

## The Signal

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### Officials Review City Transportation Needs

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As city transit officials work to update the city's Transportation Development Plan, City Council members argue that a more comprehensive citywide plan that includes the Santa Clarita Transit Authority, Metrolink, proposed light-rail systems and alternative fueling stations would be ideal when considering major growth throughout the Santa Clarita Valley.

City officials anticipate the population of the Santa Clarita Valley to reach more than 300,000 residents by 2010 and could grow to more than 400,000 residents after 2025, according to an executive summary of the Transportation Development Plan.

"We need to coordinate the whole picture," Councilwoman Marsha McLean said during a council study session Tuesday night. She suggested the city perform separate studies of Metrolink and Maglev needs for the area and said, "We need to do whatever we can to help them help us."

The Santa Clarita area also provides a challenging environment for transit services with its difficult terrain, water courses and utility corridors interrupting travel corridors, the report said.

Additionally, a limited number of arterials direct traffic down canyons and along riverbeds, making access to major corridors increasingly difficult for residents.

To accommodate this need, city transit manager Jeff O'Keefe suggested using larger buses along major corridors and operating smaller vehicles to deliver patrons to larger stops along such corridors.

The current update amends the long-range Transportation Development Plan completed in 1997 and is intended to project future needs and identify corresponding financial plans throughout the 2006 to 2015 fiscal years.

City transit officials developed the plan after completing line-by-line analysis and public participation meetings in March and a comprehensive evaluation of the Transit Authority's fixed route service to research existing ridership and performance statistics.

The total system ridership has increased from 1.5 million in the 1996 fiscal year to 3.7 million in the 2006 fiscal year, according to city reports. Estimates also indicate local service operating hours will increase 58 percent and commuter service hours will increase 15 to 20 percent within the next 10 years.

According to local route results, the highest transit ridership locations include areas surrounding the Metrolink station in Newhall and the Soledad Canyon Road/Sierra Highway intersection in Canyon

Country. Additionally, students traveling to and from school throughout the valley comprise a large population of riders.

City transit staff recommended splitting routes 1/2 and 5/6, establishing additional transfer stations and restructuring routes to incorporate planned school growth to improve efficiency in the busiest areas.

Though the city's Dial-A-Ride program makes up 2 percent of the total system ridership and 20 percent of the transit budget, reports indicate contractor dispatch and customer service levels of the program are below the city standard, and program staff are not well-trained on the area's geography or computer technology. City staff suggested increasing the level of training for employees and public outreach for riders to improve the program.

Transit staff expect to perform a number of schedule changes to Santa Clarita Transit routes by January.

Other major city capital projects include the replacement and expansion of buses, the establishment of park and ride facilities, a transportation information network and a bus stop improvement program.

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