

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 1/22/2020

Staff Report No. 20-012

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager
SUBJECT: Double Decker Evaluation

BRIEFING ITEM

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving a report on the evaluation of the in-service double deckers with a recommendation to purchase more when funds become available.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Financial Stability and Resiliency
Initiative - Service Quality

Double-decker buses carry over a third more seated passengers than other high-capacity buses in the AC Transit fleet. This allows the District to provide more capacity at the same operational cost instead of adding service to meet demand. They have become a marketing tool in themselves; a passenger survey revealed half the passengers ride Transbay service more frequently because of them, and the dramatic ridership growth demonstrates this. In addition, passengers stated the buses significantly enhance Transbay service quality.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with this report. When the Transbay fleet reaches retirement age and when Regional Measure 3 funds become available for fleet expansion, staff will consider purchasing double deckers to replace and expand the Transbay fleet.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

Since December 2018, the District has operated twelve double decker buses on Transbay service every weekday. The attached report provides a full evaluation of the Alexander Dennis Enviro 500 double decker in service and makes a recommendation to purchase more for the Transbay fleet. Currently, Alexander Dennis is the only Buy America compliant manufacturer of low-height double decker buses that are height appropriate for California roadways.

Transbay service has seen rapid growth since the rebound from the Great Recession in 2013. With BART at capacity and the new Salesforce Transit Center open, AC Transit Transbay service has become a more attractive way to commute. The double deckers have only increased the attractiveness of the service. The passenger

survey demonstrated how positively they are viewed by passengers, with over 50 percent of respondents stating the double decker influenced their decision to ride the service more. Passengers with accessibility needs also considered them more favorable than the existing Motor Coach Industries (MCI) buses.

Internally, the feedback is more mixed. The operators and mechanics voiced reservations with the bus; however, the majority of those staff surveyed or interviewed would like to see more of these buses in the Transbay fleet. The Planning department's analysis proved dwell time to be less of a concern than originally thought, and given the overcrowding seen on many Transbay lines, the additional capacity benefit outweighs any constraints due to the height of the bus. However, Maintenance staff experienced most of the initial problems with the bus. These included some manufacturing defects and some design defects that were compounded by slower than anticipated parts deliveries from the manufacturer.

Most staff agreed the double-decker bus would be an asset to the District, though it comes with unique operational differences and some manufacturing concerns. Some of these are challenges, which staff will work on to resolve. Others are only differences, which staff recognize and have adjusted standard procedures to accommodate. Ultimately, staff recommends purchasing more double deckers when funds are available with two caveats:

1. Restructure the Transbay network to allow for more double-decker viable lines with minimal overhead obstructions. This goal will be folded into the planning of the Transbay Tomorrow expansion phase starting later this year.
2. Work with Alexander Dennis to alleviate some of the manufacturing concerns from Maintenance and Operations staff.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

Advantages include:

- The higher capacity buses allow the District to meet demand and grow ridership at a lower operational cost.
- The buses themselves are a proven marketing tool to grow ridership.

Disadvantages include:

- Staff time is required to resolve the manufacturing and design concerns with Alexander Dennis.
- Some Transbay lines require restructuring and coordination on clearing obstructions such as tree limbs and overhead wires before double decker deployment.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

The alternative to deploying double deckers on Transbay service is to double the operating cost and deploy two buses to achieve the same capacity. Staff does not recommend the alternative due to the lack of funds and operators available for additional service.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

SR 19-381 STIP Grant Programming Request

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Double Decker Evaluation

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