



Information Item

Date: January 7, 2010

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Stephanie Negriff, Director of Transit Services
Subject: Tide Ride Update

Introduction

The Big Blue Bus is continuing to re-evaluate the Tide Ride to better serve the needs of the business community. This report is an update on the discussions with business stakeholders regarding downtown transit service needs and options.

Background

In December 2008, staff recommended the elimination of the Tide Ride due to low ridership and shrinking transit revenue. The City Council directed Big Blue Bus staff to conduct additional outreach with downtown and community stakeholders before discontinuing the service. Between February and June 2009, the Big Blue Bus conducted stakeholder meetings with representatives from contributing hotels, business improvement districts, business associations, and other interested parties including those neighborhood associations served by the Tide Ride. The result was a recommendation to reduce the Tide Ride service to weekend only, which was approved by City Council on July 14, 2009.

As part of the recommendation to modify the Tide Ride route, a process was established to continue working with business stakeholders to identify downtown alternative transit options that better match downtown visitor and tourism transportation needs.

Discussion

The Big Blue Bus established a working group consisting of representatives from the five hotels that contribute funding for the Tide service, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, Bayside District Corporation, Main Street Merchants Association, Pico Neighborhood Council and the Santa Monica Pier Restoration Corporation. The group has met monthly since October 13, 2009 to redevelop the Tide service consistent with the terms of the development agreements and meet the needs of Santa Monica tourists and visitors.

The stakeholder group has identified four working concepts/options:

- 1) Eliminate the Tide Ride completely and offer Big Blue Bus fare media to the funding hotels in an amount equal to their annual contribution for operation of the shuttle.
- 2) Convert Tide Ride Weekend Only Service to Seasonal Weekend Only Service during summer and winter months and eliminate spring and fall.
- 3) Create an excursion program providing limited scheduled day-time trips to regional attractions, e.g. Getty Center, Rodeo Drive, Hollywood Highland, etc.
- 4) Create an On-Demand Service, which would provide hotel guests with shuttle service to local destinations within Santa Monica.

Big Blue Bus staff met with the stakeholder group in October and November to discuss the options. The group preferred concept/option 4, an On-Demand Service for visitors that would model the City's existing Dial-A-Ride program. The concept would be to offer a "premium" van/car service that customers could reserve by phone up to 30 minutes prior to departure that would take them to destinations within the City of Santa Monica limits. Rides would be free to guests at funding hotels while other non-funding hotel guests, the business community and general public would be charged per ride. The funding hotels currently pay \$231,000 annually which would provide a maximum of 2,100 hours of service based on the current cost of the demand response contractor.

Summary

Big Blue Bus staff will present a conceptual service delivery model for the On-Demand Service to the stakeholder group in January 2010, and incorporate their feedback. Once support of the stakeholder group is obtained, the Big Blue Bus plans to present to Council in March 2010 the final recommendation for a service that would replace the current Tide Ride and meet the obligations of the current development agreements and seek direction on selecting a contractor to provide the service.

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