

RIVERSIDE TRANSIT AGENCY
1825 Third Street
Riverside, CA 92507

July 28, 2005

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

THRU: Larry Rubio, Chief Executive Officer *Larry*

FROM: Scott Richardson, Director of Marketing *SR*

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 26th. 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 three years RTA offered bus service to and from the Downtown Aglow event. Last year, service was offered from Calimesa, San Jacinto, Hemet, Temecula, Beaumont, Banning, Mead Valley, and Corona. The service carried 244 passengers which was significantly below the goal of 640 and less than the over 600 riders carried in 2003. As discussed at the February 24, 2005, Board meeting, staff plans to analyze demographics, local event conflicts and promotion strategies to maximize ridership in 2005.

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 the jurisdictions of Canyon Lake, Lake Elsinore, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Norco, Perris, Sunnyslope/Glen Avon, and Sun City. Staff proposes serving two cities with two buses each on the four Saturdays following Thanksgiving. This will allow RTA to offer service from eight cities 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. As reported to the Board at the February 24, 2005, meeting, 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. Additional marketing strategies may include outside sponsorship of fares and discounts for early fare purchases. 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. Staff will also work with the departure locations to offer presale tickets for residents to reserve a seat on the bus. The fare will be \$1.00 per passenger each way with a 10 percent discount for early ticket purchases to provide an incentive for passengers to commit to ride. For the service from Moreno Valley, additional promotional assistance will be sought from the Moreno Valley Transportation NOW Chapter and the Moreno Valley Mall who have expressed interest in working with RTA on a holiday service promotion.

Bus service will be scheduled to depart from the respective jurisdictions at approximately 5:00 p.m. Return service from the event will be scheduled to depart at approximately 8:30 p.m. In order to estimate the demand for this service, RTA will work 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 \$4,811. RTA will target a 20 percent farebox recovery of the operating costs, a minimum of \$963, for this service. A minimum of 40 presold seats from each departure location will be required for service to operate from that city. RTA will spend up to an additional \$3,000 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 Finance, Board Operations, and Board Administrative Committee meetings of July 6th and July 13th, respectively. The Committees' members unanimously approved recommending this item to the full Board of Directors for their consideration.

Recommendation:

Authorize staff to work with the cities of Canyon Lake, Lake Elsinore, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Norco, Perris, Sunnyslope/Glen Avon, and Sun City 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.