

REPORT

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TO: Regional Transit Technical Advisory Committee

FROM: Matt Gleason, Associate Regional Planner (213) 236-1832; gleason@scag.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Initial Findings, Regional O&M Performance Benchmarking Exercise

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

SCAG staff will present a review of the initial findings of the Regional Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Performance Benchmarking Exercise. This exercise compares O&M performance data from the SCAG region with a peer group of 11 other large metropolitan regions. Performance data regarding ridership, productivity, mobility and cost were accessed via the National Transit Database (NTD) and compared across regions.

BACKGROUND:

In February 2011, the Regional Transit Technical Advisory Committee was presented with the findings of the Draft 2012 RTP Transit Analysis. This analysis focused on twenty two transit properties from throughout the region that a) provide service between local jurisdictions, and b) report performance data to the National Transit Database (NTD). The report included a section focused on transit Key Performance Indicators (KPI) including ridership, productivity, mobility, and cost.

As a result of the findings of the KPI exercise, it was decided that it would be helpful to compare our regional transit system's performance to those other regions. By doing so, we establish a frame of reference for the cost effectiveness of current operations, and identify areas where other regions are providing service at a lower cost. Further, doing so will allow regional stakeholders to identify areas of possible improvement, and to identify peer regions and peer agencies who might provide best practices examples.

Furthermore, understanding how peer regions are performing allows us to set performance goals that we know are achievable, based on evidence from peer regions. Performance goal setting at the regional level is often a difficult endeavor, and this exercise will help policy makers to do so from a more informed position.

In order to contextualize the findings of the KPI review presented at the February meeting, staff has begun work on a transit regional (O&M) peer group performance benchmarking exercise. By comparing our region's transit performance with other similarly sized regions, staff hopes to ground analytical work regarding system performance and cost in an understanding of national trends.

Performance benchmarking through peer comparison is relatively new in transit; peer comparison exercises by public agencies are more commonly performed in the education and public safety fields. Increasingly though, transit properties are using the availability of NTD data to measure agency performance in comparison to peer agencies. It is also an emerging practice at the regional level.

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Over the past ten years, several performance benchmarking exercises have been performed at the system level by regional bodies. Beginning in 2003, The Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis has added a benchmarking component to its quadrennial transit system performance audit. The Atlanta Regional Council (ARC) performed similar analysis in 2005, focusing on peer regions with similar populations, growth rates, density, and travel characteristics. The State of Illinois Department of Transportation’s *Performance Audit of Mass Transit Agencies in Northeastern Illinois: RTA, CTA, Metro and Pace* included comparison of each mode in the region with five peer services.

METHODOLOGY:

In order to perform the analysis, staff began by constructing a peer regions group. Previously, SCAG has performed performance benchmarking activities in the context of the State of the Region Report, where our region’s performance was measured and compared along a broad axis of multi-sectoral indicators. Historically, the peer group in this analysis has been regions with populations over 5 million.

For the purposes of this exercise, that peer group metric has been retained. Using US Census 2009 estimates, a cohort of 10 Consolidated Statistical Areas (CSAs) and one Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSAs) with more than 5 million residents was built (the Miami Fort Lauderdale Pompano Beach MSA in not part of a CSA).

Peer Regions Comparison Group	
CSA / MSA Designation	2009 Estimated Population, US Census
New York-Newark-Bridgeport, NY-NJ-CT-PA CSA	22,232,494
SCAG REGION	17,987,767
Chicago-Naperville-Michigan City, IL-IN-WI CSA	9,804,845
Washington-Baltimore-Northern Virginia, DC-MD-VA-WV CSA	8,440,617
Boston-Worcester-Manchester, MA-RI-NH CSA	7,609,358
San Jose - San Francisco - Oakland CA CSA	7,427,757
Dallas-Fort Worth, TX CSA	6,805,275
Philadelphia-Camden-Vineland, PA-NJ-DE-MD CSA	6,398,896
Houston-Baytown-Huntsville, TX CSA	5,968,586
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Gainesville, GA-AL CSA	5,831,778
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL MSA	5,564,635
Detroit-Warren-Flint, MI CSA	5,327,764

The peer regions group contains 109 million residents as of the 2009 Census estimates, roughly one-third of the national population. The peer group also represents a significant portion of the nation’s transit investment, service, and ridership. There are 192 separate agencies reporting data within the peer regions comparison group, across a variety of transit modes. To contextualize, the table below presents the amount of service and productivity of various modes in the peer regions comparison group.

After an initial review of the data available through the NTD, it was decided that modally disaggregated data would provide the most useful comparative analysis. This complicated the manner by which the analysis was performed, and would be reported. Many of the NTD’s modal categories, especially the rail modal categories, have few operators throughout the peer groups. However, among the peer regions group

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there are 190 separate Motor Bus records in the database. Therefore, different comparative methodologies were necessary for rail and bus.

For rail modes, ridership and cost performance data can be compared evenly by agency across the regions. For the purposes of fixed route bus analysis, SCAG Region transit properties were compared to a series of peer region comparison group performance quartile values.

NEXT STEPS

Subsequent to the RTTAC providing input on this exercise, any recommended additional analysis will be performed. If areas for improvement are identified, staff will examine the practices of the peer group's best performers in those areas, and perform brief best practices reviews to help inform the process of setting regional performance goals for transit. By doing so, we can help define for policymakers operating goals that are both ambitious and achievable.