

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: NOVEMBER 7, 2007

SUBJECT: State Grant for Agricultural Workers Mobility Plan

SUMMARY

This staff report reports on the November 1st submittal by Ride-On Transportation for state grant funds to develop and implement a new vanpool program for Agricultural Workers in the San Luis Obispo region. This grant program is managed by Caltrans in Sacramento with close to \$15 Million in state monies to be encumbered before 2010. To fund the program, the Budget Act of 2006 has a one-time appropriation of \$20 million from the Public Transportation Account (PTA). Over \$5 Million were already awarded for planning or implementation grants. A very successful application of this program is already in place in Kings County and has expanded into adjacent counties (Kern, Tulare and Fresno) via the Kings County Transit agency (regional, rural provider) leadership.

A total of \$1 Million was set aside for planning/community outreach in 2008 (growers, agricultural workers organizations and service providers in rural areas) with another \$14 Million for competitive service awards. The Board expression of support for the Ride-On grant (\$457 K request) will be sent to Sacramento.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff: Support Ride-On Grant Request

DISCUSSION

Providing safe and reliable rural mobility has received a lot of attention, in part since changes in regulations for access to drivers' license by migrant workers and the occurrence of major traffic accidents along rural roads (at times with un-insured or un-licensed drivers). The recognition of the need to address the mobility of agricultural workers in California began in the San Joaquin Valley. With actions urgently needed to guarantee safe and affordable transportation for agricultural workers, Caltrans created the Agricultural Workers Transportation Program (AWTP) (January 2007). The main purpose of AWTP is as follows:

"To provide safe, efficient, reliable and affordable transportation services, utilizing vans and buses, to agricultural workers commuting to/from worksites in rural areas statewide. The emphasis of the AWTP is on....vanpool operations similar to the successful Agricultural Industries Transportation Services (AITS) program ongoing in Southern San Joaquin Valley."

The Ride-On grant request focuses on Service Implementation: via staffing by a bi-lingual Coordinator (Ride-On offices), partial fare subsidies and the acquisition of eight (8) 15-passenger vans over the next two to three years (starting in July 2008 to 2010). The vanpool driver and a back up driver will be trained by Ride-On; both are volunteer drivers and fully bi-lingual to interact with the passengers. This approach is similar to the current commuter vanpools (24 + with pending expansion) managed by the Transportation Management Association in coordination with Regional Rideshare (ride-matching). Yet some differences may be:

- Special outreach activities are important to the start up of this new program (See contemplated activities on Page C-4-2). Ride-On Transportation with in-kind support from Regional Rideshare/SLOCOG will perform outreach to the agricultural sector (a new market for transportation providers which warrants a tailored approach);
- There is no formal Transportation Management Association, focusing on weekday and weekend travel to the agricultural fields. Ride-On, Rideshare and the Stakeholders Committee (as

envisioned) will need to work closely and build strong ties to keep the program financially viable past the grant period.

- Coordination with adjacent counties is needed from day one. Ride-On has talked with SMOOTH (North Santa Barbara County CTSA), due to start running 9 used vans for agricultural workers in the Santa Maria Valley. Those same vans might travel north into Nipomo/Edna Valley. Similarly the King City and Greenville (South Monterey County) communities are starting vanpools with some trips into the Paso Robles area.

Initial Outreach for New Agricultural Workers Vanpools:

Ride-On is identifying benefits and barriers through initial outreach. If the grant is awarded, Ride-On will hire a Bi-lingual Program Coordinator to build on the outreach and expand awareness and participation in the following ways.

- For committee of stakeholders/partnering agencies
 - Agricultural
 - California Rural Legal Assistance
 - Growers/shippers association
 - Grape growers association
 - Low Income Support Service Providers
 - Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC)
 - English Learners-Literacy Council
 - Low Cost Medical Providers
 - Cultural Resources
 - Local Churches
 - Schools
- For Bilingual Community Liaisons (individuals who are agricultural workers and can recruit riders)
 - Through stakeholders committee, establish community liaisons
 - Advertise (bilingual and pictorial) at churches, grocery stores, libraries, playgrounds, parks, etc.
- For Agricultural Employers
 - Through focus groups, identify barriers/benefits for employers and Farm Labor Contractors
 - Establish key contacts who can “sell” program to employers and Farm Labor Contractors who may currently provide rides to their agricultural workers

Marketing and Outreach (on going)

- With assistance from SLO Regional Rideshare, employer focus group and stakeholder committee, develop appropriate promotional materials
 - Users and advocates
 - Bilingual website for users and for low income service providers
 - Radio, TV, and print materials
 - Employers and contractors
 - Print materials identifying cost saving benefits
- Members of stakeholder committee schedule meetings with other service providing agencies to explain program and encourage them to share information with users
- Make presentations in culturally appropriate settings throughout the project area
- Meet with interested parties (potential drivers/riders), explain driver requirements, establish driver and back-up drivers