

Future of Transit – Local Perspective – Gold Coast Transit District

By Steve Brown, General Manager



Next year, Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD) will mark its 45th year of service in Ventura County. As the largest provider of fixed-route and ADA paratransit (dial-a-ride) in the region, GCTD provides nearly 4 million trips each year to residents of Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Ventura, and unincorporated areas of Ventura County between the cities. With our fleet of 56 buses and 20 routes, our service is designed to connect neighborhoods to jobs, schools, and shopping. Our passengers include a diverse cross section of our community including college students, retail workers, veterans, seniors and people with disabilities.

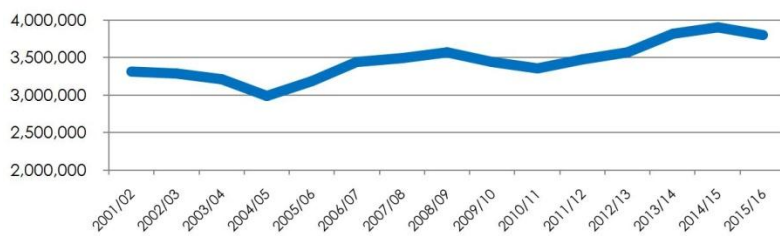
Looking ahead at transit's future, our cities have some challenges to overcome. With Measure AA not reaching the 2/3 vote it needed to pass, local funding for public transit isn't expected to increase much in the next few years. While GCTD will get a small boost from the passing of SB1, we won't benefit from the additional funding provided by SB1 to counties that have passed 'self-help' measures. At the Federal level, President Trump's proposed cuts to public transit funding could have a devastating effect to the local service we provide.

Our cities also face disruption from popular apps like Uber and Lyft that are bringing more cars, congestion and uncertain business practices into our communities. These services cater to those with higher incomes (who have access to cell phones and credit cards) and, because of their popularity, many people make the assumption that they would be good "alternatives to funding public transit." This is troublesome for transit riders, because these companies have no obligation to provide equal levels of service to those who rely on public transit the most. Uber and Lyft rely on private drivers that can choose to reject rides in neighborhoods where they don't "feel safe" or avoid picking up passengers with disabilities. Public Transit serves everyone and is required to provide equal levels of service to all areas regardless of demographics. Additionally, street geometry still dictates that use of high-capacity vehicles (like buses) providing frequent and fast service is more efficient at moving large numbers of people along urban streets (like Main Street, Telephone Road, Victoria Avenue) than single occupancy vehicles which take up a lot of space while only carrying a couple passengers per hour.



GCTD also faces the challenge of decades of auto oriented land use policy. We know that public transit works best when routes are designed to be as direct as possible. However, over time as developments are built away from existing transit lines where land is less expensive, we've struggled with making tradeoffs between coverage vs. frequency. To help our cities move away from this pattern, we will need to encourage transit supportive policies that encourage clustering jobs and housing around existing transit lines.

GCTD Annual Ridership | 15-Year History



Finally, although there is a lot of publicity about declining transit ridership in our county, ridership in the GCTD service area has actually increased 15% over the past 15 years and is at nearly 4 million annual trips taken today. GCTD forecasts transit needs will continue to grow in Ventura County, and fleet needs will double in the next 30 years.

To meet this need, GCTD has begun construction on a new Operations and Maintenance Facility to replace the existing facility that we've outgrown. The new facility will enable GCTD to provide lasting, quality, green job opportunities in the operations and maintenance of transit service helping our local work force and economy. The construction of the new facility will not only create 380 construction jobs, but will accommodate GCTD's 201 employees, the majority of whom operate or maintain buses.

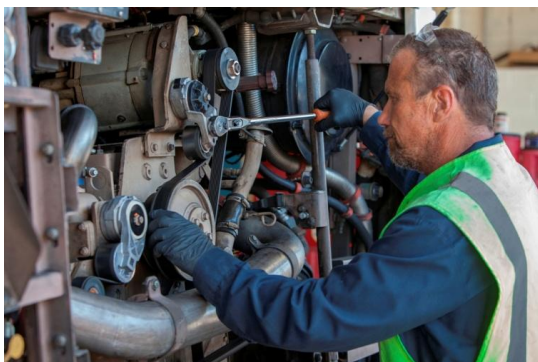


While we work to address our local transit capacity constraints, we know there are also opportunities for transit service expansion and efficiency improvements in our cities. With the renewal of SOAR, the cities GCTD serves made it clear that they want to limit growth in a way that minimizes traffic and avoids sprawl. Smart growth policies such as clustering jobs and housing along existing transit routes have the potential to increase transit ridership. In addition, as cities look to repair and maintain streets, the redesign of streets can serve as an opportunity to encourage a more connected community. To create a transit system that works, streets need to include sidewalks, places for buses to stop, lighting at bus stops, as well as safe crossings that help complete and make the transit system more accessible. Doing this will make it possible for us to operate more direct and frequent service where riders need to go.

In 2015 Gold Coast Transit District's Short Range Transit Plan identified our top priorities for service expansion which included increasing frequencies in Ventura and Oxnard, adding service along Ventura Road to connect Port Hueneme/Naval Base Ventura County to Highway 101 and The Collection, as well as adding technology that would help streamline ticket purchasing and make riding the bus easier. To make this plan a reality, GCTD will need to be successful in pursuing funding opportunities from state programs, Cap-and-Trade funds, as well as greater access to VCTC discretionary funds generated by SB1 which could be put to great use if distributed based on measures such as ridership and demand.



With the passage of SB 1 and the strong support of Governor Brown for more investment in reduction of greenhouse gases, including Cap and Trade programs, there is some funding available for cities willing to be innovative. Grant programs such as Low Carbon Transit Operations Program and the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities grant programs encourage partnerships between city land-use and transit planners and have the potential to bring about projects that spark economic growth in our communities. While the recent Measure AA did not get the 2/3 vote needed this time, in the western Ventura County cities GCTD serves it came very close, which could mean there would be support for a measure in the future.



Any funding that is generated in the GCTD service area would be directly fed back into local communities. For every \$1 invested in public transportation, approximately \$4 is generated in economic returns meaning there is a strong return on investment for public transportation. GCTD's operating budget funds quality green jobs, our Operators and Maintenance employees live and work locally, and the majority of our purchases of equipment (such as tires, printing, and services) are fed right back into local businesses. Funding transit expansion would energize economies in our neighborhoods, reduce traffic congestion, improve the quality of the air and provide real savings for people, thus benefitting the entire region.



We know we have our work cut out for us in meeting the challenges and opportunities that face transit in the next 45 years. On our side is the knowledge that public transit has the potential to link communities together, is a catalyst encouraging walking, biking, improving air quality, and is an economic engine that helps make our community more livable for all. We'd like to take this opportunity to encourage our local communities to embrace transit as a partner in helping get our communities on the go.



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