



Visalia City Council

Staff Report

Visalia Administration
220 N. Santa Fe Street
Visalia, CA 93292

File #: 24-0492

Agenda Date: 11/3/2025

Agenda #: 2.

Agenda Item Wording:

City's Participation as the Project Lead and Primary Operator of the Regional Express Transit Service Project - Consider approval for the City to participate and serve as the project lead and primary services operator of the Regional Express Transit Service Project funded by the Tulare County Association of Governments, to include express transit service between Tulare and Kings Counties and the cities of Visalia and Tulare.

Deadline for Action: 11/3/2025

Submitting Department: Administration

Contact Name and Phone Number:

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Department Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the City Council approve the City's participation in and serving as the project lead and primary services operator of the Regional Express Transit Service Project, approve the draft Resolution authorizing the City Manager to execute the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Master Agreement and Program Supplement for Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program Funding (TIRCP), and authorize the City Manager in coordination with the City Attorney to draft necessary agreements with the Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG), Tulare County Regional Transit Agency (TCRTA) and Caltrans for the Council's formal approval.

Background Discussion:

Forecasts estimate that the combined population of Tulare and Kings Counties will approach 700,000 by 2030 (currently 638,460). Approximately 130,000 total daily trips are currently made along the State Route 198 corridor between the city of Farmersville and Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore, and the volume of trips between destinations on this corridor could increase by almost ten percent (10%) by 2030. Today, only one-half of one percent (0.5%) of these trips are made on public transit, and an operational express transit service spanning from Lindsay to NAS Lemoore could increase transit mode share close to six percent (6%) by capturing up to twenty (20) additional daily public transit trips.

Beginning with direction provided by the Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG) Board of Governors at its Board Retreat in 2016, the strategic objective was established for the preservation and potential utilization of the historic San Joaquin Valley Railroad freight corridor as a valuable east-west transportation system linking Kings and Tulare Counties between the cities of Huron and Porterville, thus given the name the Cross Valley Corridor. Several planning studies to expand public transit services in Tulare County have been conducted and sponsored by the TCAG over the past twenty (20) years, with the most recent being the 2018 Cross Valley Corridor Plan and subsequent

2024 Kings-Tulare Cross Valley Corridor Phase 1 Operations Plan. Given the TCAG Board's Objective, the 2018 Plan envisioned a 75-mile high-frequency transportation corridor linking cities east to west across the valley utilizing the historic rail corridor, with future rail transit service planned between Porterville-Lindsay-Visalia-Hanford-Lemoore-Huron. The 2024 Operations Plan recommends incremental implementation of the 2018 Plan, with initial express transit service along the most active and viable segments. Additionally, the 2024 State Rail Plan identifies and supports express transit service along the Cross Valley Corridor, initially to connect with San Joaquins Amtrak trains at the Hanford Station, and later with high-speed rail trains at the Kings-Hanford Station upon the opening of that system.

The Regional Express Transit Service Project is comprised of two (2) separate but intersecting express transit services in the region, including the Cross Valley Express (CVX) project connecting communities of Tulare and Kings Counties primarily along the State Route 198 corridor, and a complimentary Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system on the Mooney Boulevard (State Route 63) corridor between the Visalia and Tulare transit centers, with stops serving commercial retail destinations as well as the College of the Sequoias campus in Visalia. The CVX is planned to initially operate between the Farmersville Transit Center and the Hanford Amtrak Station.

Based upon the 2024 Operations Plan, the CVX would operate eight (8) transit vehicles at 30-minute service frequencies for 16-18 hours per day over the approximate thirty (30) miles between the Hanford Amtrak Station and the City of Farmersville Transit Center via Visalia, including stops at the Hanford Transit Center, Visalia Industrial Park (2), College of the Sequoias, Kaweah Health Medical Center, and the Visalia Transit Center. Visalia Transit would serve as the primary transit provider, supported by the Tulare County Regional Transit Agency (TCRTA) and Kings Area Regional Transit (KART). It is the goal that the CVX would begin operation in Fall 2028, including the development of a new transfer station in the Visalia Industrial Park (potentially at the TCOE Doe Center), installation of twelve (12) new CVX transit stops, and twenty (20) intersection traffic signal preemption systems. Given all the current funding for the Project is sourced from State transit grant funds, zero-emission battery-electric and/or hydrogen fuel cell vehicles would be required of any procurement, and therefore the necessary EV-charging or hydrogen-fueling infrastructure would also need to be developed. It is hoped that the early success of the CVX would lead to connection to NAS Lemoore shortly after service is begun, as it is the expressed interest of the Station administration to have express transit service to Visalia for its personnel who live in the community and work at the Station.

The Mooney Boulevard BRT would operate along Mooney Boulevard with five (5) vehicles at 15-minute service frequencies for 16-18 hours per day over the approximate eleven (11) miles between the Tulare Transit Center and the Visalia Transit Center, including stops at Prosperity Avenue (Tulare), Visalia Parkway, Caldwell Avenue, Walnut Avenue, Tulare Avenue/College of the Sequoias (COS), and Kaweah Health Medical Center, intersecting with the CVX at COS, Kaweah Health and the Visalia Transit Center. Visalia Transit would serve as the primary transit provider, supported by TCRTA. It is also the goal that the BRT would begin operations in Fall 2028, including the installation of six (6) new BRT transit stops, twenty (20) intersection traffic signal preemption systems, and necessary EV-charging or hydrogen-fueling infrastructure. Given the significance of Mooney Boulevard as the regional commercial corridor, it will be imperative that the project not create additional congestion and/or interfere with commercial operations and development, and that the City maintain authority over the BRT routes, timing and operations.

In financial support of the Project, TCAG has submitted multiple federal and State transit grant

applications, resulting in currently \$69.38 million in State Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) grant funds for capital improvements, including \$49.1 million in capital improvements and \$18.8 million for zero-emission vehicles, which \$10.28 million in funding must be obligated with Caltrans by June 30, 2029 and expended by June 30, 2032. The remaining \$59.1 million must be obligated with Caltrans by June 30, 2031, and expended by June 30, 2034. Given the combination of awarded capital and vehicle grant funding, TCAG has stated that the ongoing use and value of capital and infrastructure development be the priority for funding in development of the Project, given there are other various local, State and federal funding options for vehicle procurement. TCAG has also allocated an initial \$7 million in State Senate Bill 125 transit funds toward operational support, as well as \$1.5 million in State Senate Bill 743 mitigation funding from the State Route 99 Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement Project toward operational support for the BRT.

The \$49.1 million in funded capital improvements include the following:

- Signal Preemption/Street Improvements Construction: \$12,410,000
- Construction Contractor Costs: \$9,460,000
- Caltrans and City Indirect Costs: \$7,580,000
- Transit Stop Facility Improvements Construction: \$5,720,000
- EV and Charging Infrastructure Construction: \$5,300,000
- Lindsay Transit Center: \$4,400,000
- Design and Engineering: \$4,230,000

As the most robust transit system in the region, TCAG has requested that the City of Visalia serve as the project lead and primary service provider. The City serving in this capacity will be of significant impact, both in the Engineering Department and the Administration-Transit Division, and will require extensive coordination with Caltrans given the significant number of intersection signal preemption system and street improvements within Caltrans jurisdiction and right-of-way, to which Caltrans has committed to identify a project manager on its behalf to coordinate with the City. The Caltrans Project Manager could potentially be the same for the State Route 63 Rehabilitation and Class II Bicycle Lane Project currently being planned for construction in 2028. The City has identified the specific need for a new Project Manager position in the Engineering Department to administer the City's design/bid/build process and close coordination with necessary consultants and the identified Project Manager for Caltrans, as well as a likely the need for a new position in the Transit Division as the project grows closer to implementation.

There are currently several agreements being drafted and/or reviewed by legal counsel for future consideration in support of the Regional Express Transit Service Project, including a draft agreement between the City, TCAG and the TCRTA for "Operations", a draft Cooperation Agreement between the City and Caltrans for "Capital Development", a draft agreement between Caltrans, the City and TCAG for "Construction of Capital Improvements", a draft agreement between the City and Caltrans to be the recipient of State TIRCP transit grant funds, and a draft agreement between the City and TCAG to be the recipient of State SB 125 transit funds.

Given the magnitude of the capital improvements planned for the CVX and BRT express transit services and multi-year timeframe for development, it is possible for certain services to begin prior to final capital improvements (e.g. Visalia Transit matching KART service between the Visalia Transit Center and Hanford Transit Center).

Fiscal Impact:

If approved for the City's participation, this proposed Project will lead to the creation of a new CIP project for the Transit Division with Engineering Department assistance and support, and the receipt and responsibility for significant State and potentially federal transit grant funding.

As indicated in this report, upwards of \$70 million in State transit grant funds have been awarded for the development of the Project, which are prioritized for capital and infrastructure development. There are various local, State and federal funding sources available for transit vehicle procurement, and TCAG has already budgeted the projected first year of full buildout operations of \$8.5 million.

As also indicated in this report, of the \$69.38 million in State transit grant funds secured, \$10.28 million in funding must be obligated with Caltrans by June 30, 2029, and expended by June 30, 2032. The remaining \$59.1 million must be obligated with Caltrans by June 30, 2031, and expended by June 30, 2034.

Prior Council Action: None

Other: N/A

Alternatives: Do not authorize the City's participation in the Regional Express Transit Service Project and/or serve as the project lead.

Recommended Motion (and Alternative Motions if expected):

I move to approve the City's participating in and serving as the project lead and primary services operator of the Regional Express Transit Service Project, approve the draft Resolution authorizing the City Manager to execute the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Master Agreement and Program Supplement for Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program Funding (TIRCP), and authorize the City Manager in coordination with the City Attorney to draft necessary agreements with the Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG), Tulare County Regional Transit Agency (TCRTA) and Caltrans for the Council's formal approval.

Environmental Assessment Status: N/A

CEQA Review: N/A

Attachments:

1. Draft Resolution 2025-73
2. Draft Caltrans Grant Recipient Agreement
3. Draft Memorandum of Understanding for "Operations"
4. Draft Memorandum of Understanding for "Capital Infrastructure"
5. CVX and Mooney BRT - System Map Exhibit
6. Meeting Presentation