

This document is an extract of a larger publication.

civilgrandjury.org is a project of UnGovr.org, a US-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to government transparency and public accountability.



24. All heavy-duty and one of the medium-duty buses are equipped with emission control devices. The California Air Resources Board requires that alternatively fueled engines be used when the heavy-duty buses are replaced. These replacements are scheduled to begin in 2011.
25. In 2006-07, MTA replaced one 20 passenger van and two Senior Center vans. 2007-08, replacements included two paratransit vans, five large vans and one Senior Center van. In 2008-09, MTA has replaced two more Senior Center vans and the Trolley. A paratransit van has been replaced by a gasoline powered Dodge Sprinter that has nearly doubled the miles per gallon.
26. All passenger vehicles are equipped with wheelchair lifts and one or two wheelchair tie-down locations. Vehicles are also equipped with bicycle racks, except for paratransit vans.
27. Regular preventive maintenance allows MTA vehicles to run reliably and well beyond the normal expected life span.

Personnel and Passenger Safety

28. Drivers complete a vehicle inspection procedure at the beginning of each shift.
29. A recently installed radio system has greatly enhanced driver access to the dispatcher and to emergency services.
30. There is no nationwide standard for preventable accidents, but MTA's consultant recommended a goal of 1.0 preventable accident per 200,000 miles. In FY 05/06 and 06/07 MTA was at or below this benchmark. In 07/08 MTA buses traveled about 769,000 miles and had 11 preventable accidents for a rate of 2.9 per 200,000 miles. The driver responsible for 3 of these incidents is no longer an MTA employee.
31. MTA has installed digital security cameras on all passenger vehicles that will document activity in and immediately around the bus. Funding for this project came from the statewide Proposition 1B Safety and Security bond issue and a federal capital grant.
32. Drivers receive training to handle emergency situations and difficult passengers.
33. Drivers do not carry cash to make change. Fares are deposited in on-board metal vaults to which drivers do not have access.
34. A 2007 grant provided funding for ten new shelters and twenty new benches that have been installed throughout the county. Solar power lights shelters where night service is offered. A new shelter for the Town of Mendocino received unanimous local support for a design that is consistent with historic preservation standards. This shelter will be constructed as soon as the required permit is secured from the county Department of Planning and Building.

Service and Fare Structure

- 35. MTA provides regular service throughout Mendocino County and connects with Lake County Transit in Ukiah. One route operates in Sonoma County and connects with Santa Rosa City Buses. Service connections are also in place with AMTRAK, Greyhound, the Sonoma County Airport Express and Golden Gate Transit.
- 36. Low fares, user-friendly routes and schedules, courteous drivers and clean, safe vehicles all contributed to an overall increase of 2.9% in ridership in 2007-08. For 2008-09, ridership is up 8.3% through November over the same period last year.
- 37. Routes, schedules and fares are posted on the MTA website and hard copies are available on the buses, at MTA headquarters, and at libraries and other locations throughout the county.
- 38. The MTA website is a valuable resource for passengers and for those who assist seniors and disabled individuals to access needed transportation.
- 39. Table I (below) provides information on general public fares and passes.

Table I

	One-Way Fares*	Monthly Pass**
One Zone	\$1.00	\$20
Two Zones	\$1.75	\$35
Three Zones	\$2.50	\$50

*** Those over 62 travel for half price. Two children age 6 or under ride free with one passenger age 16 years or older. Disabled individuals also travel for half price with an authorized photo-ID discount card. Information on discount cards and on Dial-A-Ride services and fares is available by calling 1 (800) 696-4MTA or (707) 462-5765.**

**** Punch passes are \$10 for 16 punches and are charged at the rate of one punch per zone traveled.**

- 40. When reviewed by the Grand Jury, the MTA website did not provide information on Dial-A-Ride fares. Also missing was the procedure for securing the authorized photo ID card required for disability discounts.
- 41. MTA provides regular service to clinics and many county agencies. Clinics and social service agencies purchase MTA passes and distribute them to low-income clients.
- 42. Routes and schedules are based on regularly monitored ridership data, transportation needs assessment studies, and an annual review of unmet transportation needs identified by members of the communities served.

43. During 2006-07, for example, MTA adjusted and eventually discontinued Routes 40, 52 and 54. It enhanced Routes 65 and 95, running Route 65 earlier and on the same schedule every day to make a more timely connection with Golden Gate Transit. MTA also included Golden Gate Transit connection times in its schedules and added luggage racks to connecting buses.
44. MTA has seven bus schedules that are revised three times a year in response to school and college schedules and seasonal time changes.
45. Enhancing service to Hispanic/Latino neighborhoods and providing students with evening service to Mendocino College are two of MTA's stated goals that have been achieved.
46. Dial-A-Ride services are available to the general public at fares that begin at \$4 for travel within a single zone. A computer-assisted Dial-A-Ride dispatch system became fully operational in 2007-08.
47. During hours when the MTA office is closed, an automated phone system gives the late and early departure times from locations on all routes. A recent review of this service revealed a significant volume of calls. The MTA website also provides a wide range of MTA information.
48. MTA strives to post current signs at each bus stop showing when buses depart from that location and their destinations. The grand jury found that accurate, complete information was not consistently available at all stops.
49. Funding has been secured for a commuter study to better address the needs of low-income workers.
50. In rural areas, drivers are trained to be flexible about drop offs and pick ups, when flagged from a safe location.
51. Additional "hands on" services for the handicapped and frail elderly are provided in cooperation with Anderson Valley, Redwood Coast, South Coast, Ukiah, Willits, and Indian (Ukiah) Senior Centers.
52. Dial-A-Ride, curb-to-curb, programs are offered in Fort Bragg and Ukiah.
53. A new Flex-Route program is being offered in Willits that combines regularly scheduled service with Dial-a-Ride service by appointment.
54. Racks are provided for two bicycles on all scheduled passenger buses. When racks are full, it is sometimes possible to transport a bicycle in an unoccupied wheel chair area.
55. Cyclists can miss a bus or be required to leave a bus if the handicapped space is required by a disabled individual. While this is a rare event, it may deter some potential riders. Data are being collected on incidents when cyclists cannot be served.
56. MTA distributes Transportation Development Act funds to Senior Centers to support specialized transportation services including service to senior meal programs. Senior Center transportation includes assistance "door-through-door" rather than the "curb-to-curb" service offered by Dial-A-Ride.
57. MTA assists Senior Centers with the process of selecting and purchasing new vehicles and provides vehicle storage, servicing and fueling for those with access to its Ukiah headquarters.

58. MTA also provides storage, maintenance and fueling services for the Mendocino County Bookmobile and Animal Care and Control mobile pet clinic and for vehicles that serve veterans.

Finances

59. The Transportation Development Act requires that at least 14.7% of the cost of public services come from farebox revenue. For Fiscal Year 2006-07, farebox revenue accounted for 17.6% of operating costs. Additional revenue came from contracts, grants and contributions. The farebox ratio dropped to 14.9% for Fiscal Year 2007-08 because fare revenue declined while operating costs increased slightly.
60. During the rapid run up of fuel costs in 2007-08, the MTA board voted to use reserves, if necessary, rather than increasing fares to compensate for the projected deficit. Despite reduction of other expenses, MTA anticipates a 2008-09 budget deficit of approximately \$200,000, largely due to fuel costs.
61. MTA solicits fuel bids from local wholesalers, approximately monthly, for its own vehicles and for resale to the Ukiah Senior Center, Department of Veteran's Affairs vehicles, Mendocino County Bookmobile and Animal Care and Control mobile pet clinic.
62. Capital programming, budgeting and grant-writing have allowed replacement of vehicles before excessive operating costs or unreliability become problems.
63. MTA managers expressed concern that cutbacks in transportation funding may make it difficult to maintain the current high replacement standards and achieve the planned transition to alternatively fueled vehicles. Reduction in sales tax during the current recession may also impact the operating budget.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that Mendocino Transit Authority:

1. begin, in the current fiscal year, to locate funds to commence a new planning cycle by no later than 2012 to incorporate and prioritize objectives and strategies consistent with anticipated transportation needs and economic circumstances. (Findings 9, 17, 18, 20-22, 42, 49)
2. establish procedures for drivers regularly to check the information posted at bus stops and provide feedback so that missing or incorrect information can be promptly corrected. (Finding 48)
3. enhance the MTA website by adding Dial-A-Ride fare and zone information and details on how the disabled can secure an MTA authorized discount card. (Findings 39-40)

4. consider a “*Return Ride Guarantee*” for cyclists in Willits, Ukiah and Fort Bragg that would employ Dial-A-Ride as a backup to ensure that a cyclist will not be stranded on a return trip due to a full bike rack or the needs of a disabled passenger for space on a regularly scheduled bus. (Findings 26, 54-55)

Discussion

In preparing for this inquiry, Jurors reviewed prior Grand Jury reports that described a number of concerns about MTA’s operations and management of its facilities. The 2008-09 Jurors were impressed by the transformation that has been achieved in recent years and by the evidence they saw of the strategic planning and on-going assessment that are essential to MTA’s continued sustainability.

Economic and environmental pressures are making public transportation increasingly important to Mendocino County residents. It is heartening to be able to encourage increased use of the services offered and to commend those who are striving to further improve MTA’s performance and the many contributions it makes throughout the county.

Required Response

Mendocino Transit Authority General Manager (All Findings; All Recommendations)

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

EXCELLENCE PERSONIFIED

Ukiah Police Chief and His Finest Are To Be Commended

May 18, 2009

Summary

Law enforcement officers have to deal with numerous difficult situations and the Grand Jury found the Ukiah Police Department (UPD) to be professional and up to the task. Operating with effective new leadership, the department:

- has significantly upgraded its evidence room to a state-of-the-art facility
- provides a School Resource Officer (SRO) to maintain a law enforcement presence at Ukiah High School and implement drug and gang intervention programs
- is collaborating with the Sheriff's Office to establish a grant-funded K-9 corps
- works with Project Sanctuary to improve response to domestic violence incidents
- re-instituted the annual report to the community.

The Department is currently focused on identifying alternative resources to replace State funding that will soon end for booking and forensics. The new Chief is emphasizing local recruiting to fill four currently vacant positions for sworn officers.

Methods

The Grand Jury visited the UPD facility, evidence and training rooms, interviewed personnel regarding operations, and reviewed pertinent documents.

Background

Penal Code § 925a states that *...the grand jury may investigate and report upon the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments, functions, and the method or system of performing the duties of any such city or joint powers agency and make such recommendations as it may deem proper and fit.* The 2008-09 Grand Jury undertook their charge with numerous visits to the City of Ukiah Police Department between August 28 and November 27, 2008.

Findings

1. The Ukiah Police Chief is also in charge of the Ukiah Fire Department as Director of Public Safety.
2. There are three captains, five sergeants, sixteen officers, seven dispatchers, two records clerks, one mechanic, one school resource officer (SRO) and two parking enforcement officers. There are currently no training sergeants.
3. All officers, including the SRO, are assigned their own patrol vehicles.
4. The current SRO has not received special training for his position.

5. The SRO has an office at Ukiah High School (UHS) and also goes to other schools to teach younger children about prevention of alcohol and other drug use, gangs and vandalism.
6. Marijuana and alcohol abuse are the biggest problems in and around the school this year. The SRO and school representatives perform locker and backpack checks on a random basis and whenever there is probable cause.
7. Student affiliation with rival gangs is a significant concern at UHS.
8. Due to construction, the SRO is not able to use his designated parking space in front of the school. This will be corrected when the construction is complete.
9. Dispatchers are given one month training at an academy and then work with an experienced dispatcher for three months.
10. If a non-English speaker calls 911, they are immediately transferred to a communications center where a language specialist transfers them to the correct interpreter.
11. The UPD currently has no service dogs. The UPD and Sheriff's office have received a total of \$100,000 from Homeland Security funds to purchase two dogs, special cars, equipment and training for the officers and the dogs. The officers and their dogs will attend two months of specialized training. Each dog will cost between \$8,000 and \$10,000. An officer has to make a commitment of three to five years to work in this position.
12. One dog will be assigned to the UPD and trained for bomb detection, the other will be assigned to the Sheriff's Office for drug detection. Both will be trained to protect the officers.
13. There is an active bicycle law enforcement and safety awareness program. UPD issued 295 warnings and two citations during the past year. Violators' names are taken and logged. The warnings issued were for bicycle safety and failure to wear helmets.
14. There are two parking officers and one parking enforcement vehicle. Although parking meters have been removed, the officers enforce posted time restrictions. City officials have delayed decisions on downtown parking to study what should be done.
15. The UPD sponsors an Explorers program to introduce young adults, ages 18-20, to law enforcement professions.
16. State funding for forensics and bookings is scheduled to end this year. UPD is seeking alternative funding sources.
17. The Grand Jury found significant upgrades to the evidence room. In particular, the security and cataloging of evidence is now state-of-the-art.
18. Project Sanctuary workers are involved in all domestic violence calls. This is a new collaborative effort between the Chief and Project Sanctuary.
19. The UPD annual report that had been discontinued is being produced again and distributed to the community. Copies are available at the UPD.
20. There are four openings for sworn officers.
21. The Chief stated it is difficult to find qualified applicants that are likely to stay in the community after training because the pay is higher in other cities. For that reason, he is trying to recruit locally.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. any officer assigned to SRO duties be trained prior to assuming these duties. (Finding 4)
2. the SRO have a highly visible designated parking space at UHS. (Finding 8)
3. the UPD and the City of Ukiah should pursue additional funding to secure a second dog trained for drug detection. (Findings 11-12)
4. the UPD increase its emphasis on issuing citations and fines for serious bicycle violations. (Finding 13)
5. the Explorer program be continued. (Finding 15)
6. a continued search for funding for the forensics and bookings programs be given a high priority. (Finding 16)

Discussion

The evidence room is state-of-the-art and well managed. The Grand Jury observed significant improvements and commends the UPD for creating an evidence room that is now a model for other agencies.

Jurors appreciated the cooperation of the Chief and found department staff professional and informative. The jurors were also impressed with the information provided and the enthusiasm shown about re-institution of the K-9 unit.

The policy of involving Project Sanctuary workers in domestic violence calls has proven to be of real value to victims. The Grand Jury commends the Chief for this effective collaboration with an important community agency.

The Grand Jury was also very pleased that the UPD annual report is being produced again and would like to see this continued.

Jurors further commend the Chief for focusing on local recruitment to fill openings.

Required Responses

Ukiah Chief of Police (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Ukiah City Manager (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Ukiah City Council (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Requested Responses

Principal, Ukiah High School (Findings 5-8; Recommendation 2)

Director, Project Sanctuary (Finding 18)