

RIVERSIDE TRANSIT AGENCY
1825 Third Street
Riverside, CA 92507

July 27, 2006

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS
THRU: Larry Rubio, Chief Executive Officer
FROM: *SR* Scott Richardson, Director of Marketing
SUBJECT: Authorization to Offer Bus Service to the Festival of Lights Downtown Aglow in downtown Riverside

Summary:

Each year the Mission Inn presents the Festival of Lights Switch-on Ceremony. The event is held the day after Thanksgiving in downtown Riverside. This year's event will be held on Friday, November 24th. Thousands of area residents gather to observe the official lighting ceremony and the holiday entertainment and specialty booths along the mall.

Following the official Switch-On ceremony, the entire downtown area begins the holiday season by continuing the Festival of Lights celebration with Riverside Downtown Aglow every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night between Thanksgiving and Christmas. This is an excellent opportunity for visitors to enjoy the lights and entertainment, shop, and take in dinner in a holiday atmosphere.

For the past four years RTA has offered bus service to and from the Downtown Aglow event. Last year, service was offered from Canyon Lake, Lake Elsinore, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Norco, Perris, Sunnyslope/Glen Avon, and Sun City. The service carried 518 passengers, which was somewhat below the goal of 640, but significantly more than the 244 riders carried in 2004.

Staff recommends providing bus service to and from the Festival of Lights Downtown Aglow event again this year for eight jurisdictions on the four Saturdays following Thanksgiving. This bus service will allow residents the opportunity to attend the event that may not have transportation or do not want to deal with traffic, parking issues and long walks to the festival area. Publicity on the service also provides positive positioning for RTA as a partner in the community. Staff

suggests that this year's bus service target Calimesa, Hemet/San Jacinto, Temecula, Beaumont, Banning, Mead Valley, Corona, and Country Village. Staff proposes serving two jurisdictions with two buses each on the four Saturdays following Thanksgiving. This will allow RTA to offer service from the eight jurisdictions and carry a total of 640 passengers.

RTA also has the opportunity to partner with the Riverside Downtown Partnership (RDP), the organizers of Downtown Aglow. The RDP is working on programming entertainment and vendors for the evenings the Agency operates bus service. The entertainment would vary and include performances by choirs, acrogymnists, and bands. The vendors will include seasonal specialty vendors and food vendors such as kettle corn and funnel cake. The RDP will also work on providing "goodie bags" for distribution to the riders. The materials would include the Downtown Aglow program and coupons and special promotions.

This service will operate open door to the general public; RTA will allow anyone to ride the buses to and from the event. Staff will work with the local jurisdictions to schedule the service so that it will not conflict with holiday activities. Staff will also work with local community leaders to determine the best target markets, optimal communication methods and ideal service departure points for targeted riders. Marketing efforts are expected to include posters, flyers, and newspaper advertising. Because these are open door services, the origin and destination points with published schedules that will be made available to the general public in the Ride Guide and through flyers distributed throughout the communities. The fare will be \$1.00 per passenger each way. For the service from Calimesa, Banning, Beaumont and Corona, additional promotional assistance will be sought from the Transportation NOW Chapters.

Bus service will be scheduled to depart from the respective jurisdictions at approximately 5:00 p.m., and the return service from the event will be scheduled to arrive back at 9 p.m. In order to estimate the demand for this service, RTA will work closely with the departure locations. When all seats are pre-sold, additional residents will be able to ride on a space available basis.

Fiscal Impact:

Based on the above schedule that utilizes 16 buses, the total cost to operate all routes will be \$4,397. RTA will target a 20% farebox recovery of the operating costs, a minimum of \$879, for this service. RTA will spend up to an additional \$3,200 to market the service

through flyers, posters and newspaper advertising. RTA will not attempt to recover all the marketing costs on this service, as the advertising is general marketing and effectively will market the entire bus system, confirm RTA's commitment to involvement in community events and offer residents the opportunity to experience the Agency's bus service.

Committee Recommendation:

This item was discussed at the Board Budget and Administration and Board Operations Committee meetings of July 12th. The Committees' members unanimously approved and recommended this item to the full Board of Directors for their consideration.

Recommendation:

- Authorize staff to work with the cities of Calimesa, Hemet/San Jacinto, Temecula, Beaumont, Banning, Mead Valley, Corona, and Country Village to develop a program with bus routes serving the Festival of Lights Downtown Aglow on the four Saturdays immediately following Thanksgiving.
- Authorize staff to develop routes, market the service, presell tickets and operate service to and from the event.