

TUOLUMNE COUNTY TRANSIT AGENCY

Michael Ayala
Chairman

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Darin Grossi
Executive Director

AUG 27 2020

Superior Court of California
County of Tuolumne

By: Diana Jolley Clerk

August 19, 2020

The Honorable Kate Powell-Segerstrom
Tuolumne County Superior Court Judge
60 North Washington Street
Sonora, CA 95370

RE: Tuolumne County Transit Agency Response to 2019/20 Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations

Dear Judge Powell-Segerstrom:

The TCTA Board and I would like to thank the Grand Jury for their time and effort in putting together this report. We welcome this citizen oversight and believe the jury's efforts demonstrate how the system should work. Clearly, the jurors worked in good faith and integrity attempting to fully understand rural public transit and the challenges we are faced with on a daily basis. The TCTA Board, and I, realize that participation in this process is an important Civic Duty aimed at improving government services.

The following is offered in response to the 2019/20 Grand Jury Report as it pertains to Tuolumne County Transit.

Findings:

F1. The Grand Jury finds that some Fixed Routes consistently display low and declining ridership.

Response: Agree; ridership has been declining for the past few years. We have discussed poor system performance publicly many times. Our many attempts to improve services in the hope for re-gaining past ridership levels have fallen short of our objectives. Several poorly performing routes have been eliminated or reduced in service level over the past few years. We would only note that transit ridership has generally been in a state of decline across the industry and nation.

F2. TCTA uses oversized and fuel inefficient buses to accommodate an expected, but unmaterialized, increase in ridership, and their continued use is counterproductive to state efforts to minimize GHG emissions.

Response: Disagree; ridership reports show ridership varies by time of day, but consistently show in excess of 20 riders on some routes served by larger buses that accommodate 26 passengers plus 2 wheelchairs. Lower performing routes can generate 10 plus riders at certain times of the day and are served with smaller buses that accommodate 18 passengers and one wheelchair. TCTA has not purchased a large bus since 2016.

F3. The Grand Jury finds that the criteria for performance evaluation do not reflect rural transit challenges.

Response: Agree; TCTA will look to future performance audits to quantify the cost benefit of Tuolumne County Transit.

F4. Despite advertising efforts, access to transit information is difficult for the public, and could contribute to lowered public awareness and ridership.

Response: Agree; we are aware that the public often finds understanding or obtaining information on public transit is sometimes considered difficult. We have engaged numerous private consultants to assist with marketing plans, social media, website development, radio and tv advertising. Yet, our engagement of public continues to indicate we need to do better in this area. We have secured grant funding to hire a Mobility Manager who will devote the majority of their time to helping the public access various public and private transportation services.

F5. TCTC cannot justify pursuing costly infrastructure development for a ZAV fleet, due to not owning their current facility.

Response: Agree; we are not implementing a ZEV fleet at this time. Consistent with California Area Resources Board requirements, TCTA will submit a ZEV implementation plan by 2023. It is expected that ZEV implementation cost will decline in the coming years and grants to support transition to ZEV will become available.

Recommendations:

R1: The Grand Jury recommends that the TCTA examine overall routes and schedules; remedial measures such as consolidation, expanding DAR, increasing Trip Program funding and increasing bus frequency on popular routes should be considered (F1).

Response: Implemented; We believe this recommendation supports recent actions of the TCTA. We have consolidated services repeatedly over the last 6 years. The TCTA has contracted with AMMA to develop a Short-Range Transit Plan to identify where efficiencies can be gained, we have a greatly expanded Dial a Ride and added to the TRIP budget. Covid 19 has thrust us into a new service model, using an Uber like Dial a Ride system to meet the public's needs. This service can expand, and contract based on ridership demands. A proposed new app-based reservation system promises to add tremendous convenience to our customers. Fixed routes will not be resumed until warranted by ridership demands. Route 1 is the only fixed route to be restored at this time. Route 1 has historically maintained a passenger per hour performance above 9 which is excellent for a rural service. We are well under way in implementing an

entirely new service model that staff believes is very consistent with Grand Jury recommendations and should cost the public significantly less annually. The TCTA Board has provided the Executive Director considerable latitude to be flexible and responsive to public transportation needs in restoring effective transit services in the future.

R2: The Grand Jury recommends, prior to the rollout of the ZEV transition plan, any vehicles purchased for replacement purposes should be smaller fuel-efficient vehicles and should be used for DAR and fixed routes with low ridership (F2).

Response: The recommendation will be partially implemented in FY 20/21. The new general public dial a ride system warrants smaller, fuel-efficient vehicles. A smaller more fuel-efficient vehicle is budgeted for FY20/21. However, Route 1, the ski bus, vehicles used for special events and emergency evacuations require larger buses that can accommodate up to 30 passengers. The TCTA has not purchased a large bus since 2016 but may need to replace an existing large bus with another large bus sometime in the future.

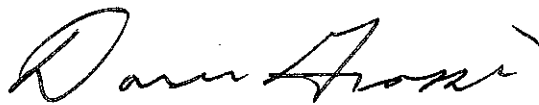
R3: The Grand Jury recommends that the TCTA self-audit performance with quantitative measures including operating costs per hour, operating costs per mile and vehicle miles travelled, as well as qualitative measures such as community benefit and passenger service (F3).

Response: Implemented; existing monthly reports provide some of this data and the Draft Triennial Performance Audits dated June 29, 2020 included some of these performance measures. The final audit reports will also include a cost benefit as well as emissions analysis.

R4: The Grand Jury recommends improving website usability, and revising and improving advertised strategies, public outreach venues and implementing the improvements outlines in the 2019 Passenger Analysis (F4).

Response: This recommendation has not been implemented but will be implemented in the future. The TCTC will seek funding for an updated Transit Marketing Plan in the next year to address the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,



Darin Grossi, Executive Director
Tuolumne County Transit Agency