

## **MEDIA ANALYSIS: NEWS RELEASES, COVERAGE, THEMES, AND NARRATIVES (2024)**

In accordance with existing procedure, the General Manager-CEO retains full discretion to determine which District matters warrant the issuance of news releases, media advisories, or official public statements, and holds final approval authority for all external communications. During calendar year 2024, the General Manager exercised this authority to issue 14 official statements addressing a broad range of District priorities, including the postponement and subsequent approval of the Realign bus network, participation in federal clean-transit initiatives, emergency operational adjustments, major funding announcements, safety-related projects, and leadership transitions.

As part of ongoing cost-containment efforts, the District eliminated its third-party media monitoring contract and currently relies on manual web-based searches to identify and track media coverage. While this approach reduces costs, it produces broad keyword-driven results that may not include all digital or subscription-based outlets. Staff reviewed and synthesized the top results to identify recurring themes, media framing, and public narratives associated with each official communication issued in 2024.

### **News Releases:**

- January 25: AC Transit Board Postpones Bus Network Changes Following Majority Vote
- September 10: Final Draft Realign Network Plan Public Hearings
- October 11: AC Transit Approves Its Realign Bus Network Plan

### **Media Coverage:**

Coverage appeared across Oaklandside, Alameda Post, Contra Costa Pulse, Daily Californian, SF Gate/Bay City News, Local News Matters, and Public Advocates.

### **Themes and Narratives:**

- Staff Shortages and Reliability: Articles identified operator shortages and operational constraints as primary drivers of the postponement.
- Equity Impacts: Quotes from Board President Young and Director Beckles emphasized the need to protect low-income and transit-dependent riders.
- Community Engagement and Public Pressure: Reporting highlighted strong rider and operator feedback as a factor influencing the postponement.
- Budget Constraints: Coverage frequently linked Realign to fiscal pressures and declining ridership trends.

### **Mixed Sentiment:**

- Media depicted AC Transit as deliberate and responsive but operating under significant scrutiny related to equity, staffing, and service reliability.
- Some outlets framed the approval as a necessary step toward reliability and modernization.

- Others focused on criticism from operators and advocates, with some characterizing the plan as inequitable.

**News Release:**

- February 9: AC Transit Participates in White House Roundtable on Clean Buses

**Media Coverage:**

Federal coverage, including the White House Readout, identified AC Transit as a national stakeholder in clean-bus manufacturing and deployment.

**Themes and Narratives:**

- Federal recognition of AC Transit’s zero emission bus (ZEB) leadership
- Workforce development and innovation in clean-energy manufacturing
- AC Transit was positioned as an early, visible participant in national clean-transit strategy.

**News Release:**

- March 6: AC Transit Will Cease Downtown Oakland Nighttime Detours

**Media Coverage:**

Coverage from Oaklandside, Hoodline, NBC Bay Area, and others.

**Themes and Narratives:**

- Strong rider response and rapid District reversal following public feedback
- Safety concerns tied to nightlife and pedestrian activity
- Restoration of reliability through multi-agency coordination

**Mixed Sentiment:**

- Media coverage reflected mixed sentiment, noting that while AC Transit acted quickly in response to community concerns, service adjustments remained contingent on public-safety conditions.
- Coverage also included opposition from city and District elected officials opposing the detour, citing potential impacts on late-night workers and asserting that the District acknowledged the misstep and should not require advocacy to restore service.

**News Release:**

- April 10: AC Transit and the City of Oakland Partner on Safety Enhancements

**Media Coverage:**

Local News Matters, Mercury News, Hoodline, Oaklandside, and Oakland BPAC.

**Themes and Narratives:**

- AC Transit was framed as collaborative and proactive in implementing traffic-safety improvements along International Boulevard.
- Partnership with the City of Oakland
- Implementation of “quick-build” safety improvements
- Connection to broader regional Vision Zero safety goals

**News Release:**

- July 9: AC Transit Receives Bus and Low- and No-Emission Grant Award

**Media Coverage:**

Daily Californian, Danville/San Ramon, the Office of Senator Padilla, Richmond Standard, and others.

**Themes and Narratives:**

- Significant federal investment in fleet electrification and hydrogen infrastructure
- Second consecutive year of major grant awards
- Expansion of hydrogen fuel-cell technology
- Coverage portrayed AC Transit as a consistent and successful grant recipient and a regional leader in zero-emission fleet deployment.

**News Release:**

- July 28: AC Transit Supports BART Service Disruptions, July 28

**Media Coverage:**

SF Chronicle, ABC7, CBS.

**Themes and Narratives:**

- AC Transit was framed as an essential mobility partner capable of providing swift and reliable emergency support.
- Rapid operational response to regional rail disruptions
- Strong cross-agency collaboration

**News Release:**

- August 5: Automated Camera Enforcement Expands Across Bus Lines

**Media Coverage:**

Extensive, including Mass Transit, Patch, CBS, KTVU, Silicon Valley Business Journal, GovTech, KRON, Reddit, Daily Californian, and others.

**Themes and Narratives:**

- Media framed AC Transit as technologically innovative and committed to improving reliability; public sentiment reflected mixed reactions to enforcement and privacy considerations.
- Implementation of AI-enabled bus-lane enforcement technology
- Reliability, deterrence, and safety improvements
- Public reaction ranging from strong support to concerns about citations and privacy.

**News Release:**

- September 26: Media Invitation for ZEB University

**Media Coverage:**

APTA Passenger Transport, ATU, Parsons, Stanford Hydrogen Initiative, YouTube, and broader industry outlets.

**Themes and Narratives:**

- Coverage positioned AC Transit as a pioneer in ZEB workforce training and safety, with regional and national influence.
- Workforce development in ZEB maintenance and safety
- National and academic recognition of AC Transit as a technical leader
- Advancement of hydrogen technologies

**News Releases:**

- November 20: GM/CEO Michael Hursh Transitions Roles
- December 16: Board Selects Kathleen Kelly as Interim General Manager

**Media Coverage:**

Metro Magazine, Transit Talent, Hoodline, APTA, Oaklandside, NBC Bay Area, Berkeleyside, Reddit.

**Themes and Narratives:**

- Coverage presented a balanced view of leadership accomplishments and accountability considerations, while highlighting organizational stability during the transition.
- Recognition of outgoing leadership accomplishments
- Public and media scrutiny of compensation and advisory roles
- Emphasis on continuity through Interim GM Kelly

**Sentiment Summary**

Media monitoring companies provide fee-based sentiment analysis for news articles, broadcasts, blogs, and other digital content, categorizing coverage as positive, neutral, or negative. Because the District does not currently contract with a third-party monitoring service, the sentiment assessment presented below is interpretive and should not be considered a definitive, algorithm-based evaluation of tone, keywords, or context.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Sentiment</b>	<b>Observations</b>
Realign (delays & approval)	Mixed to critical	Concerns related to equity, reliability, staffing pressures
Detours & service changes	Mixed	Public frustration balanced by District responsiveness
ZEB initiatives & grants	Strongly positive	Federal recognition and major funding awards
Safety initiatives	Positive	Viewed as proactive and multi-agency collaborative
Automated camera enforcement	Mixed	Support for enforcement, concerns over citations and privacy
Leadership transition	Mixed	Recognition of legacy with questions on compensation and oversight

## **2024 Earned Media Analysis**

Using available best practices, Staff analyzed earned media – defined as unpaid public exposure generated through press coverage – associated with District news releases issued in calendar year 2024. The District achieved considerable earned media at the local, regional, and, in some cases, national levels. The following summarizes the scope and nature of earned media generated by each release:

### **Realign Bus Network and Postponements (January – October)**

News Releases: January 25, September 10, October 11

Earned Media: Strong and sustained

- Coverage appeared across Oaklandside, Alameda Post, Contra Costa Pulse, Daily Californian, SF Gate/Bay City News, Local News Matters, Public Advocates, and Metro Magazine. These releases consistently generated citywide, regional, and advocacy-focused reporting.

### **Clean Buses and Federal Engagement (February)**

News Releases: February 9

Earned Media: National level

- The White House Readout amplified AC Transit’s participation in a national roundtable, placing the District within broader national discussions on clean-transit innovation. This release provided high reputational value and elevated the District’s profile beyond the Bay Area.

### **Downtown Oakland Nighttime Detours (March)**

News Releases: March 6

Earned Media: Immediate and widespread

- Coverage by Oaklandside, Hoodline, NBC Bay Area, and additional outlets reflected breaking-news interest. Reporting highlighted community response, operational adjustments, and public-safety considerations.

### **International Boulevard Safety Enhancements (April – May)**

News Releases: April 10

Earned Media: Broad and consistent

- Coverage from Local News Matters, Mercury News, Hoodline, Oaklandside, and Oakland BPAC emphasized the multi-agency nature of the safety effort. Partnership-driven and safety-focused stories generated reliable media pickup.

### **Federal Funding and Zero-Emission Fleet Expansion (July – September)**

News Releases: July 9

Earned Media: Very strong

- Regional and community outlets – including the Daily Californian, Danville/San Ramon, the Office of Senator Padilla, and Richmond Standard – highlighted federal investments supporting fleet electrification and hydrogen infrastructure.

### **Emergency Response Support for BART (July)**

News Releases: July 28

Earned Media: High value

- Coverage from the San Francisco Chronicle, ABC7, and CBS underscored AC Transit's rapid operational response and interagency coordination during the BART service disruption. Event-driven releases produce quick and high-impact coverage.

### **Automated Camera Enforcement (August)**

News Releases: August 5

Earned Media: Highest volume of the year

- Reports appeared in Mass Transit, Patch, CBS-TV, CBS-Radio, FOX, KRON, ABC, NBC, Silicon Valley Business Journal, GovTech, Reddit forums, the Daily Californian, and many more. The combination of technology, enforcement, and rider impact contributed to unusually broad and diverse media attention across both traditional and digital platforms.

### **Zero Emission Bus University (September – October)**

News Releases: September 26

Earned Media: Strong within industry and academic sectors

- Coverage included APTA Passenger Transport, ATU, Parsons, Stanford Hydrogen Initiative, and various technical and trade outlets. Stories focused on workforce development and hydrogen technology, reinforcing AC Transit's leadership role in zero emission maintenance training.

### **Leadership Transition (November – December)**

News Releases: November 20 and December 16

Earned Media: Widespread and high interest

- Metro Magazine, Transit Talent, Hoodline, APTA, Oaklandside, NBC Bay Area, Berkeleyside, and Reddit covered both announcements. Leadership transitions reliably attract both mainstream and industry press, generating sustained engagement.

Overall, nearly all 2024 news releases generated meaningful earned media, with several achieving high interest coverage across regional, national, or industry-specific outlets. While a small number of reports presented critical framing, these instances were limited. Overall, earned media associated with District messaging remained beneficial, expanding public awareness and reinforcing key priorities.

### **2024 News Release Digital Analysis**

Staff reviewed performance metrics associated with AC Transit news releases distributed during the calendar year 2024. The social media metrics, tracked through the District's third-party provider Sprout Social, reflect only those posts that included links to the corresponding press

releases. As social channels are used selectively to highlight rider-focused announcements, not every official release was promoted digitally.

Digital engagement indicators assessed include impressions, engagements, engagement rate, link clicks, and website page views. Impressions measure the visibility of a post, while engagements and engagement rate indicate the level of audience interaction. Link clicks and website page views reflect user interest in accessing the full news release and obtaining additional information.

Release Date	Impressions	Engagements	Engagement Rate	Link Clicks	Page Views	Category Rating
1/25	1,179	59	5.00%	31	608	<b>Very strong:</b> ER >3% indicates excellent audience interaction for agency content.
2/9	6,374	573	9.00%	347	338	<b>Exceptional:</b> Engagement well above typical benchmarks; strong link clicks indicate interest in press release content.
4/10	19,923	690	3.50%	113	826	<b>Very strong:</b> ER exceeds 3% benchmark, showing solid engagement despite high impressions.
7/9	7,301	489	6.70%	64	390	<b>Exceptional:</b> High ER reflects strong audience resonance.
7/28	1,246	192	15.40%	52	172	<b>Outstanding:</b> ER >10% is rare for public-sector posts; highly engaging content.
8/5	8,447	389	4.60%	20	892	<b>Very strong:</b> Engagement well above average.
11/20	15,675	1,472	9.40%	720	594	<b>Exceptional:</b> Strong ER and link clicks; content clearly resonated with followers.
12/6	11,894	1,138	9.60%	439	167	<b>Exceptional:</b> ER indicates high engagement; effective promotion of press release content.
12/16	6,593	404	6.10%	4	378	<b>Exceptional:</b> High ER, though link clicks are low, suggesting engagement was primarily reactions/comments/shares.

As shown in the 2024 News Releases Digital Engagement Table above, social media impressions ranged from approximately 1,200 to more than 19,000, demonstrating variations in audience interest based on subject matter and timing. Engagement rates generally aligned with or exceeded the common public-agency benchmark of 3-6%, as measured by Sprout Social. Several posts performed significantly above this range, including the federal funding announcement on July 28 (15.4%), and the leadership transition announcements on November 20 and December 6 (9.4% and 9.6%, respectively). These elevated rates indicate strong audience responsiveness.

Link clicks were highest for the November 20, 2024, leadership transition announcement, generating 720 clicks, demonstrating significant conversion from social media visibility to deeper content engagement. Website page views reflected these trends, with several releases – including network plan postponement (January 25), International Boulevard safety enhancements (April 10), automated camera enforcement update (August 5), and leadership transition (November 20), drawing between 600 and 900 views. This indicates sustained public interest in service-related information beyond the initial announcement.