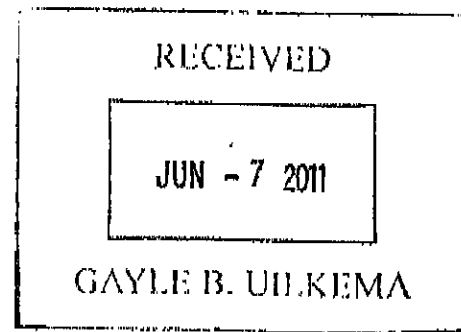


324 Shenandoah Dr.
Martinez, CA 94553
May 25, 2011

Gayle B. Uilkema
Supervisor, Contra Costa Board of Supervisors
651 Pine Street, Room 108A
Martinez, CA 94553



Supervisor Uilkema:

As an Environmental Science student at College Park High School, I have been learning this year about a variety of ways to improve the local community through environmentally and economically sound planning. One subject in particular that has been brought to my attention is public bus systems. Our current bus system, the County Connection, is beneficial to many people. However, in my experience, the majority of the community does not know about or trust these buses. By improving advertising of the bus system, making information more available, and increasing the number and frequency of buses, our county could improve ridership and maximize the benefits of this public transportation. These benefits include not only protecting the environment but also reducing traffic congestion in the area, creating cleaner and healthier air that minimizes problems such as asthma, and fostering a sense of community. I understand that you are both a member of the County Board of Supervisors and the Transit Authority Board of Directors, and I ask that you consider these steps to aid our community and the environment.

Improving the advertising of our buses would make more people consider using them. There are a number of ways to do this. For example, I have noticed that the bus stops often do not stand out—before I began researching, I was not sure where the bus stops near my house even were. If every bus stop was obvious and easily noticeable—even unique—people would be reminded to use the system and might end up trying it more often. Another simple way to improve advertising would be to hold free or reduced-price bus days, and get the announcements into local newspapers and online. Spare the air days would be a great opportunity to try these, and they would encourage first-time passengers who may use the system again.

Another way to convince more people to use the County Connection is to make information more available and clear. When I walk past a bus stop, I am not sure where that bus will take me, so I don't think to wait for it. Placing clear route maps at each stop would allow potential passengers to view the options available, and some might decide to use the bus. A time schedule should be posted at each stop as well. I do like the website that makes routes and destinations clear, but not everyone has access to or knows to look at the website.

The most effective way to make more people use the buses is to increase the number, range, and frequency of the bus fleet. The two most common complaints I have heard regarding the buses are that they do not go to enough places (especially in residential areas) and that they do not come often enough. I realize that, even more than the other steps, this would require more money, which is a scarce commodity in the current budget situation. However, the benefits are great and county residents will be proud to live in an area with excellent public transportation. A more extensive bus system would mean less traffic congestion, more community connectivity and spirit, cleaner air, less pollution, and a better Contra Costa County.

I hope that you consider these options and continue to work for a cleaner, better future for our county. Please respond to let me know what your plans and ideas are in regards to this topic. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Matthew Farnitano