

03/10/2025

Subject: AC Transit's Counterproductive Planned Fare Increase

Dear AC Transit Board President Shaw, Vice President McCalley, Director Young, Director Peeples, Director Walsh, Director Syed, Director Silva, Interim General Manager Kelly, District Secretary Nemeroff, Interim Executive Director Burgos, General Counsel Steele, and Chief Operating Officer Llamas:

We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned about AC Transit's dangerous proposal to increase fares. It will hurt riders, disproportionately impact low-income communities, increase congestion and pollution, and hurt businesses. We ask that you reject this counterproductive proposal that would worsen ridership and add yet another hardship to the backs of tens of thousands of low-income riders. **There is absolutely no excuse for hurting riders with some of the highest fares in the country¹ during a time when AC Transit needs to focus on improving service and bringing *back* ridership.**

Increasing fares to \$3.00 — among the highest in the country — would impose an unjust burden on low-income riders who have no other transportation option. AC Transit riders' median yearly household income is under \$36,500, and 42% lack access to a vehicle.² It's unjust to ask these riders to pay more for bus service when many already struggle to put food on the table and maintain stable housing.

Unfortunately, Clipper START, the pilot fare discount program for low-income riders, is not sufficient to justify increasing fares. Between July 2020 and March 2023, only 32,000 riders in the nine-county Bay Area had signed up for Clipper START,³ or just 0.4 percent of all Bay Area residents. There are many reasons that many riders do not enroll in Clipper START, and until these barriers are addressed and enrollment increases substantially, it is not responsible or acceptable to increase fares on low-income riders and to justify doing so by citing Clipper START.

But fare increases aren't just harmful to low-income residents; they hurt all East Bay residents. Put simply, fewer people will ride the bus if they have to pay a higher fare — a reality that shouldn't be entertained while AC Transit ridership is still recovering from COVID-19 decreases. When you decrease bus ridership, you put more cars on the road. More cars slow traffic limiting commute options and stifling labor mobility. When it is more expensive and difficult for people to get to work, workers have fewer job options and businesses have access to a smaller labor pool. Riders will also wait longer for buses stuck in traffic because of congestion caused by more cars on the road. This would also increase local air pollution in heavily burdened communities. We are in a climate emergency and fare increases are counterproductive to our existential need to address climate change, and our obligation to decrease air pollutants in highly impacted low-income communities of color.

¹ <https://www.picodi.com/us/bargain-hunting/public-transport-2023>

² <https://www.actransit.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/2017-18-On-Board-Passenger-Survey.pdf>

³ <https://blog.bayareametro.gov/posts/clipper-start-pilot-extended-through-june-30-2025>

Higher fares are counterproductive; rather than bringing in more revenue to increase service, fare hikes will push AC Transit closer to triggering a death spiral of lower ridership, less revenue, less service, and thus even lower ridership. Let's avoid this death spiral.

We ask that the board reject this counterproductive proposal to increase fares to some of the highest in the country and threaten the goals and values of AC Transit, our organizations, and our region.

Sincerely,

Carter Lavin, Transbay Coalition
Giovanni Jordan, East Bay Transit Riders Union
Jack Kurzweil, Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club
Warren Cushman, Community Resources for Independent Living
Berkeley City Councilmember Igor Tregub
Berkeley City Councilmember Cecilia Lunaparra
David Alger, Pan Theater
John Flanagan, Flanagan Legal
Ren Fitzgerald, Chair, Berkeley Transportation and Infrastructure Commission* (*For identification purposes only*)
Laurel Paget-Seekins, Public Advocates
Robert Prinz, Bike East Bay
Mona Afary, Ph.D. Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants
Caleb Jones, Transport Oakland
Michael Gliksohn, Richmond Progressive Alliance
Bob Allen, Urban Habitat
Reverend Sophia DeWitt, East Bay Housing Organizations (EBHO)
Liza Lutzker, Walk Bike Berkeley

