

**MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING  
Monday, August 31, 2009**

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Mayor Hume called the Special City Council meeting of August 31, 2009 to order at 6:02 p.m.

Present: Mayor Hume, Vice Mayor Scherman, Council Members Detrick and Cooper

Absent: Council Member Davis (arrived at 6:06 p.m.)

Vice Mayor Scherman led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**CLOSED SESSION**

None.

**REGULAR AGENDA ACTION ITEM/RECOMMENDATION**

**Agenda Item No. 3.1:** Consider restoration of *e-tran* and *e-van* service levels effective September 1, 2009

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Discuss *e-tran* and *e-van* service levels and provide staff direction as deemed appropriate.

City Manager Laura Gill recalled that, just over a year ago, Council was informed that the Transit Services Division was operating in a fiscally unsustainable position. At the close of fiscal year 2008-09, the Transit operating deficit was \$2.1 million. Over the past year, staff has made some changes to make Transit operations more sustainable. The new Transit operator contract will be in effect on September 1 and will reduce the operating costs of Transit Services by over \$1 million. The Transit fares were raised on April 1, which will result in an additional \$450,000 in revenue. Current revenue shortfalls include nearly \$950,000 that was expected from the Sacramento Transit Authority for sales tax dedication to transit. Additionally, there has been a \$427,000 reduction from the State, and a \$200,000 reduction from the Federal Transit Administration.

With the aid of an overhead presentation (filed), Transit System Manager Tiffani Fink, reported that, on July 22, Council adopted service adjustments effective

September 1 which would lower the \$1.7 million Transit deficit to \$25,000. On August 26, Council directed staff to return, prior to September 1, in order to reconsider the service reductions. Ms. Fink provided further background, as detailed in the staff report, regarding public notice and how data was collected. Ms. Fink reported that transit buses are designed for standing, noting that the buses are equipped with overhead rails or handrails on each of the seats. On July 22, 19 runs were cut from commuter service, 115 runs were cut from local service, and e-van was eliminated on weekends.

In answer to questions posed by Council, Ms. Fink explained that the series 300 routes were added when Elk Grove Unified School District discontinued its student bus service. A student rider pays half the fare of a commuter. Due to the City's agreement with Regional Transit (RT), riders can board City buses with an RT pass; however, the City receives only half the monthly pass fare. Weekend ridership on e-tran is 96.4% less than on weekdays. Under Title 6, the City is required to show that service adjustments do not have a proportionately high or adverse effect on minority or low-income populations. Ms. Fink explained that Transit is designed as an enterprise fund, and as such, it should be self-sustaining. Since the inception of Transit in 2005, the cost of service has exceeded revenue by \$4 million. Any reinstatement of transit service that is not concurrently offset by an equal amount of service cuts or fare increases would add to the deficit. If the service cuts made on July 22 were fully reinstated there would be a \$5.7 million deficit by the end of this fiscal year.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mike Barnbaum favored the reinstatement of commuter service and a basic level of weekend bus service. He recommended that, when commuter buses turn back toward Elk Grove, the head sign change to "e-tran yard" in the event some passengers wish to travel to that location. Additionally, he encouraged the City to work with RT on the Transit Master Plan and issue a Request for Proposal to open up the discussion of the e-tran short-range transit plan and to grow the system in the future.

Linda Beattie believed that weekend bus service was a lifeline for certain individuals. She suggested that the \$500,000 that was previously going to be allocated toward Automall advertising, be used, instead, to provide bus service.

Ruth Corneso reported that there is standing room only on Route 52. She recommended that service be reduced on Fridays when State employees are furloughed.

Catherine Foreman expressed concern that service cuts would result in overcrowding to the point that she would no longer be able to access Route 52.

Garold Brown spoke in support of Route 156 and weekend service. He stated that no notices were posted in the buses about the impending cuts to service.

Terry Soward stated that he needed the early run on Route 52 in order to arrive on time for his State job. He suggested Transit use smaller buses on runs with lower ridership and increase to larger buses when passenger numbers increase. He attested to the fact that there is often standing room only on the buses and warned that the City will experience further revenue declines if drivers lose their jobs and riders cannot access the system.

Tom Pooler voiced concern about passenger safety. He maintained that riders standing on buses in cities may be appropriate; however, standing in buses traveling upon freeways is a dangerous situation. He questioned the accuracy of the data collected by Transit for use in deciding which routes to cut. He supported the reinstatement of service for Routes 52 and 53. In reply to Mayor Hume, he confirmed his suggestion to augment feeder routes to light rail.

Rosanna Villanueva also expressed concern regarding safety of riders when forced to stand while traveling on freeways and the possibility of be stranded during night hours because of the unavailability of buses.

Maria Jaya denounced the lack of public notification about pending bus service cuts. She described the difficulty of standing on buses while holding items. She urged Council to rescind cuts to Route 53.

Tehani Rodriguez pointed out the irony of encouraging commuters to use buses, obtaining their compliance, and then cutting service. She stated that 40 bus drivers will lose their jobs because of the cuts in service. She voiced safety concerns when riders are forced to stand. Ms. Rodriguez asked that service not be reduced on Routes 52 and 53.

Lynn Wheat reported that she had learned Federal dollars would be granted to cities planning density infrastructure that would support light rail transportation. She recalled speaking in support of light rail; however, Council instead chose commuter buses.

Karen Henderson stated that she relies on Route 52 and worries about being stranded in Sacramento if service is cut.

Atull Shrivastav asked Council to reinstate bus service on the weekends, as he is reliant upon it for transportation.

Anna Chung voiced concern about rider safety, when forced to stand on buses traveling on the freeways. She emphasized the need to improve public notification

and questioned why there has been a delay in getting bus advertisement revenue. She suggested the City advertise the Shop Local Campaign on buses.

Peggy Hardaway reported that she had been given data by the Transit Department; however, the form it was in made it impossible to analyze. She explained that the reason Route 53 has lower ridership in the morning is because many commuters are taking Route 52, which has later runs to Sacramento. She believed the service cuts were made in an arbitrary manner. She recommended that bus advertisement revenue be sought, as well as the possibility of connector routes. She complained that public notices were not posted on buses and riders were not informed that the City receives only half the fare when passengers use RT passes.

Christiana Jeanmarie implored Council to restore weekend service, as she did not want to use taxis.

Michael Kissel objected to staff's assertion that buses were designed for riders to stand both when they are traversing city streets and when traveling at 65 mph on the freeways. He countered that the new buses have handrails that extend only one-third the distance of the bus. He asserted that the public notification was unacceptable. He asked where the data was that analyzed the impacts the cuts would have on remaining service. Mr. Kissel stated that he relies on Routes 52 and 53 and connectivity to RT in downtown Sacramento is critical. He questioned the competency of Transit staff and management, and suggested that the City give the routes back to RT if they cannot be sustained.

Crystal Dunlap displayed a photo showing standing passengers on Route 52 and submitted that it is not a safe practice.

Juan Riggins urged Council to reinstate Route 53.

Teena Wynne claimed that 55 bus drivers may lose their jobs, due to service cuts. She voiced opposition to cutting bus service for disabled riders.

Gavonna Payne complained of a lack of notification and information being provided from Transit. She expressed safety concerns and did not believe the taxi companies were equipped to handle passengers in wheelchairs.

Keith Joseph pointed out that the buses are a public service, which is customarily subsidized. He believed the survey of ridership was flawed. He urged Council to keep weekend bus service, as low-income residents have no other way to travel. He estimated that Transit is losing 45% of its revenue through outdated fare boxes and cash riders who are not paying correct amounts.

Sharon Anderson questioned the accuracy of the ridership survey and voiced concern about safety of standing riders. She recommended that weekend service be offered on the route that was implemented when promoting the Shop Local Program. She urged Council to continue commuter service and Route 49.

Cheryl Barton complained that there is standing room only on Route 53 and asked Council not to cut weekend service.

Kim Porbanic stated that she understood the financial situation and necessity to make service cuts. She felt staff's analysis was fair. She recommended Transit meet with riders and reach agreement on how to accommodate the highest number of commuters. She felt that disabled service and weekend service should be a priority for the City subsidy.

Mayor Hume interjected that Ms. Porbanic's comments illustrate the value of targeting groups and engaging in direct communication, which leads to input, buy in, and understanding.

Constance Conley voiced concern about liability and the safety of riders that must stand on buses. She recalled staff having made the recommendation to Council to spend \$1 million more for the Veolia Transportation Services contract over the MV Transportation contract, and suggested the City use that money for bus service.

Percy Cornish stated that he was a Shop Steward at e-tran and made the following comments: 1) weekend service is a lifeline to the public, 2) Route 155 has very little ridership and Route 158 should be used instead; 3) the ridership surveys were flawed; and 4) buses are full and forcing riders to stand in buses traveling on the freeway is a dangerous situation.

Ray Harvey asked the City how it will recoup lost revenue related to the service cuts. He stated that notices posted in the buses were not visible to the riders. He claimed that the money spent on bus Global Positioning Systems was wasted because half of them are inoperable.

Linda Merdinger complained about the lack of public notification and safety issues associated with standing passengers on overcrowded buses. She urged Council to maintain service on Routes 52 and 53.

Judith Rury, bus driver, stated that her hours were cut from 40 to 21. She urged Council to consider impacts on citizens, traffic, seniors, and the disabled community who rely on weekend bus service.

Council Member Detrick maintained that communication must be improved. He recommended the use of articulated buses, which can hold twice the number of passengers, to which Ms. Fink explained that street turning radius must be large

enough for the buses to maneuver. Mr. Detrick suggested an increased commuter fare. He supported weekend service for the disabled and the Shop Local business route.

Vice Mayor Scherman apologized that amenities originally promised when the City took over bus service, did not materialize. She voiced concern about passenger safety when standing on buses travelling on the freeway. She asked for improved communications to the public and supported a basic level of weekend service for the disabled.

At the request of Vice Mayor Scherman, Ms. Fink reported that, when the City took over bus service from RT, there were eight routes, operating 13,000 revenue hours and currently there are 28 routes operating 85,000 hours.

Vice Mayor Scherman suggested having standby buses for overflow of Routes 52 and 53, to which City Manager Gill pointed out it would not result in a cost savings.

Council Member Davis emphasized the need for better communication. He recommended future route service adjustments be handled by beginning with a general public announcement, conducting a public hearing to make a tentative decision, followed by specific notice of pending adjustments, and a second hearing to make a final decision. He believed this was an inopportune time to cut transportation, due to economic, social, and environmental reasons. He shared the public's concern regarding rider safety. He clarified that the City Council supports bringing light rail to the community as quickly as possible. He felt that the taxi scrip program was a bad idea and recommended that Routes 52 and 53 be reinstated and weekend e-van service be continued.

Council Member Cooper stressed the importance of improving the public notification process. He doubted that light rail would be offered in Elk Grove anytime in the near future, due to its location at the southern boundary of the county. He expressed support for offering bus service for the disabled community.

In reply to Mayor Hume, Ms. Fink reported that there are 5,500 boardings during a week, 2,500 of which are commuters. The service adjustments were based on data collected from July 7, 2008 to June 30, 2009.

Mayor Hume, Vice Mayor Scherman, and Council Member Cooper asked that MV Transportation bus drivers make verbal announcements to riders to augment the public notification effort of Transit and that any future notices be posted prominently overhead in large size print.

City Manager Gill reported that she has asked the City's Public Information Officer to conduct an audit of the communication practices of Transit, with a goal of making improvements in the future.

Mayor Hume agreed with Council Member Cooper's comments regarding light rail. Mr. Hume stated that his highest priority is disabled/lifeline users of the bus system and had hoped to continue e-van on the weekends. He pointed out that 2,500 commuters represents just 2% of the population, and yet they expect the rest of the community to pay for their bus service. He believed e-tran to be a failed experiment.

Council Member Cooper suggested reinstating Route 52 or 53 and forming a subcommittee of Council, staff, and members of the public to reexamine and conduct a complete analysis of the situation.

Ms. Fink described an alternative "Shopper Shuttle" deviated fixed route on the weekends, whereby riders, including the disabled, could request pick up. She estimated the cost to be \$160,000.

**Motion: M/S Cooper/Scherman** to reinstitute two morning and two afternoon services for Route 52 for a period of two months; restore the cuts made to Route 53 for two months; create a "Shopper Shuttle" with deviation to address the paratransit weekend service; and return to Council on October 28, 2009 to consider fare increases and to review the data that is collected during the next two months regarding the service reinstatement and restoration.

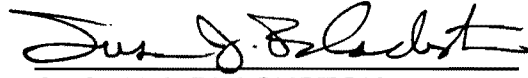
At the request of Vice Mayor Scherman, Finance Director Rebecca Craig confirmed that the Transit fund has built up a negative financial position for years. If it is decided that the priority is not to have Transit address the deficit, then a decision must be made on where to fund the existing and ongoing deficit, which she explained would be General Fund reserve and/or reductions to General Fund operations. Ms. Craig noted that the General Fund already subsidizes Transit nearly \$500,000 a year through support services.

Council Members Davis and Detrick pointed out that the data is already known and will not change significantly during the next two months; therefore, they favored making a decision based on the facts as they have been presented.

**Substitute Motion: M/S Davis/Detrick** to reinstitute the 5:20 a.m., 7:15 a.m., 4:50 p.m. and 5:20 p.m. services for Route 52 for the remainder of the year; restore the cuts made to Route 53 for the remainder of the year; create a "Shopper Shuttle" with deviation to address the paratransit weekend service; and return to Council on October 28, 2009 to consider fare increases. ***The motion passed by the following vote: Ayes: 3; Noes: 2 (Cooper, Scherman).***

**ADJOURNMENT**

With no additional business to conduct, the August 31, 2009 Special City Council meeting was adjourned at 9:24 p.m.



SUSAN J. BLACKSTON,  
CITY CLERK

ATTEST:



PATRICK HUME, MAYOR