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July 30, 2007

The Honorable Francisca P. Tisher
Presiding Judge
Napa County Superior Court
825 Brown Street
Napa, California 94559

FILED

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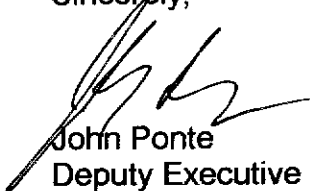
Clerk of the Napa Superior Court
By: C. Allen
Deputy

Dear Judge Tisher:

Enclosed, please find the response of the Napa County Transportation and Planning Agency to the findings and recommendations of the 2006-2007 Napa Grand Jury pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933. This response was approved by the Board at their July 18, 2007 meeting.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 259.8636 or by e-mail at jponte@nctpa.net.

Sincerely,



John Ponte
Deputy Executive Director

Received

JUL 30 2007

Napa Superior Court

NAPA DOWNTOWN TROLLEY – NAPA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION AND PLANNING AGENCY (“NCTPA”)

Finding 1:

The Downtown Trolley is not fulfilling the mission that was intended in the creation of the service, i.e. encouraging tourism in the downtown area.

Response – Deputy Executive Director NCTPA: The Deputy Executive Director concurs with this Finding as written. However, the original intent of the service was modified by the NCTPA in February 2004 to target more local riders. Please see the response under the Recommendation section for additional details.

Recommendation 1:

The NCTPA should engage in studies to determine if the current system of operation can fulfill the mission of the Downtown Trolley.

Response – Deputy Executive Director NCTPA: The Deputy Executive Director concurs with this Recommendation.

The service was initiated at the request and using Transportation Development Act (TDA) funding set aside by the City of Napa and the service has received operating support from the Downtown Merchants Association. Although the riders have not largely been tourists, the NCTPA and the Merchants Association continue to support the service as a good addition to the community. The service does carry people to and from in the downtown area; regardless of residence, shoppers and diners are shoppers and diners.

The original intent of the service has shifted somewhat, casting a wider net than originally anticipated. Recognizing that the service was not carrying large numbers of visitors, the City of Napa requested that the NCTPA Board end the Trolley two year demonstration project and integrate the service into the overall VINE service; the Board agreed to the request in February 2004. Subsequently, the Merchants Association elected to cover the farebox requirement for the route as required to qualify for TDA funding.

The level of visitor development in the downtown has not increased as quickly as originally anticipated; however, that level is expected to increase with the tourist and commercial construction development immediately expected in the downtown area.

The NCTPA engages in a nearly continuous series of operational and planning studies of transit services. The Agency has just completed a rescheduling study for the VINE service to be implemented next month which includes deleting a less-than-satisfactory Route, a study of the existing and projected needs for transit services north of Yountville has just been completed, and the agency is proceeding to seek consultant assistance for the next iteration of the Short-Range Transit Plan, a long-range examination of transit operational and capital needs, including those of the Trolley.

Exclusively for the Trolley, NCTPA has recently entered into rescheduling/rerouting discussions with the Merchants Association with an eye towards improving the passenger counts and passengers per hour figures to align with current and future needs.

Finding 2:

The current routes of the Downtown Trolley do not satisfy the demands of visitors to the Napa Valley as evidenced by the lack of visitors using the service.

Response – Deputy Executive Director NCTPA: The Deputy Executive Director does not concur with this Finding. First, the service was never intended or designed to satisfy the transit demands of the visitors to the Napa Valley; it was intended to accommodate the needs of a segment of the visitors coming to the Downtown Napa area. Second, the number of visitors to the downtown area does not appear to have reached the level anticipated at the inception of the service, due to the lack of attractors, the 911 attack and the following economic slowdown; for these reasons the NCTPA Board, at the request of the City of Napa broadened the target of the service.

Recommendation 2:

Consideration should be given to expanding Trolley routes to include other areas in the Valley that have significant visitor appeal. In keeping with current environmental and fuel economy concerns, the NCTPA should also consider replacing the three trolleys with more efficient and adaptable vans or minibuses.

The NCTPA should explore other methods of utilizing the trolleys such as renting them out for special events, parties or other celebrations.

Response – Deputy Executive Director NCTPA: The Deputy Executive Director partially concurs with this Recommendation.

Item 1 – Partially Concur

Consideration should be given to expanding Trolley routes to include other areas in the Valley that have significant visitor appeal.

The NCTPA is currently discussing change for the Trolley routes with the Downtown Merchants Association with an eye to increasing ridership. The Trolley service is operating satisfactorily, carrying over fifty thousand riders per year; the fifth highest number of passengers of the eight Routes running only in the City of Napa – nearly right in the middle of the pack. NCTPA is expecting the absolute numbers and the percentage of visitors to increase as the number and volume of visitors increases due to route changes, an expanding economy and the increase in hotels and visitor attractions in the downtown area.

The NCTPA also provides transit services in Calistoga, St. Helena, Yountville and American Canyon that can be used by visitors as well. Several aspects of some of these services have been targeted at the visitor but with very limited success due to both the extreme proximity of visitor attractions in some of the jurisdictions combined with the strong desire to also see several dispersed outlying attractions. This is a general problem for transit – regardless of rider – in the Napa communities; both trip generators and trip attractors tend to be dispersed, making it difficult to design and operate efficient transit services.

The NCTPA has and will continue to examine opportunities to provide efficient public transportation services to all riders.

Item 2 – Partially Concur

In keeping with current environmental and fuel economy concerns, the NCTPA should also consider replacing the three trolleys with more efficient and adaptable vans or minibuses.

Where the ridership warrants, the NCTPA does run smaller vehicles. The NCTPA has significant experience with smaller vehicles, operating them in all of the Napa communities, except for the City of Napa. Providing a public transit service with vans or mini-buses can engender significant problems of capacity and longevity. Surges in the ridership are expected - at times the bus will be full and at others, empty. It is likely that two or more smaller vehicles would have to be included in the Trolley service to accommodate the passengers that one vehicle does now, triggering a significant operating cost increase. Also, the smaller vehicles do not have the longevity of the larger ones; the initial purchase price is less but they generally are replaced after one-tenth the miles of a larger fixed-route bus.

The NCTPA is working towards a more environmentally friendly fleet. Of the 23 fixed route buses, 6 are powered by compressed natural gas. All of the diesel vehicles have particulate traps to the highest standards available on the market (considerably higher than any commercial diesel truck in the state). The Agency is purchasing 4 hybrid buses with an option to purchase 4 more. NCTPA is also researching the use of biodiesel; staff may well recommend a pilot program to the Board later this year.

Item 3 – Does Not Concur

The NCTPA should explore other methods of utilizing the trolleys such as renting them out for special events, parties or other celebrations.

As a provider of public transit services, the NCTPA is restricted by both state and federal statutes and regulations against providing special event transit services that could be provided by a for-profit company. The rules prohibit public services using public funds to compete with private providers.