

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Commuter Rail Development

MEETING DATE: March 1, 2006

AGENDA ITEM: 5

RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss next steps for development of commuter rail proposal included in 101 In-Motion consensus package.

STAFF CONTACT: Michael Powers

DISCUSSION:

The final consensus package for 101 in Motion approved by the board included implementation of commuter rail service between Ventura County and the South Coast. The committee has previously expressed interest in pursuing the development of commuter rail. This offers a brief status report on recent activities and some of the next steps that could be taken to initiate the service.

The Commuter Rail Preliminary Analysis prepared by the consulting team for the 101 in Motion plan outlines many of the steps that will need to be taken to implement commuter rail service including (not in priority order):

- Formation of a sponsoring agency
- Securing track rights agreement with UPRR
- Operating agreement with Metrolink (or another operator)
- Securing funding sources
- Ordering and receiving rolling stock
- Construction of track and station improvements
- Integration of local transit services

Clearly, one of the most important first steps will be to secure funding sources for implementation of the commuter rail service. As noted in the 101 IM Commuter Rail Report, most traditional funding sources used to operate commuter rail systems (e.g., TDA and Measure D sales tax) are currently used by SBCAG to support SBMTD or have been already designated for other purposes. The effort to reauthorize Measure D (see Agenda Item 4) includes provision for some capital and operating funds for commuter rail. The expenditure plan for Measure A includes \$52 million in local sales tax revenues to implement a commuter rail

Member Agencies

Buellton ■ Carpinteria ■ Goleta ■ Guadalupe ■ Lompoc ■ Santa Barbara ■ Santa Maria ■ Solvang ■ Santa Barbara County

pilot program for 5 years. Measure B includes an additional \$74 million that would help ensure funding to continue the service beyond the pilot program. Both measures include funding to implement local transit shuttle services from the train stations to work sites. This is a vital funding source for a new commuter rail program. This underscores the need to re-authorize Measure D and include provisions for funding commuter rail since self help county sales taxes are a principal funding mechanism for rail projects elsewhere in California. Due to limitations on other funding sources, it is unlikely that commuter rail service will be implemented unless Measure D is reauthorized.

Staff is also pursuing other funding sources for commuter rail. The Section 5309 Small New Starts program authorized by enactment of SAFETEA-LU provides potential matching funds for initiation of smaller (i.e., less than \$250 million total capitalization, less than \$75 million federal participation) rail and bus fixed guideway rapid transit systems. This discretionary program which is currently authorized only for FY 06/07 through FY 08/09 could provide some of the capital funds needed to implement the Ventura-Santa Barbara commuter rail service. The Federal Transit Administration is promulgating rules for the Small New Starts program. SBCAG Staff is learning more about this federal program and is planning to attend an information session on this program in March to learn more about the proposed rules for this program and determine how we can best position ourselves to compete for these funds.

At the joint South Coast Subregional Planning Committee meeting with the Ventura County Transportation Commission held last October, board members from both counties discussed the challenges and opportunities for implementing commuter rail service. It was proposed by Supervisor Carbajal that a list of stakeholders be compiled and that a meeting of the stakeholders could be convened to continue the dialogue between the two counties and determine what steps can be taken to make commuter rail a reality. It may be appropriate to schedule such meeting in the early Summer when more will be known about the Measure D reauthorization effort and the results of the Commuter Rail Assessment being conducted as part of the LOSSAN North Strategic Plan may be available. A list of stakeholders is being compiled by Supervisor Carbajal's office with assistance from SBCAG staff.

The committee also needs to consider our next steps with the Ventura County Transportation Commission. It was clear from the joint meeting that current VCTC priorities for funding road and rail improvements are not consistent with those of our county. SBCAG needs to be sensitive to these concerns and carefully consider next steps.

As noted above, the LOSSAN North Strategic Plan currently under development will include a more detailed assessment of commuter rail. The study is conducting train simulations to identify

SAFETEA-LU NEW START \ SMALL START PROGRAM (49 U.S.C. 5309(e))

- * Funds new fixed guideway transit systems or extensions to existing systems, including streetcar, trolley, bus rapid transit (if it has characteristics of a fixed guideway system), and commuter rail projects.
- * Limited to projects seeking less than \$75 million with a total estimated net capital cost of less than \$250 million.
- * \$200 million available annually for three fiscal years, FFY 2007 – FFY 2009
- * Local match required is 20% minimum
- * Simplified evaluation procedures and criteria apply to the program.
- * Grants are generally limited to capital costs including fixed guideway, right of way, rolling stock
- * Projects are selected by FTA through a discretionary grant application process. Criteria generally include:
 - a) results of planning and alternatives analysis,
 - b) review of public transportation supportive land use policies, cost effectiveness and effect on local economy and
 - c) local financial commitment.
- * FTA must promulgate regulations for an evaluation/rating process within 240 days of SAFETEA-LU enactment (about April 6)

capacity constraints and necessary network improvements under several operating scenarios to ensure current and future UP freight operations are not impacted by proposed additional passenger rail services. The plan will also include an evaluation of options for identification of a sponsoring agency for implementing commuter rail (e.g., a two county joint powers agreement, becoming a Metrolink member county, etc). The LOSSAN Technical Committee and Policy Board (SBCAG is represented on both) are providing direction and oversight to the Strategic Plan. The results of the plan will provide important information that will help define the negotiating environment with Union Pacific.

Organizational issues also have to be addressed. It may be timely to learn more about the structure, organization, funding, and operation of the Southern California Regional Rail Authority, i.e. Metrolink. The commuter rail technical report in the 101 In-Motion program identified SCRRA as a likely operator of the commuter rail service. Given their experience and proximity Metrolink is an obvious choice. Staff could arrange a presentation for the committee that would provide an overview of Metrolink by SCRRA staff. Staff could also arrange a field trip for committee members to view Metrolink operations, equipment and facilities.