


INTER OFFICE MEMO

TO: MP&L Committee

FROM: Rick Ramacier 
General Manager

DATE: January 29, 2021

SUBJ: Draft 2021 County Connection Federal Legislative Advocacy Program

Background

As we prepare our 2021 Federal Legislative Advocacy Program, we do so in a greatly changed world from this time last year or in previous years going quite a bit back. We have a new President with a different outlook on how the federal government should interact with public transit. This suggests that we should pivot somewhat from our advocacy approach. More importantly we are now into year two of the Covid-19 era, which will have a significant impact on how we engage our legislative delegation.

Within the new administration, the region's own Nuria Fernandez taking on the role of FTA Administrator (deputy until confirmed) will provide additional avenues of federal support.

Unlike the previous administration that had a stronger emphasis on regulatory reform, the new administration is making signs that they will not be looking to regulatory reform. Rather, they will be looking to provide increases in federal transportation funding as well infrastructure generally.

Thus, our 2021 program and how we communicate it should reflect these new conditions that we find ourselves in.

Change in Program Presentation Format and Congressional Office Meeting Visits

It is likely that Covid-19 will be with us at levels throughout the first half of 2021 such that traveling and in-person meetings are ill advised. Moreover, the congressional offices have not been open for in-person meetings that are not of the highest importance. However, the legislative clock does stop. Legislation important to public transit will be considered throughout the next six months. We should plan to be in communication with our delegation sooner rather later regarding our 2021 interests.

So, staff proposes that we up a series of remote meetings with our delegation in late February or early March. It is these meetings that we would present our program. We can then follow up remotely as things progress throughout the legislative year. Once travel is safer and the congressional offices are actually open, we consider in-person visits.

To facilitate these meetings and to present our program, staff recommends that we depart from the brochure/pamphlet format to one that takes advantage of technology driven communication. The recommendation is that we move to three or four page power point that can be easily converted into a pamphlet at a later date. We will provide you with a draft program via email early next week. It will also be posted on our web page as a link to the MP&L Committee meeting agenda.

As for the content of this power point, we propose that we shift the background material away from ridership levels and more towards our innovative approaches to providing essential service during Covid-19. And, that we focus more on our role in providing equity and vital services and connections to our residents that might be considered disadvantaged.

With respect to the issues to be heart of our program, they will be displayed in the draft power point and they are briefly described below.

Priority Federal Issues

We have identified four main issues to focus on in 2021. They are: 1.) the next round of coronavirus relief/stimulus funding 2.) re-authorization of the federal transportation bill 3.) FY22 federal transit appropriations bill 4.) restoring the federal highway and transit trust funds.

Coronavirus Relief/Stimulus Funding

The Biden administration has proposed another round of coronavirus relief/stimulus, including \$20 billion for public transit. The American Public Transit Association (APTA) based on very recent surveying of its members, estimates that public transit will need another \$39.2 billion through FY23 to avoid further Covid-19 related service cuts, employee layoffs, or capital project cancellations.

Re-authorization of the Federal Transportation Bill

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST) has been due to expire last September. It has been extended through this September. Thus, during this legislative year, re-authorizing FAST will be a major priority. To that end, the House has already passed its version of re-authorization called the Invest in America Act. This bill increases the federal investment in public transit by 133% over FAST. However, it contains language that will make innovative first and last mile and micro transit-based solutions perhaps more difficult for federal funded public transit systems to pursue. Thus, we will want to advocate for changes to this when the Senate takes up its version of re-authorization shortly.

FY22 Federal Public Transit Appropriations

This will be driven in part by what happens with re-authorization. We will at least want to ensure an adequate transit appropriations – with or without re-authorization – that would be at least

equal to if not more than the FY21 appropriations. County Connection has a crucial 40 bus replacement project in the pipeline that will be very dependent on an adequate FY22 transit appropriations.

Restore the Federal Highway and Mass Transit Accounts

With the Federal Highway and Mass Transit Accounts nearly broke, more and more of the federal transit program is being funded through the General Fund as opposed to federal gas taxes. This is not sustainable long term and is politically vulnerable to the whims of congress. We need to restore the trust funds so that dedicated funding (like the gas tax) once again supports our federal transit funding programs.

MP&L Committee Review

Staff wishes to review the draft power point, the priority issues, and the recommended approach to our 2021 federal legislative advocacy at your meeting on Thursday, February 4th with you. We will seek your feedback and possible direction to forward a draft program to the full board.

Action Requested

Review the draft program and approach, provide feedback, and consider forwarding it to the board for action.

CENTRAL CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Connecting our community by providing innovative transportation choices when and where you need it

2021 Federal Advocacy Program

COUNTY CONNECTION

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County Connection

County Connection provides vital local transit service for communities in Central Contra Costa County.



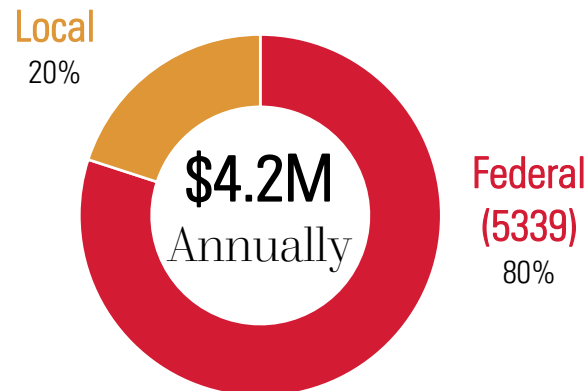
Our Riders

Compared to Central Contra Costa County residents, our riders are:

- 4.4X** more likely to have no car
- 3.8X** more likely to be in a 3+ worker household
- 3.0X** more likely to earn less than \$50,000/year
- 2.7X** more likely to be ages 18-24

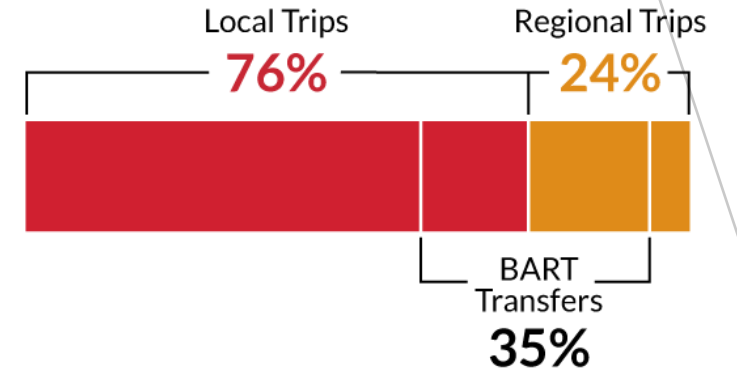
Capital Funding

Federal funding accounts for an estimated 80% on an annualized basis.



Local vs. Regional Trips

While the majority of routes serve a BART station, most of our riders (76%) are making local trips within Central Contra Costa.



Also, while 35% of our riders transfer between our buses and BART, roughly half of them stay within Central Contra Costa.





Federal Advocacy Program

County Connection relies on federal transit funding annually for necessities crucial to the Authority. Moreover, sufficient federal investments in public transit will be imperative to the impacts made by COVID-19. The new Administration has implied the plan for increases in federal transportation funding as well as infrastructure. As a result, County Connection supports the following:

Priority #1: COVID-19 Relief/Stimulus Funding

The Biden administration has proposed another round of coronavirus relief/stimulus, including \$20 billion for public transit. The American Public Transit Association (APTA) based on very recent surveying of its members, estimates that public transit will need another \$39.2 billion through FY23 to avoid further COVID-19 related service cuts, employee layoffs, or capital project cancellations.

County Connection anticipates having lost as much \$12 million in fare revenue through FY23 due to COVID-19 related ridership losses. We are likely going to experience additional losses of an unknown amount due to temporary decreases in local/state funding. County Connection has not experienced a major decrease in expenses in large part to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) and the Contra Costa Health Officer declaring public transit to be an Essential Service.

Priority #2: Re-authorization of the Federal Transportation Bill

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST) has been extended through this September. Historically, County Connection has received \$8 million dollars in federal support on an annualized basis. These funds are primarily used to replace aging buses for far cleaner and reliable buses. Thus, re-authorization of FAST is a top priority for County Connection.

The House passed the Invest in America Act to re-authorize FAST. This bill increases the federal investment in public transit by 133% over FAST. However, it contains language that will make innovative first and last mile and micro transit-based solutions perhaps more difficult for federal funded public transit systems to pursue. Because of the importance to County Connection – in partnership with the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA) – of finding and developing innovative public transportation solutions, we will want to advocate for changes to how innovative first and last mile and micro transit-based solutions are handled in re-authorization when the Senate takes up re-authorization shortly.

Federal Advocacy Program

Priority #3: FY22 Federal Public Transit Appropriations

County Connection relies on federal funds for the timely completion of capital projects and to support its services to folks with disabilities. In FY22, we have programmed federal funds to support the timely replacement of 40 buses. These 12-year-old diesel buses will be replaced by a mix of Zero Emission Buses or clean diesel buses (using renewable fuels) that will be much more reliable. To ensure that we receive this critical capital funding, the federal transit program must be fully funded at levels consistent with FAST. Otherwise, our expected federal funding for this project could be jeopardized.

Priority #4: Restore the Federal Highway and Mass Transit Accounts

With the Federal Highway and Mass Transit Accounts nearly broke, more and more of the federal transit program is being funded through the General Fund as opposed to federal gas taxes. This is not sustainable and is politically vulnerable to the whims of congress. The trust funds need to be restored so that dedicated funding (like the gas tax) once again supports our federal transit funding programs.





County Connection Innovation During COVID-19

- Transportation services as we know it know it has completely changed. Throughout COVID-19, County Connection has continued to work to identify how paratransit services could continue to be relevant to ensure the sustainability of the community.
 - In early April, transit agencies were called upon by the County's Emergency Services center to provide essential transportation for COVID-19 positive individuals who were homeless or in congregant facilities. These individuals were transported to hospitals or hotels as directed by the County Health Department. Through January 2021, **LINK Paratransit has transported over 459 COVID positive passengers.**
 - LINK Paratransit and the County Health Department maintain a long-standing partnership to provide specialized training and PPE to Operators in this voluntary program.
 - In May, the County Connection Board of Directors authorized an amendment to the Transdev paratransit LINK services contract to include COVID-19 mitigation efforts throughout our communities.
- County Connection continues to partner with the County in developing opportunities to assist with the COVID vaccines. This includes developing ride booking procedures for vaccination appointments and ways to convert buses to mobile vaccination units.
- County Connection's service and fare restructure has proven to be a great success. Prior to the impacts of COVID-19, ridership was experiencing double-digit (13%) growth.
- County Connection operates a total of eight battery electric inductively charged buses, primarily serving downtown Walnut Creek. This project was largely funded by two separate federal grants.

County Connection Provides These Important COVID-19 Related Transit Benefits

- The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) and the Contra Costa Health Officer have declared public transit an essential service. As such, County Connection has continued to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing service to many other essential workers and communities of concern which are transit dependent.
- In addition to the transportation of COVID positive individuals, County Connection's LINK Paratransit offered resources to the Meals on Wheels program, whose core set of drivers are volunteers over the age of 65. Through January 2021, LINK Paratransit has delivered over 21,301 meals to the vulnerable senior population who were affected by the Shelter in Place Order.
- At the success of the Meals on Wheels program, LINK Paratransit has partnered with other programs for food and meal delivery in the entire County, not just the County Connection service area. To date, the program has accomplished delivery of the following:
 - School Lunches: 7,239 lunches for at-risk youth
 - County and Food Banks: over 4,000 lbs. of food, including delivery boxes of non-perishable foods
 - City of San Ramon Citizens: 2,499 meals

