned, we are doing a campaign to inform the riders of the no-show policy. The next step in that is to enforce the policy. So, we are trying the education campaign first and then move forward with implementing the suspension policy.

Toshia states that there are times that she gets an alert that her ride is there but she does not see them. So, then she calls in to get an ETA or find out where the driver is waiting for her, but then she has to wait for the five-minute Access messaging or sit on hold for a long time and by that time, the bus has left. In some cases, she calls directly into dispatch, which she should not have to do- she should be able to call customer service and get a prompt response to her question. How can we fix this issue? She should not have to listen several hold messages in order to get an ETA for her ride.

Faustino states that there is a process that Access goes through a process before declaring a no-show. They attempt to call you on the number you have provided. It is only after that process is completed that a no-show is issued.

Manel states that recently she has had several issues with rides being late. She made a call to check on her ride, and she sat on hold for a long time. The call center called her back and let her know that her ride was one hour late. She received another call after the hour had passed that her ride would be an additional hour. She has also been on trips where the drivers are taking routes

that are going all over the Santa Clarita Valley, and has her on the bus well past the ninety-minute time indicated. She has asked drivers on several occasions to just drop her off nearby and she walks the rest of the way home to avoid the extended time on the bus.

Grace asks Manel to provide her with the dates and times of these incidents, so that staff can look into them.

Keith asks Michelle how many road supervisors are on the road on any given day, and do they cover each area in the Santa Clarita Valley. And what are their jobs description?

Michelle states that on average there are three. They are placed throughout the City to assist with issues out in the field. They are utilized to assist with troubleshooting issues when they arise, such as picking up passengers when a bus breaks down.

John asks if the driver goes out of order from the routing, like in Manel's case, do they call it in?

Manel tells John that no they did not call it in.

Michelle states that yes, they are supposed to call it in, and let us know "I'm near Friendly Valley, I am going to drop her of now and continue on route." For safety purposes, we want to drop the passenger off where they are designated to be dropped off. The driver is not supposed to hold riders onboard after they have made the request to get off.

Adrian states that we must remember that this is public transportation. This is not medical transportation or school service, so people have the ability to get on or get off wherever and whenever they want. If it is safe to stop and the driver can stop safely, and the passenger asks, we will do so. We will not stop mid-traffic, but if it can be done safely, dispatch will be notified and the passenger will be dropped off.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS

N/A

ADJOURNMENT

John adjourns the meeting at approximately 11:00 a.m.

FUTURE MEETING

The next meeting is May 2, at 9:00 a.m. at City Hall in the Carl Boyer Room