DRAFT **Accessible Transportation in Contra Costa County** DRAFT
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Background: There is a history of efforts to improve accessible transportation services in Contra Costa County with limited success. This paper describes that history, current accessible transit structures, barriers to progress, and potential next steps. This paper was developed in the context of the County's efforts during the Contra Costa Transportation Authority's (CCTA's) recent update to the Countywide Transportation Plan (CTP) and development of the Measure X sales tax Transportation Expenditure Plan.

*While a majority of the County's general transportation interests are specific to the unincorporated areas, this topic does **not** have that particular characteristic. The issues and services discussed below involve the entire County and impact the shared constituency of the Cities/Towns and the County.*

Introduction: This paper documents the lessons learned and archives the work of staff and the Board of Supervisors (BOS) on accessible transportation issues during the four year process by CCTA to update our CTP and develop a Transportation Expenditure Plan (TEP) for the Measure X (2016) transportation sales tax ballot measure (which was ultimately unsuccessful).

"Accessible transportation" is not a recognized designation or industry term, it is used here as a simple way to refer to a broad range of transportation related services typically provided to persons with disabilities and elderly individuals. Although services for these two populations can be separately administered and operated, they are combined here for simplicity. For the purposes of this paper, accessible transportation is defined as a range of transportation/transit and supportive services such as; Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated public paratransit service[1], city/community programs, transportation provided by private non-profits, mobility management programs, volunteer based transportation programs, etc.

This paper has four sections: **1)** Current Accessible Transportation Structures in Contra Costa, **2)** History of Efforts to Improve Accessible Transportation in the County, **3)** Barriers to Progress, and **4)** Next Steps.

Accessible transit/transportation can be a complex topic due to the intersection of public transit, civil rights, public health, social service, etc., involved in administering and operating services. This paper only provides a brief summary. The impact of the civil rights aspect of Americans with Disabilities Act paratransit service cannot be understated. Public transit providers have specific regulations they operate under all while trying to accommodate other client demands.

1) Current Accessible Transportation Services in Contra Costa County

Service Types: Organizations and agencies provide various service types for different rider needs:

- **Public ADA Paratransit**: Public transit agencies (listed below) provide required ADA paratransit[1]. No additional funding was provided when this this requirement was mandated in the 1990s.
- **Program Specific Service:** In order to ensure certain service characteristics (door-*through*-door, consistent/direct origin to destination, specific driver skill set, more control over on-board/trip times) some programs provide their own transportation. Examples: Contra Costa Advocacy, Respect, Commitment (ARC), Choice in Aging; and others.
- **Senior Transportation Programs**: These programs typically transport residents of a specified minimum age and/or persons with disabilities (in contrast to ADA paratransit, there may not be disability eligibility requirements). Examples: Cities of San Pablo, Richmond and others.

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[1]**ADA Paratransit:** The ADA requires public transit agencies to provide "complementary" (as in parallel or similar) paratransit service to people with disabilities who are unable to use the fixed-route bus or rail service because of their disability. The ADA defined the minimum service characteristics to be considered equivalent to the fixed-route service it is intended to complement. This type of service typically has associated eligibility requirements with an application process.

- **Other Support Services (Mobility Management, Travel Training, Veteran's Programs)**: *Mobility management* is a strategic approach to transportation service coordination and customer service, directing passengers to the most appropriate and cost-effective transportation providers through a one-call, one-click portal. A well-managed service area provides a full range of well-synchronized mobility services in a convenient, cost effective manner. Example: A comprehensive countywide mobility management program does not exist in Contra Costa County. Mobility Matters provides some mobility management functions in some areas of the County.

  Travel training teaches individuals with disabilities, elderly persons, and others how to use public transit independently to fulfill their travel needs. Travel training is also a strategy to reduce usage of more expensive demand response service (by shifting trips to conventional, less expensive fixed route service). Examples: Center for Independent Living, and WestCAT.

  Veteran's Transportation Programs often operate outside senior/disabled requirements and programs. Currently, there appears to be limited integration of these programs with other public transportation services in Contra Costa County. Mobility Matters has initiated a *Rides 4 Veterans* Program.

Service Providers: Different providers operate a variety of accessible transportation/transit services in Contra Costa in a decentralized arrangement. Each provider operates relatively independently with some limited coordination. Providers include (some definitions/organizations overlap):
- **Public Transit Operators:** AC Transit, BART, County Connection, Tri Delta Transit, WestCAT
- **Cities:** Concord (Monument Corridor Shuttle[2]), San Pablo (Door-to-Door Shuttle), and others.
- **Non-profit Agencies**: Contra Costa ARC, Golden Rain Foundation (Rossmoor bus), and others
- **Volunteer Driver Programs**: Mobility Matters, Caring Hands (John Muir) and others
- **Service Specific Programs:** Contra Costa Health Plan, Choice in Aging (Adult Day Health Care Program and Alzheimer's Day Care) and others

2) History of Efforts to Improve Accessible Transportation in Contra Costa County

- **2004 CCTA Paratransit Improvement Study**: The goal of the study was to develop prioritized recommendations and an action plan to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of paratransit services in Contra Costa County. These recommendations include: *use of sedans and supplemental taxi services; standardized trip scheduling parameters; automated scheduling of inter-agency transfers (and the need for the preparation of a Technology Plan); lifeline services beyond ADA service area including the joint use of vehicles; demand management strategies; coordination of community-based agency transportation (mobility manager); and consumer and agency advisory input on accessible transportation.*

  Outcome: The majority of the recommendations from the study remain unfulfilled.

- **2013 Contra Costa Mobility Management Plan (MMP)**: With County Connection as the lead agency, this countywide effort was to guide implementation of an array of services under a mobility management operation. The formation of an organization to manage these activities was a recommendation of the plan. Some implementation steps were initiated in conjunction with the non-profit Mobility Matters.

  Outcome: CCTA was proposed to adopt the plan and guide subsequent implementation. The MMP was presented to CCTA in early 2014. The last step taken in the process to adopt the plan was the distribution to the sub-regions for concurrence in 2014.

- **2016 Measure X Transportation Expenditure Plan (TEP):** CCTA led the effort to develop a new transportation sales tax for Contra Costa, Measure X. Recognizing the need to "*ensure services are*

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[2] While this service provides transportation to seniors and people with disabilities, a focus of the service is access to jobs.

delivered in a coordinated system that maximizes both service delivery and efficiency", conducting the *Accessible Transportation Service Strategic Plan*[3] was a requirement if the Measure passed.

Outcome: Measure X did not pass and the proposed study is not moving ahead at this time.

3) Barriers to Progress

The efforts listed above, largely unfulfilled, suggest an understanding that accessible transportation needs to be improved (or at a minimum studied). The lack of progress is acknowledged in the 2013 MMP which refers to the "*…long-running dialog in the County…with little actual implementation occurring.*" Difficulty making progress on these issues is not unique to Contra Costa. One report[4] from Washington State describes the problem, "*The expensive special needs transportation 'hot potato' gets tossed from one agency to another.*"

The points below describe specific barriers to progress related to this issue. These barriers are in addition to the inherent, ever-present difficulties in changing existing governmental structures:

Absence of a Forum for Leadership: The 2013 MMP referenced above noted the "*lack of a structural platform*" as a "*major impediment to action.*" Similarly, the September 2015 report on the TEP to the Board of Supervisors described an obstacle to progress, "*…accessible transit responsibilities are diffused throughout the county resulting in no single agency or organization falling naturally into a leadership role.*" These observations suggest that any future solutions should include the creation of a permanent forum or organization to address accessible transportation issues on an ongoing basis.

With this absence of a forum, it falls to leadership at an *existing* agency to acknowledge the need for progress and overcome any individual or institutional resistance and initiate an effort.

As an example of a solution to the "leadership" issue, SANDAG (San Diego Association of Governments) designated a non-profit, FACT (Facilitating Access to Coordinated Transportation[5]) as responsible for coordinating public, nonprofit, private, and other transportation services in San Diego County. There is coordination between the two agencies and the Boards of Directors share current and past members.

Increased Demand For Service in the Context of Tight Budgets: One issue that may result in some hesitation to address accessible transportation issues is the concern that if improvements are made, there will likely be an increase in demand for service. These concerns are probably well founded. Accessible transportation services, specifically transit, is expensive to provide. Even small increases in service volumes can spike costs. The concerns with rising costs and managing demand are so substantial that the aforementioned Sound Transit report describes "*non-published practices*"[6] to manage demand

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[3] **From the Measure X TEP:** *To ensure services are delivered in a coordinated system that maximizes both service delivery and efficiency, an Accessible Transportation Service (ATS) Strategic Plan will be developed… An overarching component in the development and delivery of the ATS Strategic Plan is using mobility management to ensure coordination and efficiencies in accessible service delivery. The plan will address both ADA and non-ADA services. The plan will evaluate the appropriate model for our local structure including how accessible services are delivered by all agencies and where appropriate coordination can improve transportation services, eliminate gaps in service and find efficiencies in the service delivered. The…plan would also determine the investments and oversight of the program funding and identify timing, projects, service delivery options, administrative structure, and fund leverage opportunities.*

[4] 2005 FLT Consulting, Sound Transit: *Embracing Paratransit Transportation: A Coordinated, Community Approach* http://www.bettertransport.info/cascadia/Trimble-EmbracingParatransit.pdf

[5] FACT is a "Coordinated Transportation Services Agency", a designation established under AB 120 (1979 – Social Services Transportation Improvement Act). The designation is intended to improve the quality of transportation to low mobility groups while achieving cost savings, lowered insurance premiums and more efficient use of vehicles and funding resources. (CalACT CTSA E-Book)

[6] *"…to reduce the eligible population – either by applying stricter eligibility standards, such as conditional eligibility or reducing the service area. Keeping public awareness about ADA paratransit services at a minimum is yet another unspoken but real strategy to keep demand down. If people don't know about the service, or if the service is too difficult to figure out, demand manages itself."*

for service. The report observes that riders needing service can be "…*managed to the point they are not eligible for a trip…*" resulting in this population not receiving "…*transportation that meets their needs.*"

This approach to demand management is unique in the transportation world. In planning for *roadway expansion*, there are substantial investments made to proactively plan for and accommodate future demand. Demographic trends are tracked, travel models are used to forecast travel, and right-of-way for additional travel lanes is preserved in advance in many cases. In the case of conventional *fixed-route transit service*, extensive efforts are made to increase ridership, market to new riders, and employ new service models to increase usage. There is a nationwide boom in the *construction of protected bicycle facilities* due, in part, to the substantial increase in cycling that often occurs after installation.

Accessible transportation services does not appear to benefit equitably from these types of proactive planning efforts. The Sound Transit report referenced above suggests this may be consistent with the state of the practice.

By modifying our approach, we have an opportunity to better serve this population consistent with our transportation goals[7] and concurrently increase the cost effectiveness of service. The more coordinated Santa Clara County system saw a 19% *decrease* in cost per trip relative to a 60% increase in Contra Costa County during the same period[11].

Over-Confidence in New Transportation Technologies: The upsurge in transportation network companies (Lyft, Uber, etc.) and the rapid emergence of autonomous vehicles may suggest some immediate relief relative to improvements in accessible transportation. These emerging technologies have great promise in the transportation field (including accessible transportation) but inflated expectations relative to this type of service could delay more useful action.

The transportation mode or vehicle itself is not necessarily the most critical bottleneck in improving accessible transit service or controlling costs. At this time, transportation network companies (TNCs) offer limited (Ride Hero, uberWAV, uberASSIST) accessible, and wheelchair accessible trips[8].

In addition, the elderly and disabled population cannot be expected to continually adapt to the ever-changing technology landscape. In order for this population to be able to take advantage of these new transportation technologies, some type of intermediary organization or interface may be necessary.

The *Coordination* and *Complexity* sections below discuss how the transportation provider or vehicle, be it TNCs or autonomous vehicle, is not necessarily immediately useful given the characteristics of accessible transit operations and administration

Coordination: While the increased use of technology and innovative approaches are common outcomes from this type of study, expanded coordination is often also necessary for tangible progress. Coordination in this context often signifies formal *linkages* between existing providers, services, and agencies[9]. Linkages exist on a continuum ranging from simple (a centralized compilation or directory of service providers on a web page or printed document) to complex (a one-call/one-click portal where customers can book trips with different providers similar to Travelocity.com or the like). A well-coordinated system can be a foundation for the implementation of new, advanced technology solutions.

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[7] 2017 Draft CTP *Goals: 1. Support the efficient, safe, and reliable movement of people and goods using all available travel modes*

[8] *Shared Ride Services and TNCs - 2016 Transportation Trends Report*, May 2017 National Aging and Disability Transportation Center. http://www.nadtc.org/wp-content/uploads/NADTC-Trends-Report-Shared-Ride-Topic-Spotlight-May-2017.pdf

[9] Nat'l Cooperative Hwy Research Program Rpt# 832, 2016: *State DOTs Connecting Users and Rides for Specialized Transportation*

The latter example, a one-call/one-click portal, is a substantial investment. Though such a system is scalable and could be phased. A more cost-effective approach would be to invest once and use the system throughout a larger region which would increase the return on the investment.

This approach is reinforced by the SANDAG/FACT example provided above in addition to the near universal acknowledgement[10] that coordination results in:

- Significant reductions in service costs[11]
- Greater amount of available transportation
- Higher quality service
- Access to increased funding
- Access to additional sources of funds
- Easier to find transportation options

Coordination in this field is a complex exercise in the management of numerous, interacting data points[12]. There are a wide array of interrelating passenger/vehicle/driver characteristics, restrictions relative to the co-mingling of passengers (and associated revenue), numerous accounting and auditing parameters related to constrained eligibility of a wide array of funding streams, in addition to privacy (medical, financial, etc.) issues.

Complexity: The following is an example of how the data points mentioned above come in to play during *operations*: a transit vehicle picks up an ambulatory regional center participant (who has specific eligible funding), the same vehicle then picks up a senior with dementia from *x* City (different funding eligibility, different driver skill set), another passenger is picked up in a large mobility device (different vehicle need, different routing requirements), and finally an ADA paratransit client is picked up in *y* City, and so on. The trip and pick-ups/drop-offs need to be routed so as to not violate ADA on-board times for the ADA passenger and ensure the mobility device and passenger are picked up last and dropped off first (some vehicles have this restriction). The different Cities can provide subsidies for different services levels, all of which must be monitored, tracked, and applied at the time of trip booking.

Administratively, because the trip is shared among passengers (shared trips are critical for cost savings), the trip costs, reimbursement, and reporting needs to be cost-allocated and accurately accounted.

When coordinated trip booking and dispatching are in place along with large batch scheduling, lower cost travel options can be more effectively implemented, (ambulatory passengers on low cost sedans, etc.), hot spot analysis can be more effectively performed to proactively manage expensive trips and trends, and shared trips can be substantially increased (again, critical for cost savings). While there will be opportunity to contract with TNCs, it is unlikely that they will manage these necessary scheduling, vehicle routing, driver assignment, accounting, and reporting activities. Nor are TNCs likely to have the accessible fleet mix to reliably serve the range of mobility limitations in the target population.

The Contra Costa Health Plan (CCHP) has recent experience with these difficulties. In order for their clients to have adequate access to care, CCHP has had to initiate their own transportation program through contractors and coordination with transit districts. This coordination has been challenging.

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[10] FTA, *Accessible Transit Services For All*, Dec. 2014 | Transit Cooperative Research Program Report 91, *Economic Benefits of Coordinating Human Service Transportation and Transit Services* | TCRP Report 101, *Toolkit for Community Coordinated Transportation Services*

[11] 2004-2013 the Santa Clara coordinated system showed a 19% *decrease* in cost per trip relative to a 60% *increase* in CC County. [Despite this statistic, work should not be initiated on this issue with the expectation that total costs will decline. Efficiency will probably rise but necessary initial investments and general capacity building will increase costs in the short/medium term. In the long-term, with the likely increase in the availability and quality of service (on top of well-known demographic shifts), demand will increase with a corresponding increase in costs.]

[12] Competent data management, as critical to achieving progress in this field, is emphasized in the webinar, *How New Information and Scheduling Technologies Support Mobility Access for All*, 6/2017, National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting

The characteristics of the target population magnifies the complexity described above.

*Regarding the **Coordination** and **Complexity** topics covered above, this information is not new or unique to Contra Costa County. The U.S. Government Accountability Office has produced reports for **decades** documenting the difficulty with coordinating accessible transit and the costs to the taxpayer as a result of the failure to do so.*

Lack of Standards: The lack of software and data standards in the field of accessible transit is often a hindrance to progress. This is less of an impediment than the administrative and cultural issues listed above but this "barriers to progress" list would be incomplete without a discussion.

Off-the-shelf software often uses proprietary data formats, with substantial annual licensing costs, and can limit flexibility in the future once an agency is invested in a system. Developing local formats and protocols can offer more flexibility but is labor intensive and in the end can also result in proprietary systems. However, there are at least two major efforts currently underway to address this lack of open standards, the development of the *General Transit Feed Specification – Flex[13]* standard and the Transportation Research Board's (TRB's) active research effort, *Development of Transactional Data Specifications for Demand-Responsive Transportation[14]*.

4) Next Steps

Given the efforts listed in the history section above we might assume there is an understanding that improvements to (or a study of) accessible transportation is needed[15]. The latest proposal to study the issue was referenced above, the Accessible Transit Study[3] (ATS) included in the Measure X Transportation Expenditure Plan (TEP). The proposal was in the context of new revenue which is a more favorable environment than without new funding. However, studying an issue in the absence of new revenue is common. The countywide bike plan (on its 3rd revision), numerous high capacity transit studies in the I-680 and I-80 corridors, etc. are a few examples. The ATS proposal continues to have validity in the absence of new sales tax revenue. Rather than determining how to expend the new revenue, the recommended study would focus on using existing revenues in the most efficient manner possible and/or preparing us for any potential, new future funding source.

While not specifically directed at the ATS component of Measure X, the TEP ultimately received unanimous support from all 19 cities/towns and the County in addition to the support from the Expenditure Plan Advisory Committee (EPAC) and CCTA as a whole. What **is** more specific is that, during the TEP development, the EPAC indicated that "*Transportation For Seniors and People with Disabilities*" was one of the highest priorities.

The County proposes to reach out to other responsible agencies to determine if and how the county as a whole can make progress on accessible transportation issues.

Archive of prior reports and communication on accessible transportation:

- 3/8/16 Report to the BOS re: CTP/TEP
- 9/15/15 Report to the BOS re: CTP/TEP
- 11/3/15 Letter: BOS to CCTA re: CTP/TEP
- 10/21/14 Letter: BOS to CCTA re: CTP

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[13] GTFS-flex is a proposed extension to the General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) which currently only supports fixed route transit. The GTFS is a data format developed in the early 2000s which enables the sharing of transit routing information and is particularly useful in online applications. www.gtfsflex.com

[14] TRB – Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) G-16 Active Research: Development of Transactional Data Specifications for Demand-Responsive Transportation: Goal: Develop technical specifications for transactional data for entities involved in the provision of demand-responsive transportation. http://apps.trb.org/cmsfeed/TRBNetProjectDisplay.asp?ProjectID=4120 The G-16 effort was an outgrowth of the TCRP Report, Standardizing Data for Mobility Management

[15] The West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee has initiated a study of accessible transit issues in their sub-region.