

July 9, 2020

✓ Mr. Jerry D. Troxel, Foreperson
Kern County Grand Jury
1415 Truxtun Ave., Suite 600
Bakersfield, CA 93301

The Honorable Judith Dulcich
Presiding Judge
Kern County Superior Court
1415 Truxtun Avenue, Suite 212
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Dear Mr. Troxel and Presiding Judge Dulcich:

Golden Empire Transit District ("GET") has prepared the following response to the Kern County Grand Jury Final Report dated June 9, 2020.

FINDINGS:

- F1. Multiple cameras inside each bus give riders a sense of security.
- GET agrees with this finding.
- 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.
- GET agrees with this finding.
- 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.
- GET agrees with this finding.
- 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.
- GET agrees with this finding.
- F5. Bus stops should be "Americans with Disability Act" (ADA) compliant. GET provided \$1.5million 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.

- GET agrees with this finding, except as it pertains to the County work for which GET provided funding. The specific project that the allocated funds were dedicated to was improvement of bus stops along a designated 1.5 mile portion of Virginia Avenue which included 14 stops. The County made the agreed accessibility improvements to 11 of the stops with the allocated funds, additional PTMISEA funds were secured to improve 2 stops, and 1 stop was unable to be improved due to adjacent train tracks. The County's utilization of the allocated funds was completed in Summer 2017.

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

- GET agrees with this finding.

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.).

- GET agrees with this finding; however, we would note that the District does allow the passengers to purchase single rides and extended passes through Token Transit. Token Transit is an app-based system that allows the passenger to purchase fares online and then show the pass on their smartphone to the driver to allow boarding. This is a currently effective contactless pay system.

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

- GET agrees with this finding and notes that the current plan is to initiate RYDE service to the downtown and east side of Bakersfield as a second zone to complement the existing zone in southwest Bakersfield.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1. The Golden Empire Transit District should continue to address the issue of improving bus stops within the County's jurisdiction.

- As noted in Finding 5, the project for which funds were allocated to the County for accessibility improvement was finalized with all agreed improvements completed. As part of its ongoing operations, GET continues to review the status, functionality, and

regulatory compliance of all of its bus stops. As additional locations are identified that require improvement, GET will reach out to the appropriate jurisdictional authorities (State, County, City or private) to seek cooperative solutions to make all of GET's bus stops fully accessible to all of our passengers.

- 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).
- GET agrees with the concept of the recommendation of a contactless pay system, especially given current COVID-19 conditions. However, GET has considered adoption of such a system in the past and found it to be cost prohibitive. As the contactless pay systems suggested in Finding 7 are account based systems, where the availability of funds would have to be confirmed remotely by a bus on route, this would require an upgrade of communications, collection software, and fareboxes on all 88 fixed route buses operated by GET. From earlier consideration, management has determined the complete cost of such a system conversion would amount to approximately \$3 million. Due to the mandated capital program of fleet ZEB conversion referenced in Finding 3 and the anticipated costs to develop a new operations and administrative campus as referenced in Finding 2, GET does not believe the cost to convert to a contactless pay system meets the prioritization necessary in an environment of limited resources. GET would note that it does have a contactless pay alternative through Token Transit, as described in Finding 7, for passengers with access to a smartphone.

Golden Empire Transit District would like to thank the Grand Jury Committee members who rode our system, toured our facilities, and interviewed our team members for their professionalism, their comprehensive analysis, and the constructive recommendations they provided. We very much appreciate their shared interest with us in serving the citizens of our community. As requested in the Final Report, a copy of the Kern County Grand Jury Final Report has been posted and made available for public review. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,



Karen King
Chief Executive Officer

cc: GET Board of Directors