



**PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

CITY HALL

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**CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT**

Meeting: April 16, 2019

Subject

Update regarding 2018 community shuttle survey and provide input on an 18-month pilot program.

Recommended Actions

Receive update and provide comment.

Background

The initial concept of a community shuttle was focused on alleviating traffic congestion in the tri-school area of Monta Vista High School, Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, and John F. Kennedy Middle School. In response to community concern, consultant firm Nelson Nygaard was hired by the City in November 2007 to assess the viability of a shuttle to reduce school-related traffic congestion. Nelyson Nygaard prepared a memorandum concluding that a shuttle was not the best tool to reduce congestion in this area due to safety concerns about introducing a shuttle into a highly congested area, and also due to low projected ridership.

As congested conditions are common at many schools, improvements near schools that make for a better biking and walking environment have been a City focus. In addition to this, the City has also focused efforts on its Safe Routes 2 School Program, which adds additional focus to encouragement and education programs as a method to increase the number of students bicycling and walking to school.

Since the initial concept of a school-centric community shuttle, the idea of a community-wide shuttle serving all of Cupertino has been given more attention. To further evaluate this, in the summer of 2018, the Public Works Department conducted an online survey to determine preferences such as desired destinations, preferred hours of operation, etc.

Discussion

The survey was publicized via a robust public outreach campaign that continued for the duration of the survey. In response to this outreach, a total of 806 surveys were completed by residents, employees, and students in Cupertino. Total response

represented over 40 hours of public comment in the City's Open Town Hall web platform.

Survey findings showed strong overall support for a community-oriented shuttle in addition to highlighting preferences for the type of shuttle service in Cupertino. A snapshot of survey results is below with a summary of survey results included in Attachment A along with a link to the complete report available on the City webpage, [www.cupertino.org/shuttle](http://www.cupertino.org/shuttle).

*Snapshot of Survey Results:*

72%	live in Cupertino
8%	work in Cupertino
5%	are students at De Anza College
83%	rarely or never use VTA bus service
79%	would use a shuttle to reach Caltrain if available
76%	prefer fewer stops with faster travel times (and shorter wait times)
77%	want to be able to walk to the shuttle
85%	use an auto as primary form of transportation
69%	would use a local shuttle service if one existed

*Popular Destinations Noted:*

- Caltrain Station,
- Cupertino Library/Civic Center,
- Main Street Cupertino,
- De Anza College,
- Vallco, Stevens Creek/De Anza area.

While the survey results show a high auto drive-alone rate in Cupertino, they also demonstrate a strong desire for an alternative to worsening traffic congestion in the region. It also revealed that existing transit service provided by Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) is not meeting the needs of the majority of the Cupertino community. These findings are consistent with the observed changes of travel habits, atypical commute patterns, and the rise of private ride-sharing companies such as Lyft and Uber, among many others, are proving to be much more convenient for the majority of the travelling public.

*Existing Transit Services in Cupertino*

Currently Cupertino is served by several VTA bus routes with services on most of the city's arterials and express routes on Highways 280 and 85. The Highway 280 route will

be discontinued in 2020 due to low ridership and Highway 85 service will be reduced. If approved by the VTA Board on May 2, 2019, VTA will be implementing system-wide changes included in its 2019 New Transit Service Plan, implementation timed with the start of BART service to Santa Clara County (late 2019). Most of the proposed changes are minor changes to Cupertino service, including several bus route numbering changes and a route deviation at Tantau. One significant improvement will be to Stevens Creek Blvd bus service with a new rapid line with 15 minute or faster arrivals and fewer local stops, improving the speed of the service. The route number will change from 323 to 522.

#### *Fixed-Route Community Shuttle*

Staff initially reached out to several of the leading shuttle vendors to plan a shuttle service that included the most popular destinations noted in the survey. In all of the fixed-route scenarios considered, the wait times and trip times to reach destinations were not a significant improvement from existing VTA services. In most scenarios routes would take in excess of hour to complete a loop in the core area of the City with additional time to reach the Sunnyvale Caltrain station.

All-inclusive costs for fixed-route shuttles are approximately \$2M per-year. An additional \$65,000 for planning, development and implementation is necessary, in addition to a part-time staff position during the pilot program period.

This type of fixed-route service is similar to the Google funded Mountain View service that began in January 2015. The Mountain View shuttle is not aimed at commuters as the Mountain View Transit Management Association already operates a robust commuter shuttle program.

In evaluating survey responses, and in consideration of numerous conversations with community members at public outreach events, the community desire is for a fast, efficient shuttle service that can be reached by foot, and meet the needs of commuters. This led to staff's conclusion that a fixed-route shuttle option was not the best option for Cupertino at this time.

#### *On-Demand Transit*

In several of the surveys community members noted the City should pursue partnerships with private ride-sharing companies as a way to reduce cost and provide a high quality service. Upon receiving this recommendation, staff contacted Via - a rapidly growing ride-sharing firm and reached out to the City of West Sacramento to learn more about an ongoing pilot underway operated by Via. West Sacramento noted that the Via service had been incredibly popular, averaging 408 weekday trips with continued growth since its launch. West Sacramento selected an on-demand model for

its pilot because of low existing transit ridership, long inflexible travel times, and first/last mile gaps with growing senior mobility needs. West Sacramento is in the process of a contract extension to continue operations beyond the pilot, and offer expanded hours of operation to include Sundays, Holidays and additional weekday hours.

#### *Via On-Demand Community Shuttle*

Via is a ride-share company that provides corner-to-corner shuttle service (and door-to-door service for disabled/or elderly customers). The system works similarly to Lyft and Uber, where shuttles are requested via mobile App or a toll-free number. However unlike Lyft or Uber, with Via, riders walk a set distance to meet the shuttle, which increases the speed and efficiency of the service. The shuttle uses an algorithm to pick up passengers travelling along similar routes and drops them off at or near their final destination, but following no fixed-route. Service would be branded as a City of Cupertino shuttle with Via's logo also on the shuttle.

In California, Via currently operates pilot programs in West Sacramento, and Los Angeles (by Metro). Via also supplies the ride-share technology used in the Marin County Transit Connect and OC Flex on-demand shuttle in Orange County. Via operates in many other large cities in the United States and internationally.

The walk distance can be set by the City and is generally no more than 400 meters. Disabled or elderly customers can be picked-up directly at their home upon request. A fare can be set to decrease the overall cost of operating the system, or the service can be subsidized entirely with no cost to riders. Attachment B summarizes the fare and its resulting impact on overall cost, given a range of ridership levels.

#### *A Turn-key Shuttle Pilot Program*

Via manages all aspects of the service including driver hiring and training, State permitting, marketing and overall program management. All details of a shuttle program, including insurance, maintenance, fuel costs, etc. are included. Via provides a turn-key shuttle service, providing 6-passenger Mercedes Metris vans with bike racks, advanced safety features, and are ADA compliant. As reservations are made for all trips, the City would be provided with anonymized trip data that would be used to assess the health of the shuttle program and provide insights into local travel patterns. The City would be asked to provide a safe parking area for the vans during the evening hours and when not in use. The City is able to set the fare, hours of operation, and determine the cost of weekly or monthly fare packages, and whether or not to offer reduced or free fares for students, seniors and low-income riders.

### *Proposed Service Area*

The proposed service area was determined by considering popular nearby destinations, existing transit services, and areas where residents may be unaware of irregular boundary lines. In most areas the Cupertino border was smoothed and in other areas intentionally enlarged to include key destinations such as Kaiser Permanente Santa Clara Medical Center, and West Valley Medical Center (Palo Alto Medical foundation), shown in Attachment D. The Sunnyvale Caltrain station is shown as an island in the service area map. This means that the shuttle would take passengers to and from the station with no stops permitted in-between until the shuttle reaches the core service area in Cupertino. The cost estimates in this report are based on a service model with 15-17 minute arrival times and operating hours of 6am – 8pm Monday – Friday and 9am – 5pm on Saturday.

### *Via On-Demand Pilot Cost*

Via reviewed the community shuttle survey results and discussed local conditions with staff and has generated approximate costs of an 18-month pilot program shown as Attachment C. The range in cost is approximately \$1.7M and \$2.4M depending on the level of service selected for an 18-month period. The per-hour costs are \$38, \$40, and \$42.50 respectively. The amounts shown in Attachment C are inclusive of a projected average fare of \$1 per customer, a conservative number that assumes overall collected fare will be impacted by free or reduced fare programs for students, low-income, and senior riders. The City may select a flat fare, or develop different fare zones where longer trips are a higher fare, including a separate Caltrain station fare. However regardless of the fare selected the overall fare recovery is not expected to change significantly as many of the costs are fixed and tied to the number of vehicles in the program. Additionally a higher base fare may make the shuttle less attractive to residents for shorter trips. As Via is a ride-share style community shuttle it is important to note that figures contained in this report are approximate and will be refined if Council provides feedback to staff.

### Next Steps

If City Council desires to proceed with a pilot program with Via, staff will include the request for funding in the FY19/20 budget. As Via is the only known provider of these services, other vendors may not be available to participate in a request for proposals process. If Via is determined be the sole qualified vendor, a contract would be negotiated and staff will bring the contract to City Council for approval. Once the contract is executed, Via and Cupertino staff will begin work on system planning, which includes details such as fares, fare programs, system area, operations, etc. Staff

anticipates that after an agreement is negotiated with Via that service would begin within a three-month period, with service as early as summer 2019. Staff would monitor the effectiveness of the program and would provide Council updates on the shuttle with information including overall ridership at the midpoint of the pilot, and again several months prior to the end of the pilot to discuss ongoing shuttle service.

#### Sustainability Impact

A community shuttle has the potential to reduce single occupant vehicle miles traveled in Cupertino with a corresponding reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Shuttles would have bicycle racks which could make it easier for bicyclists to make difficult connections.

#### Fiscal Impact

If Council elects to proceed with a pilot program for a community shuttle the fiscal impact would be influenced by factors such as the length of the pilot program, the level of service, the fare, fare exclusions, etc. If an 18-month on-demand pilot with Via is selected the overall cost would be approximately \$2,100,000.

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Approved for Submission by: Timm Borden, Acting City Manager

#### Attachments:

A - 2018 Survey Results Summary

B - Fares & Cost to City

C - Via Cost Sheet & Service Times

D - Via Cupertino Service Area Map