



NAPA VALLEY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY Board Agenda Letter

TO: NVTA Board of Directors
FROM: Kate Miller, Executive Director
REPORT BY: Matthew Wilcox, Manager of Public Transit
(707) 259-8635 / Email: mwilcox@nvta.ca.gov
SUBJECT: Vine Transit Route 25 Intercity Bus Service

RECOMMENDATION

That the Napa Valley Transportation Authority (NVTA) Board receive an update on the Vine Transit Route 25.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At its May 17th meeting, the NVTA Board held a public hearing for the elimination of the Vine Route 25. At that time, the Board did not approve the staff recommendation to eliminate the route but instead instructed staff to work with its Sonoma County partners on a new operation, funding and marketing plan and delay action on the route until its September 20, 2017 Board meeting. This memo will provide an update on the progress made since the May NVTA Board meeting.

PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Staff Report
2. Public Comments

FISCAL IMPACT

Is there a Fiscal Impact? No. The item is information only.

CEQA REQUIREMENTS

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: The proposed action is not a project as defined by 14 California Code of Regulations 15378 (California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines) and therefore CEQA is not applicable.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

At the May 17th Board meeting NVTA staff presented a proposal to eliminate the Route 25. This recommendation was prompted by impending Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311(f) funding reductions. Item 11.2 B provides a separate discussion about funding in response to questions that emerged at the May meeting.

NVTA uses three performance indicators to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of a route. These key performance indicators, or KPIs, include overall ridership (total trips), passengers per revenue hour (number of passengers each hour a vehicle is in revenue service – which excludes deadheading), and farebox recovery (the amount of fares as a proportion to the operating cost of the service). The Route 25 is the least productive Vine route in all three performance categories.

Table 1 below is comparative chart showing each of Vine’s routes and their performance for these three KPIs year-to-date. Route 25 is highlighted in blue.

Table 1

	Total Riders	Passengers per Revenue Hour	Farebox Recovery Ratio
Route 1	16,745	7.5	6.8%
Route 2	48,330	17.3	13.1%
Route 3	53,707	15.1	13.8%
Route 4	46,730	13.9	11.9%
Route 5	46,291	13.4	11.8%
Route 6	34,136	13.4	8.7%
Route 7	21,875	9.5	7.7%
Route 8	86,057	20.7	16.2%
Route 10	197,193	12.0	11.9%
Route 11	209,909	13.7	13.7%
Route 21	17,138	6.0	16.5%
Route 25	8,310	4.7	3.3%
Route 29	54,713	6.2	18.4%

The route's poor performance is indicative of several factors. Low population density is a primary contributing factor to poor overall ridership and poor passengers per revenue hour performance. The Route 25 is affected to a greater degree by low density because it connects two rural populations rather than typical express bus services that connect rural populations to urban centers (e.g. Vine Route 29).

The extremely low farebox recovery ratio is symptomatic of the low ridership figures and the comparatively low fare. A one-way trip on the Route 25 costs \$1.60 (NVTA's standard local route fare). NVTA's two other commuter services (Route 21 and 29) charge higher fares (between \$3 and \$5.50). The farebox recovery is influenced by both the total cost charged and the fare media used. Cash fares would result in higher farebox recovery as would an overall increase in fares. If the Board determines that the Route 25 should be sustained beyond September, increasing fares commensurate with the Route 21 should be considered.

NVTA staff met with representatives of Sonoma County Transit, Sonoma County Transportation Authority and the City of Sonoma on June 13th. At that meeting, staff evaluated the connection of Route 25 with two of Sonoma County Transit's routes. Adjusting service parameters and increasing fares was also discussed. NVTA staff further requested a Route 25 financial contribution from the participating agencies. The representative from Sonoma County Transit noted that it would be challenging to justify a contribution to the Route 25 noting that several Sonoma County Transit routes have better performance metrics and are currently being considered for elimination because of poor performance. Sharing the Route 25 service corridor with Sonoma County Transit routes is not likely to garner additional ridership and would result in higher costs because Sonoma County's hourly service rate is higher than the Vine's. This would result in an overall cost increase to serve the corridor, and these costs would be borne by NVTA.

Given that many of the trips are non-work trips, we also discussed seeking funding from the City of Sonoma's Tourism Improvement District (TID) and Visit Napa Valley (VNV) and build ridership in the recreational market. This prompted further discussion about the potential to refocus service during times that would foster recreational trips (e.g. nights and weekends), versus traditional work trips. Unless additional funding is secured, however, staff would not recommend expanding service but instead reallocate existing service. To accomplish this, NVTA will need to work with the Sonoma TID and VNV on funding, survey existing riders and evaluate passenger counter data more closely. Staff will evaluate this potential over the next month and present the findings at the July NVTA Board meeting. Staff will also develop a marketing plan based on these findings with related costs and present them to the board in tandem with operational alternatives.

Any recommended changes will need to be evaluated in context of the May Staff proposal to use the Route 25's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 5311F funds to expand the Vine Route 21 to Fairfield-Suisun Amtrak-Capital Corridor Station. The

Route 21 is a rapidly growing route and has significantly greater connectivity to both the Sacramento and central Bay Area job markets. Based on preliminary findings of the Express Bus Study, providing commuter service to major labor markets is likely to have greater impacts on reducing congestion on major corridors in Napa Valley.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Attachment: (1) May 30, 2017 Letter to Sonoma County Transit Manager



May 30, 2017

Mr. Bryan Albee
Transit Systems Manager
Sonoma County Transit
355 W. Robles Ave.
Santa Rosa, CA 95407

Dear Bryan:

Per our phone conversation, I am reaching out to you to request your assistance in funding the Route 25. The current cost to run the service and related revenues are summarized in Table 1, attached. Also included on Table 1 are current Route 25 operating statistics. Members of the Sonoma County City Council have also expressed an interest in continuing the service. NVTA staff intends to reach out to them to understand if the City is willing to support the route financially.

On May 17th the Napa Valley Transportation Authority (NVTA) held a public hearing to discontinue the Route 25. The NVTA board received a number of comments during the hearing as well as letters requesting that the Route 25 be continued. In the wake of the public testimony in favor of retaining the Route 25, NVTA's Board elected to extend the public comment period and reconvene in September to determine the route's fate.

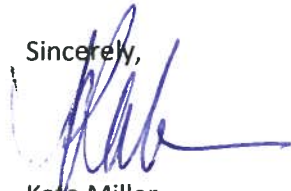
From the comments received at the public meeting and ridership data pulled from automatic passenger counters (APCs) indicate the route functions more to serve Sonoma County residents than it does Napa residents. Looking at trips departing Sonoma and Napa during commute hours, 56% of those trips depart Sonoma. NVTA's own Travel Behavior study points to a similar flow of commute traffic.

Although the funding and performance metrics point to eliminating the Route 25, the NVTA Board recognizes that the route provides a crucial link in the connectivity of the Bay Area's regional transit network, and is currently the only route that links Napa and Sonoma Counties – an issue that has come up as part of the SR 37 policy meetings.

In addition to reaching out to our Sonoma County partners, NVTA Board requested that staff develop a marketing plan to improve the routes performance. We will also be looking at other ways to make the route more effective. A consideration is whether there is an opportunity to coordinate NVTA Route 25 with the Sonoma County's Route 40 which would make connections to SMART in Petaluma when it begins operations to reduce costs for both agencies.

If there is an interest by Sonoma County Transit, we will coordinate a meeting that includes the City of Sonoma to discuss funding and route planning. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Kate Miller
Executive Director, Napa Valley Transportation Authority

cc: NVTA Board

Suzanne Smith, Sonoma County Transportation Authority

Table 1: Route 25 Intercity Bus Service to Sonoma Costs

Item	Annual Estimate
Purchase Transportation Cost	
3,187.22 hours x \$65.19/per hour	\$207,775
Fuel	\$32,094
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS	\$239,869
Revenues	
Fares	\$6,177
5311 F Revenues	\$129,307
Current farebox recovery ratio – 2.6%	
Shortfall apportioned by trip origin	
Sonoma – 56%	\$58,461
Napa – 44%	\$45,933
Current annual ridership is 10,336	
Unless otherwise indicated, data is based on FY 2015-16	