

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 10/9/2024

Staff Report No. 23-250k

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Realign Final Network Plan Approval

ACTION ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST: ☐

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-035, which approves the proposed Realign Final Network Plan and Realign+ service additions, approves the service equity analyses, and directs the General Counsel to file a Notice of Exemption with Alameda and Contra Costa Counties and any other parties as may be required.

Staff Contact:

Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering
Claudia Burgos, Director of Legislative Affairs & Community Relations

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service

Initiative - Service Quality

The proposed Realign Final Network Plan and the Realign+ service additions are designed to improve AC Transit's bus network in response to post-pandemic conditions and travel patterns. Should the Board vote to adopt the proposed plan, service changes could be implemented as soon as March 2025.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

The proposed Realign Final Network Plan carries no additional operating costs because it is designed to maintain service levels at 85% of pre-pandemic levels, while keeping Bus Operator position counts at the current level. AC Transit's Fiscal Year 2024-25 budget is based on the 85% service level and the associated Bus Operator staffing.

As staffing levels increase, new service focused on a Priority Transit Network would be implemented as part of Realign+, a package of service improvements intended to increase service to 100% of pre-pandemic service levels. Implementation of Realign+ will increase operating costs as the Bus Operator count grows beyond current levels, albeit at a gradual pace as Bus Operators are added through the training process.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

Since Spring 2023, AC Transit has worked diligently to include robust public participation into the plan

iterations developed over the course of the Realign process. The most recent public engagement phase, conducted from August 2, 2024, through September 11, 2024, served as an opportunity for formal public comment from communities and stakeholders throughout the District. The Realign project team conducted 49 outreach activities, including community events and council presentations, with over 1,200 touchpoints recorded across the AC Transit service area. Staff and the Board also held a total of four public hearings on September 9, 10, and 11, 2024, to receive comments on the Draft Final Realign Network Plan.

In total, the District received 580 public comments. Public comments generally centered around proposed frequency reductions on some local lines, including lines 7, 65, 67, and 72R, proposed coverage changes on lines 19 and 21, and comments about areas not served by the proposed plan, including the possibility of service along the State Route 13 (SR-13) corridor to Merritt College. More detailed information on comments received, as well as outreach and engagement metric highlights during this period can be found in Attachment 4.

Revisions since the Public Hearings

Key differences between the attached proposed Realign Final Network Plan and the Draft Final Network Plan included as part of the September 2024 public hearings include:

- **Line 19** is proposed to extend to AC Transit Division 4 as it does today in response to feedback from Bus Operators and labor partners.

In addition, rather than traveling directly to and from Downtown Oakland via Marina Village Parkway and the Webster and Posey Tubes, the line will serve Alameda Point in both directions, traveling via Mitchell Ave., 5th St., Willie Stargell Ave., West Midway Ave., Pan Am Way, West Atlantic Ave., Ralph Appenzato Memorial Parkway, and Webster St.

This change will balance the desire for improved connections to Alameda Point, add new trip generators on the low-performing Line 19, and minimize impacts on existing through-riders on Line 20 traveling to Downtown Oakland.

- **Line 20** is proposed to operate as it does today, with the proposal for Line 19 serving Alameda Point.
- **Line 29** is proposed to be routed differently in Downtown Berkeley following productive discussions with City of Berkeley staff about layover space. The proposed northern layover would move to eastbound Addison St., just west of Oxford St. To accommodate this change, the line would operate via Bancroft, Shattuck, and Addison in the northbound direction, and via Addison, Oxford, Center, Shattuck, and Durant in the southbound direction. Buses would serve Downtown Berkeley BART in both directions to facilitate transfers.

Response to Feedback

This section summarizes the tenor of the comments received and staff's corresponding response for not incorporating this feedback into the final plan. Staff will consider all comments as development of an unconstrained service plan continues into 2025.

- **Line 7** comments focused on the proposed frequency reduction from every 30 minutes to every 60 minutes on existing segments north of downtown Berkeley, including in North Berkeley, unincorporated Kensington, El Cerrito, and Richmond. Comments discussed the importance of service for youth, student, and senior populations along the northern segments of the line, and the usability challenges of hourly transit service.

Three key factors explain the trade-offs associated with the retention of hourly service in the proposed final network plan.

First, while commenters cited the importance of the service among youth, student, and senior populations along the line, the Board-approved Realign guiding principles focus on prioritizing Equity Priority Communities (EPC) in allocating AC Transit's limited resources, rather than non-EPCs like those along the northern portion of the Line 7 alignment.

With respect to service equity and the proposed reallocation of resources from these services into other system reliability priorities, taken on its own, Line 7 north of downtown Berkeley falls into the bottom quarter of all AC Transit services when ranked by the number of people of color and low-income individuals per route mile. In absolute terms, the northern section of Line 7 serves the fourth-fewest people of color and the sixth-fewest number of low-income individuals of all routes systemwide.

Second, with the introduction of 30-minute service with the Line 7 pilot extension, ridership growth has occurred primarily on the Southside, College, Ashby, and Emeryville segments of the line, which would continue to be served by the proposed Line 27. Less growth has been seen on the pre-pilot segments of Line 7, with the most intense ridership growth concentrated south of Solano Avenue.

Details are provided in the table below.

	Time Period	Average Weekday Ridership	Δ	% of Growth
Line 7 (pre-pilot segments)	Spring 2023	449		
Line 7 (pre-pilot segments)	Spring 2024	1,195	+ 746	40.2%
Line 7 Extension	Spring 2024	1,112	+ 1,112	59.8%
Line 7 Overall	Spring 2023	449		
Line 7 Overall	Spring 2024	2,307	+ 1,858	

Third, this reinvestment of resources, together with other reallocations, allows the District to make the investments in route reliability identified in public outreach efforts, discussions with operations staff

and labor partners, and by the Board.

- **Line 18** comments focused primarily on a commenter-proposed extension from Montclair Village to Merritt College via the SR-13 corridor.

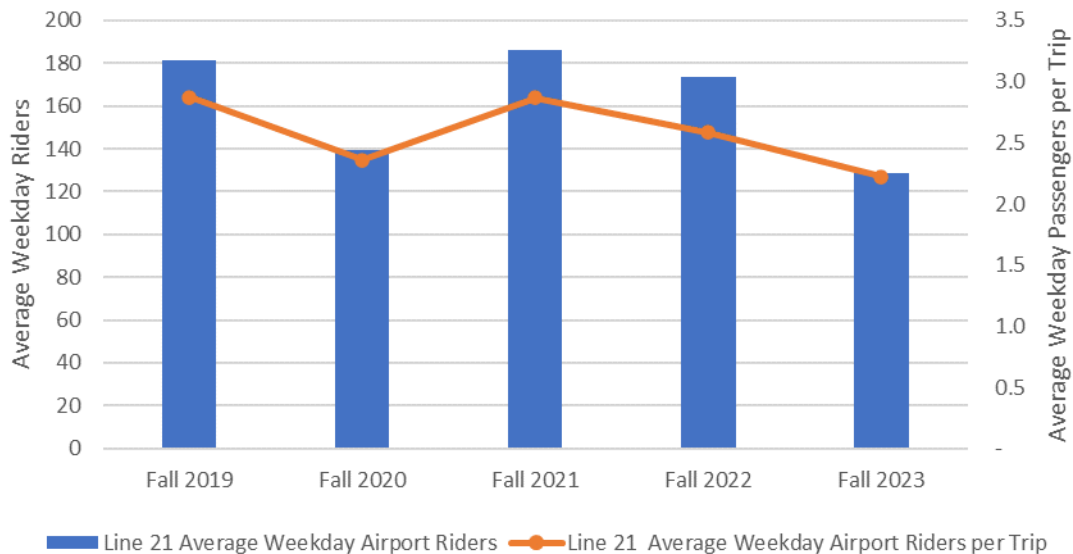
While commenters identified the importance of a potential service in improving student access to Merritt College, the Board-approved Realign guiding principles focus on prioritizing EPCs in allocating AC Transit's limited resources rather than non-EPCs like those along the SR-13 corridor in the Oakland Hills. The District has other competing needs that better align with the project guiding principles, like the use of its resources to reinforce the frequent transit network in EPCs, or making investments in reliability within the existing network. In addition, under the proposed Final Network Plan, Merritt College would continue to be served by Line 54 crosstown service, maintaining access to this key regional higher education destination.

- **Line 21** comments focused primarily on the proposed elimination of service to the San Francisco Bay Oakland International Airport.

First, while commenters identified the importance of the service among those who use it, and the Fruitvale Ave portions of the alignment travel through EPCs, Fruitvale and Dimond District residents would have ample opportunities to reach the airport on other transit service, including by transferring from the variety of different east-west AC Transit services connecting with Line 73, which would continue to serve the airport, as well as connections with BART. Most comments received have come from Alamedans on Bay Farm Island and on Alameda's East End as opposed to those in East Oakland's EPCs.

Second, while the fare differential between AC Transit services and the BART Oakland Airport Connector is significant, BART offers a discount program to offset the fare differential for employees, who are the most likely frequent potential users of Line 21 airport service.

Third, ridership per trip to and from the airport has been trending downwards since 2019, as depicted by the chart below.



Fourth, this reinvestment of resources, together with other reallocations, allows the District to make the investments in route reliability identified in public outreach efforts, discussions with operations staff and labor partners, and by the Board.

- **Line 65 and 67** comments focused on proposed frequency reductions. Comments focused on the importance of the service among youth, student, and senior populations in the Berkeley Hills, and the usability challenges of less frequent transit service.

Like with the Line 7 proposal, the Board approved Realign guiding principles focus on prioritizing EPCs in allocating AC Transit's limited resources, rather than a focus on communities along lines 65 and 67 alignments not included within the definition of an EPC.

With respect to service equity and the proposed reallocation of resources from these services into other system priorities, Lines 65 and 67 fall in the bottom quarter of all AC Transit services when ranked by the number of people of color and low-income individuals per route mile within range of both routes. In absolute terms, Lines 65 and 67, respectively, serve the fewest people of color and the third and second fewest number of low-income individuals, respectively of all routes system-wide.

- **Line 72R** comments focused on proposed frequency reductions. This proposed service reduction and reallocation reflects perhaps the most challenging trade-off of the proposed Final Network Plan.

First, the amount of service proposed for reduction on this line (from every 12 minutes to every 30 minutes on weekdays) is significant and the line serves many individuals in EPCs along the length of San Pablo Avenue. While Equity is a project guiding principle, so too are Reliability and Frequency, including addressing runtime and layover concerns throughout the system, while also maintaining frequent fifteen-minute or better service where most warranted. With limited staffing and budget, reliability improvements require reallocation of resources, and the total amount of service proposed on the San Pablo corridor would be able to absorb the anticipated passenger volumes while ensuring that the corridor between Jack London Square and the El Cerrito del Norte BART Station remains

served by fifteen minute or better frequency throughout the week.

Second, staff recognizes the importance of high-quality service on the San Pablo corridor. Based on the public outreach conducted throughout the Realign process, comments stated that the Rapid service overlay on San Pablo is extremely important to riders, even at a significantly reduced frequency. With the Realign+ service additions, however, Line 72R ranks as the top priority for added service.

With many competing service quality priorities, staff recognizes the importance of high-quality service on the San Pablo corridor and its role in providing service to equity communities in Richmond and San Pablo. For this reason, staff has included an alternative for the Board to consider which would prioritize Line 72R above other network priorities in the Alternatives Analysis section, though it would come at a significant cost on other lines given the level of service currently provided on Line 72R.

Title VI Service Equity Analysis

Staff has conducted a service equity analysis in compliance with federal guidance and has found no disparate impact or disproportionate burden associated with the recommended Realign Final Network Plan as detailed in Attachment 5. Staff recommends approving this fare and equity analysis pursuant to Board Policy 518.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

Key advantages of adopting the recommended Realign Final Network Plan:

- The plan expands service in new markets with ridership generation potential like Brooklyn Basin as well as EPCs currently underserved by crosstown service like South Berkeley.
- The plan invests in system-wide reliability improvements in response to public and labor partner feedback.
- The plan invests in new frequent service along major corridors in EPCs.
- Service additions as part of Realign+ would provide a blueprint for the District to continue investing in its most transit-oriented communities as staffing resources become available.

Key disadvantages of adopting staff's recommended Realign Final Network Plan include:

- Bus Operator and cost-neutral budget assumptions mean frequency and coverage losses in some communities are needed to reinvest resources in improvements elsewhere.
- Bus Operator and cost-neutral budget assumptions mean that more resource-intensive service improvements will have to wait for Realign+ and a future unconstrained plan.
- Without continued investment in on-street speed and reliability improvement measures with partner jurisdictions and investments in system-wide active service management, the conservative (slower) speed assumptions incorporated in the Title VI access modeling could become reality.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

Fixed Route Network

1. Reinvest frequency from Lines 12, 27, 29, 96, and NL into 15-minute service on Line 72R

Rather than waiting for Bus Operator counts to improve and implementation of the Realign+ service changes, the Board could adopt a modified plan that includes the changes depicted in the Background/Rationale section of this report and includes Line 72R operating at every 15 minutes throughout the day on weekdays. The recommendation would require the reduction of weekday frequency on lines 12, 27, 29, 96, and NL as depicted in the chart below:

Line	Weekday Frequency (Staff Recommendation)	Weekday Frequency (Alternative)
72R	30	15
12	20	24
27	30	35
29	30	35
96	30	35
NL	15	18

While staff has costed out this possibility, due to time constraints, potential Board action on implementation of this alternative should be conditional on approval of a revised Service Equity Analysis (SEA) that finds no disproportionate burden or disparate impact. Should the Board choose this alternative, the SEA would come to the Board at a future meeting date before approving implementation. Moreover, reductions on Lines 12, 27, 29, 96, and NL would move those lines to the top of the Realign+ priority list, replacing Line 72R on the District's path towards operating 100% of pre-pandemic service levels.

2. Provide more feedback, request additional plan revisions

The Board could choose not to adopt the staff recommendation or the above alternative at this time and instead direct staff to return at a future date with additional plan revisions based on additional Board feedback. This action would delay implementation beyond March 2025. With Board direction to make additional plan revisions, staff would recommend implementation in August 2025 to align with the District's typical timeline for a General Sign-up and the start of the 2025-26 school year. It is possible that this alternative would require the Board to set and hold another round of public hearings in line with Board Policies 110 and 544.

3. Forgo implementation of any alternative transit network plan

The Board could also choose to forego adoption of the resolution altogether and continue operation of the transit network that exists today. This alternative is not recommended given Board direction over the last two and a half years and proactive messaging to the community about the need for a transit network better aligned with passenger needs.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

SR 22-502 Network Redesign Timeline Update and Procurement Approval

SR 23-250 Realign Network Plan Update
SR 23-250a Realign Network Plan Update
SR 23-250b Realign Network Plan Update
SR 23-250c Realign Network Plan Update and Revised Guiding Principles Approval
SR 23-250d Realign Draft Service Scenarios
SR 23-250e Realign Phase 3 Summary
SR 23-250f Set Public Hearings: Realign Draft Final Plan Proposal
SR 23-250g AC Transit Realign Phase 4: Updates and Key Decision Points
SR 22-502a AC Transit Realign Timeline Extension and Change Order Approval for Realign Consultant Services
SR 23-250h Realign Draft Plan Workshop
SR 23-250i Set Public Hearings: Realign Draft Final Network Plan
SR 23-250j Public Hearings: Realign Draft Final Plan
Board Policy 110 - Public Hearing Process for the Board of Directors
Board Policy 544 - Service Adjustments

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution 24-035
2. Proposed Final Network Plan Matrix
3. Alternative 1 Matrix
4. Engagement Report
5. Title VI Service Equity Analysis
6. Table of Proposed New Streets
7. Maps of Proposed Discontinued Segments
8. Presentation
9. Engagement Report Appendix (includes all public comments)

Prepared by:

David Berman, Senior Transportation Planner

In Collaboration with:

Diann Castleberry, External Affairs Representative

Michael Eshleman, Service Planning Manager

Approved/Reviewed by:

Robert del Rosario, Director of Service Development and Planning

Claudia Burgos, Director of Legislative Affairs & Community Relations

Nichele Laynes, Director of Marketing, Communications & Customer Services

Lynette Little, Director of Civil Rights & Compliance

Dwain Crawley, Director of Transportation

Sebron Flenaugh III, Executive Director of Human Resources

Salvador Llamas, Chief Operating Officer

Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering

Aimee L. Steele, General Counsel/Chief Legal Officer