
BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT 2009-2010

B-LINE BUTTE REGIONAL TRANSIT

SUMMARY

Butte Regional Transit, also known as the “B-Line” is operated under the direction of the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG). BCAG is formed by a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) between the County of Butte and the incorporated cities of Chico, Gridley, Biggs, Oroville, and the Town of Paradise. The BCG owns the buses, but contracts with a private transportation company, Veolia Transportation for B-Line operations. The B-Line receives funding from both State and Federal sources along with farebox revenues.

The B-Line provides regional and urban fixed route service and also paratransit service throughout portions of the county. The B-Line is a consolidation of several independent public transit systems, such as the Chico Area Transit System, Butte County Transit System, and the Oroville Area Transit System that operated in the county prior to July 2005. The consolidation of these smaller systems reduced the need for multiple administrations, and provided for centralized scheduling, coordination of routes, and an overall more efficient transit system.

There are 20 fixed B-Line routes within the county, consisting of 10 urban routes in Chico, four urban routes in Oroville, one urban route in Paradise, and five regional routes. The Paratransit service provides door-to-door service for both ambulatory and non-ambulatory clients in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Paratransit also offers Dial-A-Ride service for seniors and persons with disabilities. To be eligible for the service, riders must be 65 years of age or older or have an impairment that prevents using the fixed route system.

The B-Line has experienced a consistent increase in ridership since its inception. BCAG has demonstrated creative leadership in seeking new and innovative ways to increase efficiency, safety, and cost effectiveness. The buses are clean and relatively comfortable. The scheduling is easy to understand and the buses operate consistently on time. The contractor maintains the buses well, however a larger facility to accommodate maintenance, cleaning, and bus parking is needed.

GLOSSARY

AVL – Automated Vehicle Location is a system for automatically determining the geographical location of a vehicle utilizing GPS then transmitting that information to a requester.

BCAG – Butte County Association of Governments

Butte Regional Transit or “B-Line” – the regional fixed route and paratransit service operated by BCAG to the cities, town and county

farebox – a device used for the collection of fares. All B-Line buses are equipped with fareboxes that accept coins, bills, and magnetic stripe passes.

Grand Jury – 2009/2010 Butte County Grand Jury

JPA – Joint Powers Agreement, an agreement between county and cities to perform services, cooperate with or lend powers to each other

Paratransit – Paratransit is a transit service in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It also provides Dial-A-Ride service for seniors and persons with disabilities. The B-Line Paratransit is a shared ride service designed to meet the needs of seniors and persons with qualifying disabilities who are unable to use the B-Line fixed route services.

BACKGROUND

The B-Line system came into existence in 2005. The Grand Jury learned that the BCAG’s B-Line operations had not been visited or reviewed since its inception.

APPROACH

The Grand Jury met with staff of BCAG, staff of Veolia Transportation, toured the bus maintenance facility, and reviewed documents describing the operations of the transit system. Additionally, members of the Grand Jury rode a bus on a regional route.

DISCUSSION

The B-Line is operated under the jurisdiction of the Butte County Association of Governments. BCAG is formed by a Joint Powers Agreement between the County of Butte and the incorporated cities of Chico, Gridley, Biggs, Oroville, and the Town of Paradise. BCAG is the state designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency and the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for Butte County.

The JPA gives responsibility to BCAG for the administration and operation of the region’s consolidated transit service. The BCAG Board of Directors is the policy making authority for transit decisions. BCAG’s Board of Directors has ten members: the five county supervisors and a representative from each of the county’s five incorporated cities/town. The Board of Directors receives recommendations on transit service from the Transit Administrative Oversight Committee. This committee is comprised of administrative and other staff representatives from the county, cities, town, and BCAG. This committee meets as necessary to review and provide guidance concerning the B-Line transit service. All policy decisions are made by the BCAG Board of Directors and require a minimum supermajority vote of seven of the ten Board members to pass. BCAG has three full-time staff dedicated to the B-Line.

The consolidation of the region's transit systems was the result of a multi-year planning effort by the cities, town, county, and BCAG staff to provide more efficient public transportation. The B-Line service began July 2005, replacing local systems such as the Butte County Transit System, Chico Area Transit System, and Oroville Area Transit System to form a regional system. This regional approach provides smoother transfers and fewer bus changes for the riders.

The B-Line's annual operating budget is approximately 7.5 million dollars. Approximately 1.4 million dollars of the budget is generated through fares. The remaining portion of the budget is funded by federal and state funding sources. The state funds approximately 80% of the balance through the Transportation Development Agency (TDA). The TDA funds are generated by a ¼% of the sales tax generated within the county. The Federal Transportation Agency funds the remaining balance. In order to receive these federal and state dollars BCAG must demonstrate that it is operating the B-Line effectively and efficiently. This is measured by farebox numbers, or the amount of fares generated to support the system. The federal and state farebox bench marks are:

- 20% of the budget through urban route fares
- 10% of the budget through regional route fares
- 10% of the budget through paratransit fares

The B-Line's farebox numbers for the 2008/2009 fiscal year were:

- 21% urban route fares
- 14% regional route fares
- 10% paratransit fares

BCAG owns all of the buses and equipment for the B-Line. They contract with a private vendor, Veolia Transportation, for all of the operational functions of the transit service. Veolia Transportation employs approximately 100 personnel which includes management, dispatchers, mechanics, custodial staff, and drivers. Veolia Transportation is dedicated to providing safe transportation to their clients. While there is no contractual standard, the agreed upon goal is less than 1.00 preventable accidents for every 100,000 miles traveled. Mid-year 2009/2010 their accident rate was 0.97 preventable accidents for every 100,000 miles traveled,. All B-Line vehicles are inspected annually by the California Highway Patrol.

Veolia Transportation conducts its operations out of a facility which they lease in south Chico. This facility houses all necessary aspects of the operation including dispatching, driver training, maintenance and repair of buses, and bus parking. The property is undersized for the scope of the operations. As a result, many buses have to be parked off site and some functions of maintenance that would be better done indoors have to be completed outside.

The B-Line operates 20 different fixed routes in the county which include: 10 urban routes in Chico, four urban routes in Oroville, one urban route in Paradise, and five regional routes. Along these routes there are approximately 540 stop locations with approximately 100 of those stops having some sort of passenger shelters. During fiscal year 2008/2009, the B-Line provided transportation to over 1.3 million riders on fixed route buses. This was an approximate 10% increase in ridership over the previous year, which had increased approximately 10% over the year before.

In addition to fixed route riders, the B-Line also provides Paratransit service in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This service provides door-to-door transportation for both ambulatory and non-ambulatory clients. The B-Line Paratransit also offers Dial-A-Ride service for seniors and persons with disabilities. To be eligible for this service riders must be 65 years of age or older or have an impairment that prevents using the fixed route system. The ADA requires agencies to strictly limit ADA paratransit eligibility to people who cannot use fixed route transportation because of their disability. All new B-Line Paratransit riders must complete an application and health care verification form. Riders can apply by either calling the B-Line's consultant ADARIDE.COM (toll free 1-877-232-7433) or they can apply online at www.adaride.com.

BCAG and the B-Line staff are continually looking for ways to increase the safety, effectiveness, and efficiency of the system. Some of the future plans include adding additional surveillance cameras on the buses, the installation of an Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) system, and additional bus stop shelters.

All of the buses in the B-Line fleet have video surveillance cameras and a recording system already installed. As part of their desire to increase safety for passengers, additional cameras are being installed to provide coverage of the bus both inside and outside. These cameras will be able to record any incidents that might occur either in the bus or in the immediate area outside of the bus. These recordings may assist in the deterrence of crime and in addition may help prevent accidents when used for driver training.

The installation of an AVL system is slated for 2010. This system will enable a more accurate method of tracking the buses and provide information to drivers, dispatchers, and riders regarding the timeliness of the buses. Through the data collected from the AVL system, management will be able to more accurately determine route scheduling, making the transit system more efficient. As an added benefit the information provided by the AVL can be displayed on arrival and departure message boards at the transit centers to keep riders up to date on their connections and transfers.

Lastly, BCAG has contracted with Stott Outdoor Advertising to provide up to 50 new bus stop shelters. The agreement will allow Stott to sell and place advertising on the shelters. In return, not only will they install, clean, and maintain the new shelters, they will also clean and maintain all of the other bus stop shelters in the system. This provides a two-

fold benefit to the B-Line, new shelters and a reduction in costs of approximately \$70,000 annually for the maintenance of the existing shelters.

FINDINGS

- F1. The formation of the B-Line, Butte Regional Transit has resulted in a more efficient public transportation system for much of the county.
- F2. The maintenance and operations facility is undersized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. BCAG should work with the contract service provider, Veolia Transportation, to locate and lease a larger operations facility for the B-Line.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §§ 933 and 933.05, the 2009/2010 Butte County Grand Jury requests responses the following:

- Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG)

The governing body indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- B-Line, Butte Regional Transit, Annual Transit Service Plan and Budget FY 2009/2010

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person, or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury. The California State Legislature has stated that it intends the provisions of Penal Code Section 929 prohibiting disclosure of witness identities to encourage full candor in testimony in Civil Grand Jury investigations by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those who participate in any Civil Grand Jury investigation.

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