



Transportation Committee

May 29, 2014

Withdrawal from CalVans Joint Powers Authority

Issue: Should SACOG withdraw from the California Vanpool Authority (CalVans) Joint Powers Authority, which SACOG joined in 2010 to support agricultural worker vanpool service in the Sacramento region?

Recommendation: That the Transportation Committee recommend that the SACOG Board authorize the Chief Executive Officer to submit a written notice of withdrawal from the CalVans Joint Powers Authority (JPA).

Discussion: After three years as part of the CalVans JPA, SACOG is recommending withdrawal because the program has not expanded agricultural worker vanpooling in the region as originally anticipated. The history of SACOG's entry into the CalVans program and reasons for CalVans' limited success in the Sacramento region are described below.

The Agricultural Worker Transportation Program (AWTP) was a state of California initiative to provide safe and affordable transportation for agricultural workers. In 2009, through funding from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), SACOG contracted with PRM Consulting for the development of an Agricultural Worker Transportation Program (AWTP) Business Plan to determine the extent of unmet transportation needs among the agricultural worker population in SACOG's service area, assess the viability of a public vanpool program, and develop a business plan to serve this market. The business plan indicated that a financially self-sustaining agricultural worker vanpool program was feasible over a 15-18 month period, and recommended that SACOG join in a successful pilot vanpool program of Kings County Area Public Transit Agency (KCAPTA).

In February 2010, based on the business plan findings, the SACOG Board authorized SACOG to: negotiate and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with KCAPTA to expand its agricultural worker vanpool program to the SACOG region; join the "California Vanpool Authority," a newly forming Joint Powers Agency (JPA) to operate the program starting in FY 2010/11; and work with KCAPTA and Caltrans to transfer \$1.76 million of Caltrans AWTP grant funds from SACOG to the new JPA to purchase vans for the program. SACOG signed the JPA Agreement in May 2011 and has actively participated since on the board of the CalVans JPA. The JPA includes 10 other member agencies, primarily from the Central Valley, Central Coast and Southern California.

In May 2012, the SACOG Board approved funding through June 2014 to support an expanded subsidy program for general public vanpools and the Agricultural Worker Transportation Component of CalVans based on anticipated growth. Through this period, SACOG has monitored CalVans efforts in the region, but use has proven to be minimal.

CalVans has been quite successful in working with farm labor contractors and growers and forming agricultural vanpools in other parts of the state. Through discussions with CalVans staff and 2013 workshops/focus groups conducted as part of the RUCS program, the following appear to be the primary reasons that CalVans has not caught on in the Sacramento region:

More permanent workforce: RUCS research seems to indicate that a good portion of the region's agricultural workforce lives in the region full-time and may already have transportation options.

Less CHP enforcement: There are only a few CHP officers targeted to farm labor vehicle enforcement in the Sacramento region. As a result, vans operating in violation of federal and state requirements are less likely to be stopped.

Visible out-of-pocket costs: While private vehicles can be costly in the long-run, this cost is not as apparent as when riders must reimburse a driver regularly for all CalVans vanpool expenses. According to CalVans staff, “A great deal of time and effort went into establishing several vans in [the] Punjabi community in the Sutter County area last season only to have them leave the program after four weeks citing cost as the primary reason.”

Shorter distances: Vanpools become cost-effective at greater distances. Commute distances for many agricultural laborers are not as great in the Sacramento region as in other parts of the state.

Smaller operations: Most growers are relatively small in the Sacramento region, meaning fewer workers, even during peak season, and limiting the market for vanpool riders going to/from the same location.

Shorter season: In some areas of the state, agriculture continues nearly year-round, so CalVans has been able to form more vanpools. Some large labor contractors also use CalVans to move agricultural workers from California to Arizona during the winter to keep people working. Much of the Sacramento region’s agricultural work is seasonal, and growers have reported having a harder time in recent years competing for seasonal labor because of the shorter growing season.

Little use of H-2A Program: The federal H-2A Farm Labor Program, the primary legal method for bringing in farm labor from outside the U.S., requires the provision of housing and transportation for agricultural workers. The Sacramento region has seen almost no use of this program. There also does not seem to be movement in Congress on immigration reform legislation that might expand requirements for agricultural transportation in the region.

Given that the above-described conditions appear likely to continue, SACOG staff proposes to end its three-year experiment and withdraw from CalVans. The JPA’s By-Laws require SACOG to file a written notice of withdrawal. CalVans’ Executive Director, Ron Hughes, has indicated he has no concerns with SACOG’s withdrawing at this time.

Approved by:

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