

# County Connection

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## CCCTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING

January 18, 2024

#### CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL/CONFIRM QUORUM

Chair Don Tatzin called the regular meeting of the Board of Directors to order at 9:00 a.m. Board Members present were Directors Andersen, Diaz, Hoffmeister, Hudson, Noack, Schroder, Sos, Storer, Tatzin, Wilk and Worth.

Staff: Churchill, Sherman, Brewer, Dixit, Glenn, Hill, Horta, Johnson, Jones, Martinez, Mitchell, Noya, Reeb and Sanderson

#### PUBLIC COMMUNICATION:

Judy Barrientos and Michelle Gray spoke to the Board about longer meal breaks for the drivers for health reasons as well as a better experience for the passengers. Bill Churchill stated that he has regular meetings with the scheduling department to work on this issue.

#### CONSENT CALENDAR

MOTION: Director Hudson moved approval of the Consent Calendar, consisting of the following item: (a) Approval of Minutes of Regular Meeting of December 21, 2023; (b) Investment Report as of September 30, 2023. Director Noack seconded the motion, and it received the following vote of approval:

Aye: Directors Andersen, Diaz, Hoffmeister, Hudson, Noack, Schroder, Sos, Storer, Tatzin, Wilk and Worth  
No: None  
Abstain: None  
Absent: None

**REPORT OF CHAIR: None**

#### REPORT OF GENERAL MANAGER:

##### Recognition of 20+ Year Employees that Retired During COVID-19 Pandemic

Mike Foley-Maintenance  
Myron Johnson-Transportation  
Debra Lowery-Transportation  
June Owens-Transportation  
Jorge Rubillos-Transportation

## January 1st Emergency Bus Bridge

Bill Churchill, General Manager, informed the Board that there was a BART derailment on the morning of January 1st requiring a bus bridge to be deployed. What was unusual was that County Connection was closed, as we do not provide services on six major Holidays throughout the year. We have conducted many planned bus bridges for BART on holidays in the past, but we have the luxury of planning for them many months in advance. In this case, there was no planning and BART needed the bus bridge right away. He called the general manager of AC Transit, Mike Hursh, as they were running a Sunday service on that day and they were able to immediately deploy a number of large articulated buses to start the bus bridge. Mr. Hursh let Bill know that his drivers would soon run out of drive time so County Connection would need to ramp up operations and join the bus bridge as well. Bill estimated it would take 3 to 4 hours to ramp up service since we had no one in the yard and we would have to fuel buses before deploying service. We had 3 mechanics, 4 supervisors and 10 operators that opened up the facility, fueled the buses and had the bridge running in two hours. These employees gave up a day off on a moment's notice to provide help and support to BART and ensure the transit riders in our communities are taken care of and can get to where they need to go. He is incredibly grateful and proud of what everyone was able to accomplish.

## State Legislation Update

Bill Churchill, General Manager, reminded the Board that at the December Board meeting he informed the Board that Senator Wahab did a gut and amend to SB 397 creating a bill to require CALSTA to develop a plan to consolidate all public transit agencies contained within the nine County Bay Area into one. Two weeks ago, the CTA Legislation committee voted to formally oppose the Bill and sent the senator the letter of opposition late in the day on Monday last week. On Monday morning of last week, he was part of a group of General Managers that met with Senator Wahab at her request to provide her with our concerns. He was tasked specifically with providing the small operator concerns. At that meeting, the Senator characterized her bill as a mere study bill that should not provide heartache for anyone. However, all analyses that he has seen regarding the bill did not characterize it as a study bill. Michael Pimentel (CTA) and his staff met with the Senator on Tuesday of last week to explain the association's opposition; thereafter, the Senator pulled the bill. The Senator did state that she fully intends to reintroduce the bill at a later date and would like to receive language input from the association when she does to help make the bill more palatable and no consolidation is not an option. On Tuesday of this week, Senator Wahab re-introduced her bill under SB 926 with the exact same language in the first bill. Interestingly, Assemblywoman Papan introduced AB 1837 requiring MTC to push the transit operators within the nine county Bay Area to improve their coordination with each other; this bill (AB 1837) appears to be purposefully introduced as a direct contradiction to the Wahab transit consolidation bill.

## **REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

### **Marketing, Planning and Legislative Committee**

#### Onboard Survey Report – Information Only

Pranjal Dixit, Manager of Planning, gave a brief background stating that the last onboard survey of County Connection's passengers was completed by MTC in fall of 2019, but the pandemic has delayed MTC's surveying schedule such that the next survey on County Connection will not be until 2027. Given the significant shifts in travel patterns as a result of the pandemic as well as a Title VI program update due in March, staff utilized the on-call planning contract with Transportation Management & Design (TMD) to conduct an onboard survey during Fall 2023.

Overall, County Connection riders tend to have fewer vehicles available, larger household sizes, and lower annual incomes compared to residents of Central Contra Costa. They are also more likely to be minority and speak a language other than English at home. There were some notable shifts in rider demographics since the 2019 survey.

Although vehicle availability and household incomes were higher, household sizes were also much larger, with over half having 4 or more people. In addition, the change in income levels does not account for inflation, and when considering the combination of household income and size, the percentage of households considered to be low-income stayed relatively constant compared to 2019. The cost to conduct the survey was \$50,000, which was included in the Service Development budget for FY 2024.

## **Operations & Scheduling Committee**

### Fixed Route Performance Comparison – Information Only

Pranjal Dixit, Manager of Planning, explained that in March 2020, ridership dropped across all transit systems at the onset of the shelter-at-home order as businesses closed and commuters started working remotely. The pandemic quickly highlighted social inequities, as essential workers, who are disproportionately low-income and minority, continued to rely on transit throughout the pandemic. As the demand for commuter service remains low, the demand for local service and weekend service continues to rise.

Transit agencies nationwide are facing a critical operator shortage, a ripple effect of pandemic-related burnout, health concerns, career shifts, and a competitive labor market. In the East Bay, five agencies vying for a limited pool of candidates intensifies the challenge. While some agencies like Tri Delta Transit saw success with aggressive recruitment and bonus programs, most agencies have struggled to fully restore their pre-pandemic workforce and service levels on their routes. Tri Delta Transit's operator count even exceeded pre-pandemic levels, but with their bonus program having ended in September 2023, the future remains uncertain. LAVTA and WestCAT currently have enough operators to operate current service levels, but operator retention woes pose a barrier to restoring additional service, despite having sufficient staff for their existing routes. County Connection, with a 15-operator gap as of October 2023, is taking action. An employee referral program to boost recruitment launches January 1st, 2024, and a starting salary increase was implemented in FY22. As County Connection gears up for service restorations, efforts to address the operator shortage will be crucial in ensuring adequate transit options for the East Bay community.

County Connection actively restored service (reaching 83% of its original schedule) and still attained 90% of its pre-pandemic passenger productivity. Tri Delta Transit and BART also faced the challenge of integrating its new services like Oakley Park-n-Ride service and Berryessa/North San Jose extension into their existing networks. They're currently in the process of right-sizing their schedules to optimize efficiency and meet changing travel patterns.

### Means Based Paratransit Fares

Director Sos left at 10:58 a.m.

John Sanderson, Director of ADA and Specialized Services, explained that Tri Delta Transit conducted a six-month means-based fare pilot program from April through October 2023, in coordination with CCTA. In August 2023, the CCTA ATSP Task Force recommended that the Tri Delta means-based fare pilot be expanded into a countywide program by implementing Tri Delta's pilot protocols at County Connection and WestCat.

With the lessons learned from the Tri Delta pilot period and input from Tri Delta staff and other stakeholders, Staff anticipate that a successful means-based fare program can be implemented at County Connection relatively easily and at a reasonable cost. The existing ADA eligibility staff will be tasked with verifying program applicants' low-income status primarily by confirming their participation in certain federal and state programs that help low-income individuals. Once approved, each program participant will receive (initially) \$50 per month deposited into their LINK pre-paid fare account, which can then be used to pay for rides on LINK paratransit. Because the means-based fare program constitutes a fare change lasting longer than six months, staff will also be required under Federal regulations and the Authority's "disparate impact" and "disproportionate burden" policies

to prepare a Title VI Fare Equity analysis, which will be presented to the Board for approval, once complete. County Connection will invoice CCTA monthly for the fare subsidy credited to riders plus administrative expenses.

CCTA has allocated \$145,000 in Measure X funds, which should be more than adequate to support the program through the 12-month pilot phase. If that amount proves insufficient, additional Measure X funds may be allocated or the program rules may be modified as necessary to contain program costs at a sustainable level. Program expenditures will be evaluated monthly to ensure that any necessary changes can be instituted in a timely fashion.

**MOTION:** Director Storer moved adoption of Resolution No. 2024-011 authorizing the General Manager to enter into a MOU with CCTA allowing for the reimbursement of County Connection's costs associated with operating the means-based fare subsidy program. Director Diaz seconded the motion, and it received the following vote of approval:

Aye: Directors Andersen, Diaz, Hoffmeister, Hudson, Noack, Schroder, Storer, Tatzin, Wilk and Worth  
No: None  
Abstain: None  
Absent: Director Sos

**BOARD COMMUNICATION:** None

**CLOSED SESSION:**

The Board entered the closed session at 11:12 a.m. to discuss:

Liability Claims (Government Code Section 54956.95) Claim against Central Contra Costa Transit Authority;  
Claimant: Shannon Cross

**OPEN SESSION:**

The Board entered the open session at 11:35 a.m. No reportable action taken.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Chair Tatzin adjourned the regular Board meeting at 11:36 am.

Minutes prepared by:

Lathina Hill  
Asst to the General Manager/Clerk to the Board of Directors

Date: February 5, 2024