



CITY COUNCILMEMBER
RIGEL ROBINSON
 DISTRICT 7

CONSENT CALENDAR
 March 10, 2020

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Councilmember Rigel Robinson and Mayor Jesse Arreguin
 Subject: Letter in Support of Reviving Berkeley Bus Rapid Transit

RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to AC Transit, the Alameda County Transportation Commission, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, and State Senator Nancy Skinner in support of expanding Bus Rapid Transit into Berkeley on Telegraph Avenue at the first possible opportunity.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On February 18, 2020, the Facilities, Infrastructure, Transportation, Environment & Sustainability Committee adopted the following action: M/S/C (Robinson/Harrison) to send the item, as revised by the committee, with a positive recommendation back to City Council. Vote: Ayes – Robinson, Harrison; Noes – None; Abstain – Davila; Absent – None.

BACKGROUND

Bus Rapid Transit, or BRT, is a growing tool in urban planning that centers the concept of transit right-of-way. Dedicated bus lanes can increase bus speeds by 6 to 12 percent,¹ reducing delays by ensuring that buses do not have to slow or stop for other vehicles (which accounts for 57 percent of delays), or wait to merge back into traffic after making a stop (24 percent of delays).²

Traffic congestion disproportionately affects public transit operations because of the multiplier effect — late buses have to pick up more passengers at every stop, causing them to fall even more behind schedule. This effect also means that more buses need to be deployed to maintain scheduled frequencies, costing taxpayers money.³

BRT makes it possible for transit agencies to run reliable bus service independent of how many cars are on the road. However, it is also intended to benefit non-transit users. Buses and cars sharing lanes poses a danger to drivers, who are put at risk by buses that suddenly merge into traffic or slow to make a stop. Once dedicated bus lanes are implemented, emergency vehicles can use them to bypass private automobile traffic, improving response times. Furthermore, the traffic calming, sidewalk widening, and general public realm improvements that are encompassed in a comprehensive BRT

¹ BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, pg. 1-2

² BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, pg. 1-12

³ BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, pg. 1-2

project are community benefits that enhance the streetscape for pedestrians, bicyclists, and local businesses alike.⁴

The AC Transit East Bay Bus Rapid Transit project was originally proposed to be implemented as a three-city project, connecting the Cities of Berkeley, Oakland, and San Leandro. The proposal would have provided bus service connecting the Downtown Berkeley and Bay Fair BART stations that was 18 percent faster, more frequent, and more reliable than current service. By 2015, BRT was expected to attract 6,820 new riders to transit per weekday over the no-build alternative, reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 6.2 million per year.⁵

As part of an AC Transit Major Investment Study (MIS) process, the Berkeley City Council adopted implementation of BRT as an official City policy in a 2001 unanimous vote. The policy, Resolution 61,170-N.S., states that Berkeley has a “Transit First Policy that supports the creation of exclusive transit lanes,” and specifically calls out supporting “bus rapid transit as the preferred transit mode” on Telegraph Avenue. This aligns with the findings of the MIS, which found BRT to be more cost-effective and beneficial than any less robust improvements. The study also found Telegraph Avenue to be a better route for BRT than College Avenue or Shattuck Avenue.⁶

However, in a 2010 reversal, the Council rejected Telegraph BRT by a 4-2-2 vote, citing stakeholder concerns about impacts on traffic, parking, and loading.⁷ Instead, Council voted 8-0 for a “reduced impact” proposal without bus-only lanes, focusing on improving bus loading areas and signage and implementing priority signalization and a proof-of-payment system.⁸ Because this proposal was not studied in AC Transit’s BRT Draft Environmental Impact Report, it could not be legally incorporated into the Bus Rapid Transit plan. As a result, BRT is currently only being implemented in the Cities of Oakland and San Leandro.

Since 2010, Berkeley’s political environment and the needs of its residents have changed. Public transit demand, population, and employment in the East Bay are all growing — by 2040 in AC Transit’s service area, population is projected to grow by 30 percent and employment by 40 percent. By 2025 along the Telegraph corridor, population is expected to grow by 16 percent and employment by 23 percent.⁹ In the next three years, UC Berkeley’s student enrollment will reach 44,735, a 33.7 percent increase over original projections.¹⁰

⁴ BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, pg. 1-3

⁵ BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, pg. 1-19

⁶ BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, pg. 1-13

⁷ <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2010/05/06/berkeley-opposes-bus-only-lanes-for-transit-project/>

⁸ https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Clerk/Level_3_-_City_Council/2010/05May/2010-05-18_Item_02_Minutes_for_Approval.pdf

⁹ <http://www.actransit.org/wp-content/uploads/Draft-Final-MCS-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.berkeleyside.com/2019/02/21/uc-berkeleys-student-enrollment-projected-to-reach-44735-in-next-3-years>

Coupled with a burgeoning housing crisis that is pushing residents to live farther from their jobs, these numbers pose significant traffic and congestion challenges. Berkeley residents are commuting to Oakland and San Leandro, and vice versa. UC Berkeley students are living farther from campus or commuting from home. AC Transit's Draft EIR found that the number of Berkeley intersections that are severely congested during rush hour will increase from one to five by 2025 without BRT.¹¹

A dedicated bus lane on Telegraph connecting Berkeley and Oakland would build much-needed public transit infrastructure into a densifying neighborhood that increasingly relies on multimodal transportation. BRT was projected to attract a total of 39,200 additional riders by 2035.¹² A significant fraction of these riders would be replacing their car trips with efficient, reliable public transit — when San Pablo Avenue adopted rapid bus routes, 19 percent of their riders were former drivers.¹³ Providing an attractive public transit alternative to driving is crucial for reducing vehicle miles traveled, encouraging people to get out of their cars, and ensuring that roads are less congested for Berkeley residents who absolutely need to drive.

In October, the City of Berkeley released a draft of the Berkeley Electric Mobility Roadmap.¹⁴ The draft roadmap proposes that “The City will support opportunities to explore and advance bus rapid transit routes, using electric buses, which can provide mobility and health benefits particularly for low-income communities of color.”

In October, the Council unanimously passed a referral to move forward with the Telegraph Public Realm Plan shared streets proposal, which will reconfigure the first four blocks of Telegraph Avenue to prioritize pedestrians, bicyclists, and buses over automobile thru traffic.¹⁵ Over the next few years, the City will be identifying and applying for regional funding sources, going through multiple stages of design and planning, and engaging in community outreach and public input. This presents a unique opportunity for Telegraph Avenue to be reintegrated into the Bus Rapid Transit plan.

Staff should send the attached letter of support to AC Transit, the Alameda County Transportation Commission, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, and State Senator Nancy Skinner.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The City of Berkeley's Climate Action Plan supports BRT as a key strategy to reducing carbon emissions, stating that the City should “continue timely assessment and

¹¹ BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, pg. 1-12

¹² BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, fig. 1-7

¹³ BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration, pg. 1-20

¹⁴ <https://www.cityofberkeley.info/EVCharging/>

¹⁵ https://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City_Council/2019/10_Oct/Documents/2019-10-29_Item_30_Referral_Telegraph_Shared_Streets_-_Rev.aspx

development of proposed East Bay Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.” The Plan stresses the importance of BRT “given the expected significant increase in the Bay Area’s population (and associated traffic congestion) in that same time period.”¹⁶ Implementation of Bus Rapid Transit will reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 6.2 million per year.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Rigel Robinson, (510) 981-7170

Attachments:

1: Letter

2: BRT for Berkeley: A Proposal for Consideration

[https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_\(new_site_map_walk-through\)/Level 3 - General/LPA REPORT FINAL 090809 FULL REPORT.pdf](https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_(new_site_map_walk-through)/Level_3_-_General/LPA_REPORT_FINAL_090809_FULL_REPORT.pdf)

¹⁶ https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_and_Development/Level_3_-_Energy_and_Sustainable_Development/Berkeley%20Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf



To: AC Transit Board of Directors & Alameda County Transportation Commission

Date: January 28, 2020

Re: In Support of Reviving Berkeley Bus Rapid Transit

Dear AC Transit Board of Directors & Alameda County Transportation Commission:

AC Transit has long been a valuable partner for the City of Berkeley, helping us meet our climate goals through innovative, low-emission transportation solutions. The greater East Bay benefits from AC Transit's various initiatives to improve ridership, efficiency, and reliability of service. One such project, the Bus Rapid Transit plan, is currently being implemented in the Cities of Oakland and San Leandro. In its original design, the Bus Rapid Transit project would have extended from San Leandro to Oakland, and then onward along Telegraph Avenue to Berkeley.

In 2010, the Berkeley City Council rejected the Bus Rapid Transit project by a 4-2-2 vote, citing stakeholder concerns about traffic, parking, and loading. However, as the Bay Area faces increasing challenges around climate and housing, the dire need for efficient, reliable public transportation has never been clearer. The current City Council understands these needs and believes that dedicated bus lanes are the best way to move our city towards a sustainable future. Therefore, the City of Berkeley is formally requesting that AC Transit consider expanding Bus Rapid Transit into Berkeley on Telegraph Avenue at the first possible opportunity. Furthermore, the City of Berkeley encourages the installation of BRT elements in the near term where possible along Telegraph such as dedicated lanes, boarding islands, and signal synchronization, while maintaining consideration of local bus routes and bicycle access.

Since Council rejected the Bus Rapid Transit proposal 2010, Berkeley's political environment and the needs of its residents have changed. Demand for efficient public transportation is growing, and a burgeoning housing crisis is pushing residents to live farther from their jobs. Berkeley residents are commuting to Oakland and San Leandro, and vice versa. UC Berkeley students, the vast majority of whom do not use a car, are living farther from campus or commuting from home. A dedicated bus lane on Telegraph would build much-needed public transit infrastructure into a densifying neighborhood that increasingly relies on multimodal transportation, and more intimately connect Berkeley and Oakland.

The City of Berkeley has renewed efforts to move forward with the Telegraph shared streets proposal, which will reconfigure the first four blocks of Telegraph to prioritize pedestrians, bicyclists, and buses over automobile thru traffic. Over the next few years, the City will be identifying and applying for regional funding sources, going through multiple stages of design and planning, and engaging in community outreach and public input. We believe that the planned overhaul of the streetscape presents a unique opportunity for Berkeley to be reintegrated into Bus Rapid Transit plans.

The current Council recognizes the importance of providing efficient and reliable public transportation for our residents. As the housing crisis and the effects of climate change sweep across the Bay Area, Berkeley is ready to take bold action to invest in sustainable modes of transportation. And as our city and region grow, we believe our public transit infrastructure should grow with us.

Sincerely,

The Berkeley City Council

