

GOLDEN EMPIRE TRANSIT DISTRICT



SUMMARY:

“Get on the GET Bus!” It will take you to most parts of the Bakersfield metropolitan area. For almost 50 years, the Golden Empire Transit District (GET) has been an asset to our community by serving over six million passengers a year, within a 187 square mile area, running 16 routes.

GET, on the cutting edge, has a fleet of buses loaded with technology and safety features. With their plans to purchase a fleet of new Zero Emission Buses (ZEB) beginning in fiscal year 2020-2021, this technology will soon benefit our environment to meet the California Air Resources Board mandate.

Can't catch a bus in the southwest? No problem, try the door to door service provided by the new pilot program called *RYDE*.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

The last Kern County Grand Jury report on GET was released in 2013-2014. The Special Districts Committee of the Grand Jury, pursuant to Penal Code section 933.5, conducted an investigation of the Golden Empire Transit District. The Grand Jury inquired into GET to see if the previous Grand Jury recommendations were completed:

- Work with the City of Bakersfield and the County of Kern in establishing handicap access at all bus stops
- Look into adding another bus to routes 21 and 22 to help with the overcrowding on these routes

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury met with GET personnel, rode GET bus route 45 in its entirety, researched the internet, reviewed the GET website, and obtained GET documents.

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

Golden Empire Transit District was formed in July 1973, and is the largest public transit system within a 110-mile radius of the City of Bakersfield. The legal boundary for GET includes the Bakersfield City Limits, as well as the adjacent unincorporated areas of Kern County known as the Bakersfield Metropolitan Area. The area within GET's legal boundaries is 187 square miles with a population of 500,977.

- A. GET's mission statement: "We make life better by connecting people to places one ride at a time."
- B. GET has a fleet of 88 forty-foot CNG buses equipped with 'kneeling' capability for the disabled, wheelchair lifts, bicycle racks, and security cameras. During peak times 68 buses are in use. In FY 2018-2019, GET acquired 24 forty-foot buses fueled by RCNG.
- C. GET operates 2 forty-five foot CNG commuter coaches (used for charter services).
- D. GET operates 21 compressed natural gas GET-A-Lift, paratransit vans.

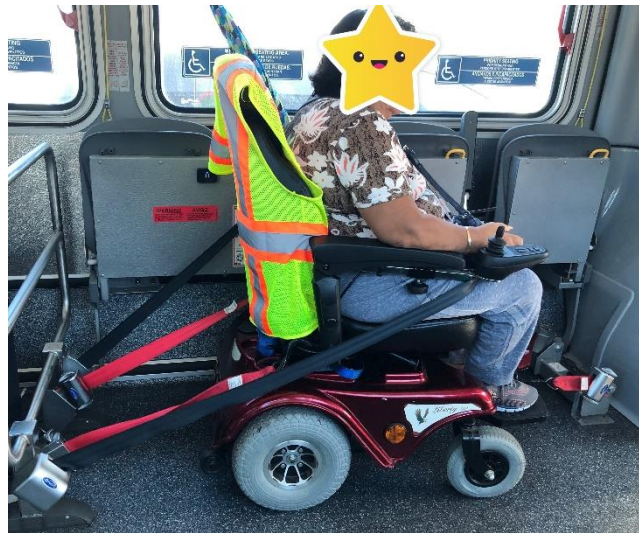


Photo Provided by Grand Jury

- E. The Fleet also includes 34 administrative and support vehicles.
- F. GET operates 16 fixed routes including the Tejon outlets. Most routes operate seven days a week utilizing 1,031 bus stops.
- G. In the spring of 2019, GET launched an on-demand micro-transit pilot project in the southwest area called RYDE. This service incorporates a six vehicle shuttle fleet, providing door to door service within a defined geographical GET zone, as well as, allowing riders to connect to the fixed route system. GET is

considering expanding its RYDE program to other locations within its service area depending on the response to the pilot program.

- H. GET has increased regional mobility access by offering connections with Kern Regional Transit System and the FlixBus System (a nationwide long distance bus service) with travel to and from Bakersfield.
- I. A July 2019 Customer and Community Satisfaction Survey revealed the following:
 - 1. 88% of the riders are either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the current fixed-route services.
 - 2. The majority of GET riders have a positive image of GET; 82% would recommend GET to family and friends.
 - 3. Riders voiced a desire for extended hours of service, especially on weekends, as well as concerns over safety and security on the bus at stops and at major transit centers.
 - 4. The most common reasons for community members **not** using GET include; the need to visit multiple destinations, inconvenience, and takes too much time.
- J. Golden Empire Transit District employs 26 mechanics/supervisors with a union contract:
 - 1. 23 Mechanics
 - Four are National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Master Mechanics completing all eight certifications
 - 2. Three Mechanic Supervisors
 - All are ASE Master Mechanics
- K. The 243 driver positions are either Full-time or Flex (part-time). Typically, the buses run 17 hours per day. The Full-time drivers work eight hour shifts then are replaced, in route, when the shift is over. All drivers are covered by a union contract.
- L. GET's revenue does **not** include any local community taxes. GET's FY 2018-2019 Operating Budget was \$31.5 million. Revenues were from a variety of sources:
 - 1. State Transportation Fund \$19.8 million
 - 2. Federal Grants \$ 6.3 million
 - 3. Passenger Fares \$ 4.4 million
 - 4. Other Receipts \$ 1.0 million
 - a. Interest \$ 60,000
 - b. Advertising \$145,000
 - c. CNG Sales \$789,000

M. Total Assets as of June 30, 2019, were \$57.3 million. Total Expenses were \$35.1 million.

N. Some of the expenses for FY 2018-2019 included the following:

1. Transportation Services \$12.8 million
2. Facilities and Accommodations \$ 1.4 million
3. Paratransit \$ 2.4 million
4. Vehicle Maintenance \$ 7.6 million
5. General Administration \$ 6.6 million

O. In December 2018, the California Air Resources Board passed a new rule requiring transit operators to start replacing their fleet in 2021 with ZEB technology, ultimately transforming the entire fleet to ZEB Technology by 2040. GET has plans to purchase new ZEB hydrogen fuel cell electric buses in the next fiscal year.

P. With the Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) system, the dispatcher knows where every bus is located. If a bus goes outside of its designated route, the AVL system alerts the dispatcher.

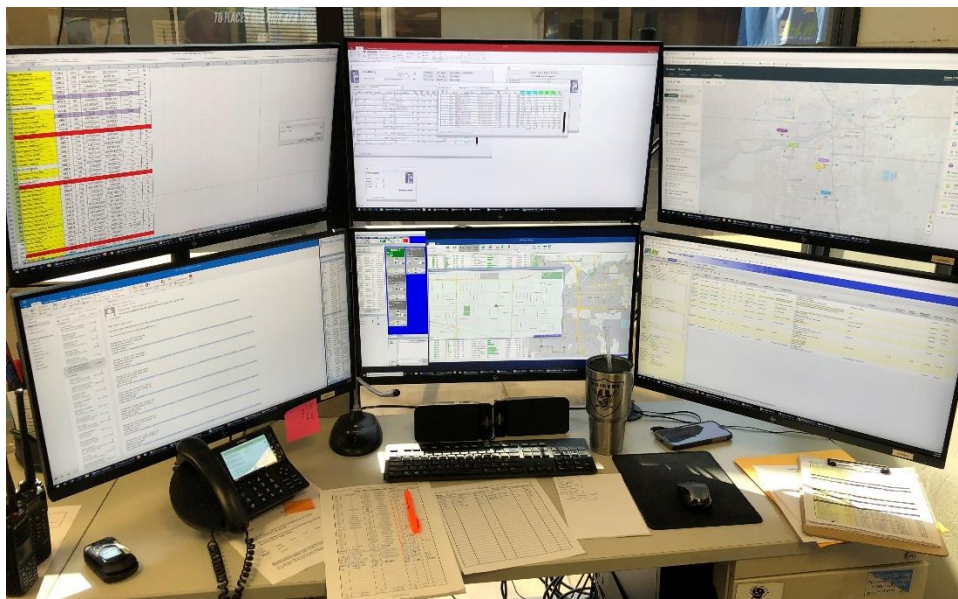


Photo Provided by the Grand Jury

FINDINGS:

- F1. Multiple cameras inside each bus give riders a sense of security.



Photo Provided by the Grand Jury

- F2. A new facility is anticipated when the California High Speed Rail purchase GET's current property. This move will provide GET with an opportunity to modernize and expand.
- F3. The State's requirement for ZEB will require GET to replace its entire fleet of CNG buses to either electric or hydrogen cell electric vehicles by 2040. GET has taken a progressive approach by issuing a Request For Quotes (RFQ#113) due March 2020, from qualified vendors, to develop a Zero Emission Bus Transitioning Plan in compliance with the California Air Resources Board Innovative Clean Transit Regulation.
- F4. With over 6.4 million riders annually, the buses are kept clean and in excellent condition. An Automated Passenger Counter (APC) is used to count each rider as they embark and disembark the bus. This allows GET to make changes on the routes as needed.

F5. Bus stops should be “Americans with Disability Act” (ADA) compliant. GET provided \$1.5 million over the past three years to the City of Bakersfield and \$0.5 million to Kern County for bus stop improvements. Currently 93% of all stops are curb-height lift accessible. The City of Bakersfield has been very aggressive in improving bus stops by creating paved waiting areas, accessible pathways, and shelter pads. However, Kern County has been slow in improving its stops. The City of Bakersfield has 70% of the bus stops in its jurisdiction, while only 27% are in Kern County’s jurisdiction, and another 3% are on State and private properties. Kern County has more work that needs to be done, because many bus stops are without curbs, gutters, or sidewalks.



Bus stops needing improvements



Example of a modern bus stop

Photos Provided by the Grand Jury

F6. GET has addressed the previous Grand Jury’s concern of overcrowding by adding buses and shortening the times between buses on its two busiest routes (21 and 22).

F7. GET is at the forefront of technology, with the AVL system, cameras, wheelchair lifts, APC’s, and the kneeling feature, as well as, real time information on computers and mobile devices. A transit trip planner integrates GET’s stop, route and schedule information to make planning a trip quick and easy. However, the newest technology they have not yet implemented... a ‘contactless’ pay system (Apple Pay, Google Pay, etc.).

- F8. The community would be better served if the GET RYDE program was expanded to other zone locations.

COMMENTS:

The Grand Jury thanks the Golden Empire Transit District personnel for providing information and a tour of its facility. GET is a well-organized and financially sound special district.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- R1. The Golden Empire Transit District should continue to address the issue of improving bus stops within the County's jurisdiction. (Finding 5)
- R2. The Golden Empire Transit District should conduct a feasibility study, and explore the possibility of grants, to add a contactless pay system on buses. (Finding 7)

NOTES:

- The Golden Empire Transit District should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: kerncounty.com/grandjury
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: kerncounty.com/grandjury

REQUIRED RESPONSES WITHIN 90 DAYS TO:

- **PRESIDING JUDGE**
KERN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301
- **FOREPERSON**
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.