



**Planning and Development Department**  
Land Use Planning Division

## **STAFF REPORT**

**DATE:** November 19, 2009

**TO:** Members of the Transportation Commission

**FROM:** Elizabeth Greene  
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**SUBJECT:** BRT Draft Locally Preferred Alternative

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### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends:

- That the Transportation Commission review the attached information regarding the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) draft Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) and comments received; and
- Make a recommendation to the Planning Commission regarding the draft LPA and the need for additional information from AC Transit.

### **Background**

The possibility of implementing a BRT system in Berkeley has been discussed since 1993, when an Alternative Modes Analysis identified the Telegraph/International/East 14<sup>th</sup> corridor as the highest priority for transit investment. In 2002, a Major Investment Study (MIS) identified BRT as the most cost-effective investment for this corridor, over light rail and improvements to existing bus service. In 2001, near the end of the MIS process, the Berkeley City Council adopted Resolution 61,170-N.S. supporting BRT along Telegraph Avenue; this resolution continues to be City policy.

The steps leading up to the development of the draft LPA include:

- In May 2007, AC Transit released the Draft EIS/R for the BRT project. This document studied a general alignment for the BRT project. A specific alignment would be studied once AC Transit received input (i.e. LPAs) from the cities of Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro.
- On September 23, 2007, the City Council directed the Planning Commission, in collaboration with the Transportation Commission and staff, to develop a City preferred alternative for the BRT project. This alternative would be studied in the Final EIS/R.

- At the June 25, 2008 Planning Commission meeting, the Planning Commission suggested that staff develop a recommendation regarding the BRT alignment for the purpose of the developing a Locally Preferred Alternative to recommend to the City Council.

### **Purpose of an LPA**

The purpose of an LPA is to guide the issues studied in the Final EIS/R so that questions important to each city can be answered. Impacts of BRT on specific neighborhoods and business districts, for example, are not currently available because the details of a BRT route through Berkeley have not been decided. When the City forwards an LPA to AC Transit, AC Transit will use the proposed alignment to analyze impacts specific to Berkeley. The LPA process can also be used to identify areas that need additional information.

The finalized LPA is not the final decision on whether to have BRT and dedicated lanes in Berkeley; that decision lies with the City Council after review of the FEIS/R findings. The FEIS/R will incorporate each city's LPA into the environmental study, which will allow a more detailed analysis of possible outcomes. A final Berkeley City Council decision on the use of city streets for dedicated lanes will then be based on more complete and specific information than what is available at this time.

### **General Features of a BRT System**

A Bus Rapid Transit system is primarily identified by the following features:

- Dedicated (bus only) lanes
- Raised platforms at stations to allow level boarding of buses
- Station amenities such as covered shelters, seating, maps and ticket machines
- Pre-paid boarding
- Entering and exiting buses at all doors

These features allow for a faster, more reliable bus system because a) dedicated lanes mean that buses will not be caught in traffic, either as they are traveling or pulling back into traffic after stopping to load and unload passengers, and b) dwell times (the time spent at a bus stop) are significantly reduced when passengers can load and unload quickly. These features have been found to improve the transit experience for riders and encourage greater ridership.

### **AC Transit's Proposed BRT System**

AC Transit's proposed system has the features of a standard BRT system. Dedicated lanes and stations in line with those lanes would be provided wherever possible. The system is proposed to have a more frequent schedule than the regular bus service, with headways of five minutes between each bus.

The DEIS/R studied two separate service plan alternatives: separate, in which only BRT identified buses would use the dedicated lane and stations would be ½ mile apart; and combined, in which all buses would use the dedicated lanes with stations located ⅓ mile apart. In the summer of 2009, the AC Transit Board decided to use the combined

alternative. For the Berkeley portion of the route, this would mean that the local bus would be discontinued.

### **Recent LPA Activity**

#### Development of LPA process and draft document

Based on City Council and Planning Commission direction, staff studied various alternatives for the route and created a draft LPA for discussion. A process for arriving at a final LPA, involving stakeholder meetings, public workshops and Commission meetings, was also developed by staff.

The draft LPA was posted on the City's website at the beginning of September 2009, and copies were distributed to the Transportation Commission at that time. During September and October, staff met with eight stakeholder groups to present the LPA and hear comments.

A City of Berkeley workshop was scheduled for October 2009, but this was postponed when reductions in the BRT budget were considered. AC Transit has since assured the City that the environmental review process will continue, and has urged the cities involved to continue developing an LPA for inclusion in the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Report (FEIS/R) (Attachment A). The LPA process has resumed, but the public workshop has been replaced by two information sessions, to be held before the November 19<sup>th</sup> Transportation Commission meeting and the December 9<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission meeting. These two public meetings also serve as an opportunity for the community to comment on the draft LPA.

#### General components of the LPA document

The draft LPA document studied the portion of the proposed BRT corridor that would run through Berkeley. This corridor was divided into four sections, each with its own issues and considerations. Below is a synopsis of the recommended alignment for each section and the considerations that went into it; alternatives that were considered are discussed in the LPA document.

*Telegraph south of Dwight:* Dedicated (bus-only) center lanes are recommended in this segment. Stations with raised platforms would be located alongside the dedicated lanes at Ashby, Derby and the block between Blake and Dwight.

- Considerations: Improved transit speed and reliability with the dedicated lanes. Loss of parking, additional congestion for the private vehicles in the remaining lanes, and possible traffic diversion into the adjacent neighborhoods. Improved pedestrian safety with reduced traffic lanes and the addition of pedestrian refuge areas. Improved conditions for cyclists.

*Telegraph north of Dwight:* Two-way traffic is proposed for the four blocks south of the UC campus. The north-bound dedicated lane would transition to a mixed-flow lane (buses with regular traffic) in the eastern of the two traffic lanes. The western lane between Durant and Dwight would become a south-bound lane for buses, delivery

vehicles, emergency vehicles and bicycles. The block immediately adjacent to campus would remain north-bound. No bus stations would be located in this segment.

- Considerations: Improved transit service with the semi-dedicated south-bound lane, improved legibility (ability to easily find bus route and stops), maintenance of existing traffic patterns and loading spaces, changed circulation patterns with left turn prohibitions on Channing.

*Telegraph to Shattuck:* North-bound buses would continue to use Bancroft Avenue, though in a side-running dedicated lane. South-bound buses between Shattuck and Telegraph would travel up Durant, also in a side-running lane. Both of the lanes would be “porous”, meaning that cars could enter the lane for turns and to access street parking spaces. Bus stations with raised platforms would be located on Bancroft and Durant, just west of Telegraph Avenue.

- Considerations: Improved transit service with dedicated lanes. Moving the bus route from Dana to Durant makes the bus route more legible, avoids the loss of 35 parking spaces on Dana, and improves the biking environment on Dana, which is currently a bicycle lane. All but three parking spaces are maintained with this alignment; other options would have resulted in significant parking loss. Corner of Durant and Telegraph would need to be cut back to accommodate turn movements by the buses.

Downtown: No dedicated lanes are suggested for this portion of the route in the short term. Instead, raised stations would be located at Kittredge and Center Streets.

- Considerations: Significant changes for downtown make planning for this area difficult. Impact of delay through downtown Berkeley on the rest of the route.

#### Community outreach to date

Staff met with the following eight stakeholder groups to present the LPA, answer questions and collect written comments:

1. Neighbors (Willard, LeConte, Halcyon, Bateman and CENA)
  2. UC
  3. Bicyclists
  4. Berkeleyans for Better Transportation Options (BBTOP)
  5. Disabled and Seniors
  6. Environmental Groups
  7. South Telegraph businesses and property owners
  8. Telegraph Business Improvement District
- (Staff also offered to meet with a ninth group, the Downtown Business Association, but the DBA chose not to have a presentation.)

Staff generally heard negative input from several of the stakeholder groups, and other groups were more willing to consider the project. The written comments from these meetings are attached to this report (Attachment B). The community also had the opportunity to send comments to staff via the BRT website; these comments, along with letters received by mail and a petition circulated by Telegraph Avenue merchants and vendors, are also attached (Attachments C and D).

Many of the comments received related to the LPA. In an effort to identify the most common LPA-related questions and comments from those meetings, staff reviewed all written comments received, as well as informal notes taken at the meetings. These comments were addressed in two ways:

- Attachment E is a compilation of responses to LPA-related comments and questions prepared by City staff and AC Transit staff. This attachment also includes responses developed to questions from the Willard Neighborhood Association that were submitted to staff prior to the September 24<sup>th</sup> stakeholder meeting and distributed at that meeting.
- Attachment F addresses four commonly heard comments (the need for short-term on-street parking on Telegraph, access to the Telegraph/Channing garage, access of private vehicles to businesses on the west side of Telegraph, and parking loss on Telegraph south of Dwight) and gives options for accommodating those concerns within the context of the proposed LPA alignment.

Staff has not revised the draft LPA to address any changes suggested in the stakeholder meetings or in written correspondence. Changes will be made at the direction of the Planning Commission, with input from the Transportation Commission.

### **Next Steps**

The LPA process will go through the following steps:

- The Transportation Commission will make a recommendation to the Planning Commission on the LPA. The Transportation Commission can recommend the LPA as it is currently written, or recommend that the Planning Commission consider changes to the alignment. Additional questions for AC Transit can also be forwarded to the Planning Commission.
- The Planning Commission will review the LPA, take public comments and recommend an LPA to the City Council. This process could involve directing staff to make changes to the LPA before referral to the Council.
- The City Council will review the work to date, and make a decision on an LPA. This final LPA would be sent to AC Transit by April 2010 for study in the FEIS/R for the BRT project.

Once the FEIS/R is complete, the City Council will review the findings. Based on these findings, the Council will determine whether to allow AC Transit to implement BRT in the City of Berkeley.

### **Conclusion**

Using the information in this report, the LPA document and public comment, the Transportation Commission should make a recommendation on the draft LPA. This recommendation will be forwarded to the Planning Commission for its consideration.

Attachments:           A. October 14, 2009 letter from AC Transit re. LPA process  
                              B. Comment cards from stakeholder meetings

- C. E-mails regarding BRT and draft LPA
- D. Letters and petition regarding BRT and draft LPA
- E. Response to questions memo
- F. Options for the current draft LPA