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**Eastern Coachella Valley
Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC)
TRIP Pilot Project Report
June 16, 2014**

SUMMARY

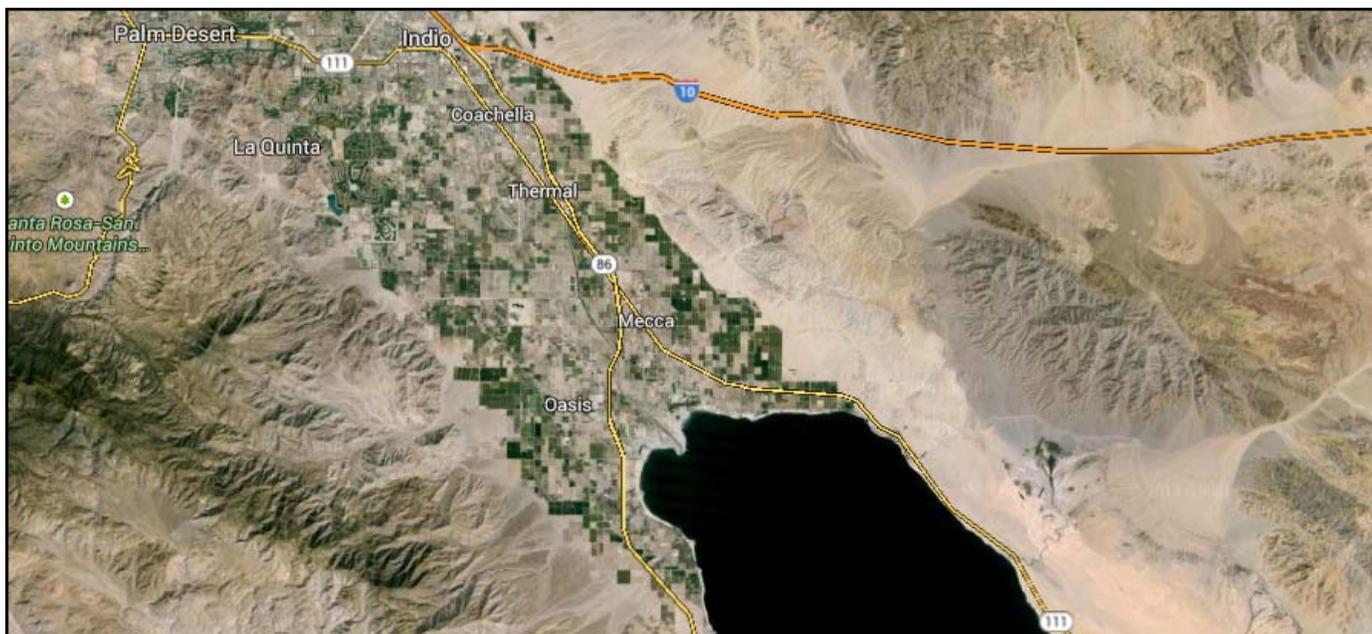
The purpose of the project was to adapt the TRIP volunteer driver model to address the unique transportation challenges faced by low-income persons seeking to secure and maintain employment. Those who would be eligible for Eastern Coachella Valley JARC TRIP assistance were planned to be those who faced difficulties traveling to and from jobs on a daily basis. The measurable goals and objectives of the grant would be to provide transportation support for people working at 200 jobs and to provide support for a minimum of 24,000 trips. During the months of December 2013 through March 2014, the project demonstrated the adaptability of the TRIP model and exceeded its goals, supporting 37,053 trips for 264 participants. Additionally, workers reported that transportation to 458 job locations was supported.

Two hundred and sixty-four project participants were enrolled principally from the unincorporated Eastern Valley communities of Thermal, Mecca and North Shore. Mileage reimbursements were paid to enrolled participants to offset daily to and from work travel. *Ninety-six percent of the work locations were from Indio east.* Normal travel to and from work sites in the Eastern Coachella Valley is provided by other area residents, friends and family members who are paid an average of \$5.65 per ride by low-income workers for daily transportation. Eighty-eight percent of the project participants work six days a week.

SunLine Transit Agency Lines 91 and 95 provide SunBus services to the area. Line 91 runs daily on 1 hour intervals from Mecca and Oasis through Thermal through Coachella to Indio beginning at 5 am. Line 95 runs Monday through Friday from North Shore to Indio on 2 hour intervals beginning at 5:34 am. The fare for both services is \$1. Only about 3% indicated that their “normal” method of transportation might include public transit services. Transit services are not meeting the transportation needs of the Eastern Valley residents who were served by this project. A number of reasons for non-use are possible. Though the area’s population density is low, it is our thought that it might be possible to design a circulating transit supported service that is focused on travel within the target area at the times that it is most likely to be needed.

BACKGROUND

The non-urban, rural area of the Eastern Coachella Valley in Riverside County California is made up of the four rural and unincorporated communities of Thermal, Oasis, Mecca, and North Shore. According to a report by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, published in November 2011, seventy-one percent (71%) of the households in the Eastern Coachella Valley are low-income; ninety-nine percent (99%) of the residents are Latino; and fourteen percent (14%) are unemployed.



Thirty percent (30%) to forty percent (40%) of principally agricultural workers are not able to drive a vehicle to work or to other needed destinations, including workforce development and job training sites. The total population for the Eastern Coachella Valley is estimated to be approximately 22,000.

SunLine Transit Agency is designated as the Consolidated Transportation Service Agency for the Coachella Valley. As of May 2014, SunLine's expanded SunBus operates two routes in the area:

Line 91: Westbound Mecca/Oasis to Indio runs on a 60 minute frequency, beginning at 5:00 am with the last bus of the day returning to Mecca at 9:06 pm. Reduced service is available on weekends. The adult fare is \$1.00.

Line 95: Westbound North Shore to Indio runs on weekdays only at 2 hours intervals beginning at 5:34 am in North Shore, with the last bus of the day returning to North Shore at 8:42 pm. Pick-up and drop-off in the North Shore area can be arranged on a reservation basis. The route runs through Mecca, Thermal and Coachella enroute to Indio. The adult fare is \$1.00.

The Eastern Coachella Valley Job Access Reverse Commute TRIP Pilot Project, when written in March 2012, proposed to:

- expand transportation in areas where limited fixed route transit service then existed
- provide services at anytime that travel to and from work was required, including early morning, late night and on weekends
- insure that ride home service would always be provided.

Informants had documented that ridesharing and paid carpool arrangements were already operating in the Eastern Coachella Valley to augment public transportation then available. For the low-income individuals who were already paying for rides, the Eastern Coachella Valley TRIP Project was designed to help to offset the costs of work rides and encourage and support more reasonable ridesharing and carpooling activities.

The purpose of the project was to address the unique transportation challenges faced by low-income persons seeking to secure and maintain employment. Those eligible for Eastern Coachella Valley JARC TRIP assistance were planned to be those who faced difficulties traveling to and from jobs on a daily basis. The specific measurable goals and objectives of the grant would be to support transportation to and from at least 200 jobs and provide support for a minimum of 24,000 trips.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposal was funded through the California Department of Transportation with Federal Job Access Reverse Commute dollars. The TRIP Program of the Independent Living Partnership (ILP) had proven its capability to provide efficient and effective special transportation assistance for older adult and disabled Riverside County residents for nearly 20 years. During that time 1.5 million trips and more than 18 million miles of transportation had been provided.

The approved JARC TRIP Pilot Project required adaptation to enable service to the farm and hotel workers of the Eastern Coachella Valley. The Galilee Center, located in Mecca, joined ILP to collaborate in the implementation of the project. The staff and management of the Galilee Center were experienced working with the population in the Eastern Valley.

Together, eligibility requirements were defined.

1. Those eligible would be residents of Mecca, Thermal, Oasis, North Shore and surrounding unincorporated areas of the Eastern Coachella Valley south of 56th Avenue
2. Enrolled participants would need to be low-income farm or hotel workers or residents of the area who were trying to get a job or who wanted to attend work training sites
3. Only one participant per household could be eligible to participate.

Outreach included news print advertisements in the *El Informador* and *La Prensa* Spanish language newspapers. Fliers were distributed throughout the area by the employees of the Galilee Center. Applications were completed, reviewed and eligibility determined by Galilee Center staff and management.

Once enrolled, JARC TRIP riders kept records of their daily travel to and from work and turned the travel logs in at the end of each month. Following validation, data for each trip was entered in a special software application developed by ILP for detailed monitoring and administration of TRIP model services. Mileage reimbursement checks were issued and distributed to project participants to reimburse them for out-of-pocket transportation expenses paid during the previous month of travel.

Daily transportation to and from work was supported by the project from December 2013 through March 2014. At the conclusion of the project, close-out surveys were administered to project participants.

SERVICE PERFORMANCE

The Eastern Coachella Valley Job Access Reverse Commute TRIP Pilot Project exceeded the goals and objectives of the grant and supported 37,053 one-way trips and 770,057 miles of travel to and from 458 work locations for 268 low-income residents of Mecca, Oasis, Thermal, North

Shore and other area locations.

Two hundred and thirty-eight (238) close out surveys were completed (90.2% response rate):

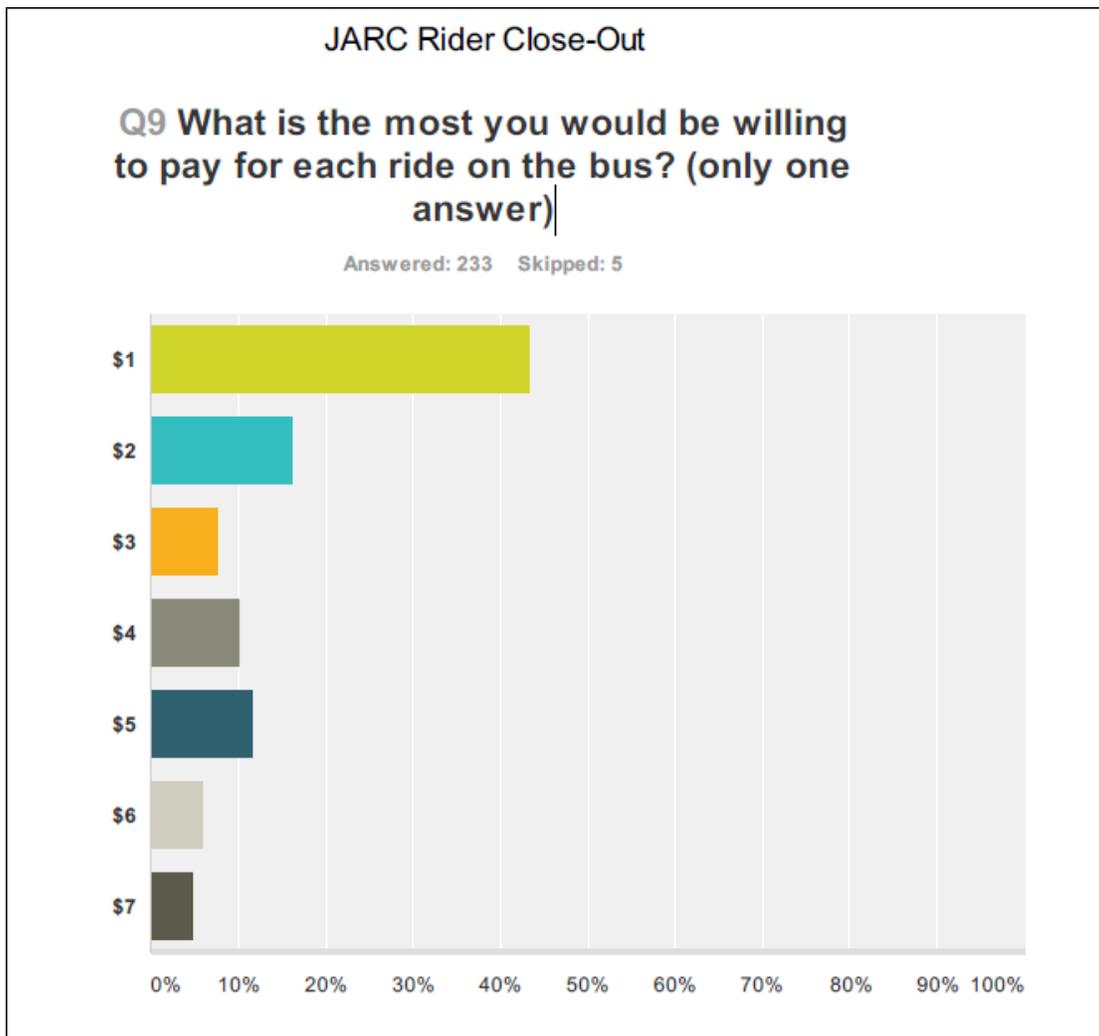
- 458 separate work locations were identified by 227 respondents
 - 2.02 work locations per worker on average
 - Most work locations for a single respondent was seven
 - 64.4% of the work locations were in the project area
 - 96.5% of the work locations were from Indio east
 - 114 job locations were in the Thermal area
 - 106 job locations were in the Coachella area
 - 93 job locations were in the Mecca area
 - 48 job locations were in the North Shore area
 - 40 job locations were in the Indio area
 - 17 job locations were in the Oasis area
 - Another 24 locations were also located within the project focus area.
- Living locations:
 - 100 in Thermal
 - 98 in Mecca
 - 28 in North Shore
 - 6 in Salton City
 - 2 in Oasis
- 97.9% of respondents said that the mileage reimbursement service was “very helpful” in getting them to the place they work and home again. The balance of respondents said the service was “somewhat helpful”. No respondents said that the service was “not helpful”.
- When asked “What, if anything, would you do to improve the service?”:
 - 43.7% of respondents said they like the program as it is and 46.4% said that they would like the program to continue
 - In response to the question about how to improve the mileage reimbursement service, 4.9% answered that they would like to see more transportation options in the Eastern Coachella Valley.

TRANSPORTATION PROFILE AND TRANSIT RELATED NEEDS

- When asked “What is the normal way that you travel to and from your work? (most often)”, 65.6% answered that they pay an “unrelated” person to drive them; 25.8% answered that they pay family or friends. One respondent indicated they ride with family or friends without having to pay; eleven respondents said they also drive; seven respondents answered that they utilize another unspecified method of transportation.
- For the low-income project participants, the average per trip payment reported was \$5.65 and the average amount reported to be paid for transportation each month was \$148.
- When asked “What is the most you would be willing to pay for each ride on the bus? (only

one answer)”:

- 22.3% indicated that they would be willing to pay \$5 or more for a bus ride
- 43.4% said they would be willing to pay no more than \$1, which is the current amount of the fare on SunLine bus lines through the area.



- When asked what days they would need a bus to take them to and from work, 88.8% answered Monday through Saturday. Approximately 6% fewer people work on Saturdays and 22.3% indicated they also need transportation to and from work on Sundays.
- When asked what times of day bus transportation would be needed:
 - Highest morning need stated:
 - 36.2% indicated 4 am
 - 54.7% indicated 5 am
 - 18.7% indicated 6 am
 - Highest afternoon/evening need stated:
 - 26.0% indicated 3 pm
 - 29.4% indicated 4 pm

- 12.8% indicated 5 pm
- 11.5% indicated 6 pm

DISCUSSION

The Eastern Coachella Valley Job Access Reverse Commute TRIP Pilot Project exceeded the goals and objectives of the grant. Those who utilized the service felt that it was helpful. The efficiency of the project is evidenced by the low \$6.28 cost per ride for the project. During the period of project operation the average cost of daily transportation, usually paid out of the pockets of low-income workers, was fully covered by the mileage reimbursements paid by the project. Should a similar service be operated in the future, the amount of mileage reimbursements paid could be adjusted to lower project cost per ride and engineer cost participation by service users.

Interestingly, the daily destination requirements of project participants were mainly centered in and near the project area with less than four percent of jobs west of Indio. The preferred method of securing necessary transportation by project participants was to pay unrelated people, friends or family members. Of the surveyed participants, only about 3% indicated that their “normal” method of transportation might include public transit services. Since the cost of transit rides should be attractive to project participants, we might speculate there must be other reasons that transit was not utilized by project participants:

1. They are not aware of services that are available
2. The daily start of service is not early enough for the service to be used
3. Work locations for farmworkers are remote from fixed route bus lines
4. Transit services are regarded as inconvenient because of waiting times, distance from routes to or from actual work locations, or other unknown reasons.

Though the area’s population density is low, it might be possible to design a circulating transit service that is focused on travel within the target area to and from farm locations at the times that it is most likely to be needed.