



City of Modesto
Public Works Department
Transit Division
1010 Tenth Street, Suite 4500
Modesto, CA 95354

September 8, 2015

The Honorable Marie Sovey Silveira, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, Stanislaus County
P.O. Box 3488
Modesto, CA 95353

Dear Judge Silveira;

Please find attached the City of Modesto's response to the final report of 2014-2015 Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury, Stanislaus County Public Transit Systems, Case 15-02C.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

James N. Holgersson
City Manager

Enclosure

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SEP 24 2015
Civil Grand Jury

Read by
J. Silveira

City of Modesto Response to the Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury

Stanislaus County Public Transit Systems

Case 15-02C

Response to Findings (SCCGJ Findings are shown in italics)

F1: The four transit authorities within Stanislaus County have differing policies, contracts, operating procedures, and ridership needs. These differences have a negative impact, which is affecting ridership.

Modesto Response: The policies, procedures, etc. of each of the transit agencies have been adopted in response to the particular needs of the community they serve as determined by their respective governing bodies. The impact of these differences on ridership varies, but any negative impact would appear minor considering that Modesto's transit system (Modesto Area Express (MAX) and Modesto Area Dial-A-Ride) serves 85% of all transit trips made in Stanislaus County and its service area covers about 50% of the county's population. It should also be noted that besides serving the City's citizens, Modesto's transit system is regional in nature because it also serves the unincorporated communities of Salida and Empire, and all County islands on the south and west side of the Modesto urbanized area. The differing needs of each community should be a topic of discussion in any consolidation study that is prepared.

F2: Transit authorities have previously discussed consolidation strategies, and some authorities have completed both ridership and comprehensive reports with an emphasis toward partial or total consolidation of public transit needs.

Modesto Response: We agree that the issue of consolidation has generally been discussed by the transit agencies in the past, but we are not aware of any discussion involving actual strategies nor are we aware of any reports that have been prepared by any transit agency on the subject.

F3: All four transit authorities are deficient in current technological services.

Modesto Response: Budget constraints and priorities have impacted the adoption of technological advances in all of the transit systems, but the City of Modesto has made great strides on this issue. All buses in the Modesto Area Express (MAX) fixed-route bus service are equipped with GPS-based computer aided dispatch/automated vehicle location (CAD/AVL) technology. This system indicates to the dispatcher through a digital map on a computer monitor the exact location of each bus and on another monitor the number of minutes each bus is either behind or ahead of schedule. Customer service employees have the same information shown on a monitor in their office and can tell customers over the telephone or at the counter the exact on-time status of every bus. Since such a large percentage of transit trips in the county are made on Modesto's system, these technology improvements benefit a significant portion of the county's transit users.

Many of the buses also have automated passenger counters (APC's) that indicate to the dispatcher the number of passengers currently on board. Modesto recently added 22 new APC equipped buses to its fleet. Approximately 69% of the 51 MAX urban transit buses are now equipped with APC's.

These new buses also have hardware for automated stop announcements. This function uses the GPS system to determine the upcoming bus stop. When operational, it will automatically announce the stop location over the public address system and display it on an electronic sign inside the bus. We will be acquiring a software module for the CAD/AVL system to make this feature functional and all new or refurbished buses will be outfitted with it.

All transit systems in the county participate in Google Trip Planner, which is a program that enables potential customers to plan trips over the internet. Customers enter their origin and destination into the Trip Planner and receive information that shows the different routes available to take them to their destination, the location of the nearest bus stops for those routes, walking time to those stops, and the times the next 2-3 buses are scheduled to serve the stop.

To date, none of the transit agencies in the county have yet acquired real time bus departure prediction. The City expects to acquire this feature within the next few years. This technology allows customers to use a smart phone app to find bus routes, bus stops, and estimated times of bus departure from the selected stop based on the actual location of the bus at the time the request is entered into the phone. This feature operates using the location information provided by the bus system's GPS tracking system and data residing in the CAD/AVL system.

Response to Recommendations (SCCGJ Recommendations are shown in italics)

R1: The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors should direct StanCOG to complete Request for Proposals and hire an independent professional consultant to conduct an all-inclusive consolidation of transit services study within Stanislaus County.

Modesto Response: StanCOG is directed by its own policy board, which consists of representatives of the City of Modesto, all other cities in Stanislaus County and the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors. Any effort to evaluate the consolidation of transit services in Stanislaus County should be done in consultation with the StanCOG's policy board. StanCOG staff indicate their agency has funds budgeted for a transit system consolidation study.

R2: The consolidation study should examine all public transportation systems within the county and include a cost/benefit analysis for a complete or partial consolidation. This study should take all operational and ridership matters into consideration and make specific recommendations to both StanCOG and the Board of Supervisors that will best serve the transit authorities, users, and taxpayers.

Modesto Response: We agree with this recommendation, and further add that any proposed recommendations should also be directed to the City of Modesto, which operates the largest transit system in Stanislaus County (MAX and Modesto Area Dial-A-Ride).

R3: StanCOG, StaRT, BLAST, CAT and MAX should begin inquiry into the implementation of technological advances in the areas of both transit management and rider services, such as automated fare boxes, auto-announce, Wi-Fi, GPS tracking and phone app schedules.

Modesto Response: The City of Modesto has been in the process of implementing CAD/AVL technology features for MAX since 2008. The MAX CAD/AVL program is fully operational for transit management and dispatching purposes. Hardware for automated stop announcements is present on 22 recently acquired buses. Real-time bus departure prediction is planned for the near future. Funds are budgeted to acquire all of these features in the next few years.

All MAX buses have automated fare boxes. The 22 newest buses have the latest model fare boxes capable of accepting magnetic strip cards. Funds are budgeted in this fiscal year to purchase replacements for the remaining older fare boxes

No MAX buses are currently equipped with Wi-Fi, but it will be included in the new commuter coach for which specifications are now being finalized. The City's other three commuter coaches will also be outfitted with Wi-Fi technology. The commuter coaches operate between Modesto and the Dublin/Pleasanton BART station.

Comments on Body of Report

Report statement: The four different transit authorities find themselves in competition for limited funds.

Modesto Comment: StanCOG limits the amount of TDA funds each of the four transit systems are allowed to use for transit. TDA funds not used for transit may be used by all entities, except the City of Modesto, for street and road purposes. (State law prohibits the use of TDA funds for street purposes by cities over 100,000 population in counties with over 500,000 population.) In every non-recession year, TDA funds are left over for street purposes after the transit entities receive what they are allocated. Consequently, transit entities are not competing among themselves for those funds; they are competing with those who would rather use TDA funds for street purposes.

Report Statement: Each authority receives both FTA and TDA funds through StanCOG.

Modesto Comment: The City of Ceres receives no federal transportation funds. Each of the other transit entities receives funds from a different FTA program administered by either Caltrans or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Turlock receives FTA funds for SMALL urbanized areas through a program administered by Caltrans, Modesto receives FTA funds for LARGE urbanized areas through a program administered directly by the FTA, and Stanislaus County receives FTA funds for RURAL areas administered by Caltrans plus funds for LARGE urbanized areas through the City of Modesto.

Report Statement: Technology such as automated fare boxes, auto-announce, Wi-Fi, GPS tracking, and phone app schedules are currently unavailable on all or most buses countywide.

Modesto Comment: As discussed above, the MAX system has a significant number of technological features already in use on its buses and more are proposed. The technological features available on the MAX system benefit most of the public transit passengers in Stanislaus County given that Modesto carries approximately 85% of all public transit passengers in the county.

Report Statement: The table on Page 3 states that MAX achieved a farebox ratio of 17.0% for Fiscal Year 2014/2015.

Modesto Comment: Data regarding the farebox ratio for FY 2014/15 is not yet available. The latest year for which complete data is available (FY 2013/14) shows that MAX achieved a farebox ratio of 19.7%.