

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 1/14/2026

Staff Report No. 24-384b

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Salvador Llamas, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Updated Board Policy 545 - Service Standards Approval

ACTION ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST:

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider approving the proposed final draft of an updated Board Policy 545 - Service Standards. [Continued from the November 19, 2025, Board of Directors meeting.]

Staff Contact:

Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service

Initiative - Service Quality

The revisions to Board Policy 545 provide updated standards to assist the District in planning high quality bus service, measuring the quality of the customer experience, and continuously improving service delivery. The new metrics associated with this policy focus on active management of the bus system, in line with the 2022 Strategic Plan addendum.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no budgetary impact associated with the approval of the proposed policy amendments. However, meeting the aspirational goals included in the proposed policy would require additional funding over time to hire operators and road supervision, and pursue the capital investments needed to increase service levels.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

Overview

Staff developed and shared a first draft of a revised Board Policy 545 (Service Standards) at the September 24, 2024, Board Meeting. This initial draft was based upon a Best Practices Review conducted by the Realign project team, which included a thorough overview of practices at seven peer agencies and drew upon public outreach and engagement throughout 2023 and 2024 during the Realign planning process.

Staff made edits and presented a revised draft to the Board at its November 19, 2025, meeting. This draft

incorporated comments received at the September 24, 2024 meeting and additional stakeholder outreach with transit advocates and leadership from the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 192 (ATU) conducted in April and October 2025, respectively.

At the November 19, 2025, meeting, the Board voted to continue the matter until January 2026 so staff could address additional items discussed at the meeting, including a comment letter from Public Advocates, as well as issues related to first mile/last mile options in low-density parts of the District, and questions about service frequency standards.

Summary of Feedback on November 2025 Draft Document and Staff Responses

From the Board of Directors:

Microtransit and First/Last Mile Issues:

The Board's action directed staff to explore questions related to first mile/last mile transportation access within the policy. In response, staff has added language into the standards highlighting first mile/last mile access challenges and encouraging partnerships with peer jurisdictions on capital infrastructure improvements to improve walk access, micromobility solutions like scooters and bikeshare, and programmatic solutions such as carpooling and vanpooling. Given the Board's continued interest, staff will plan more robust Board engagement on first/last-mile issues and the potential for District-led solutions, such as microtransit service, separate from this policy update.

Span of Service:

The Board desired more clarity on Span of Service minimums and a comparison with peer transit agencies. For local service, the proposed minimums of 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. are in line with regional and national peers. TCRP Synthesis 139 (Transit Service Evaluation Standards, 2019) cites that for the 12 agencies surveyed with standards for route spans, spans generally “[vary] by type of service, from 12 to 18 hours Monday-Friday [and] usually less on weekends.” A table of span standards from the Realign team’s peer review is also included as Attachment 4. The full peer review document was included as an attachment to Staff Report 24-384.

The standard sets a floor for service rather than a maximum, and it is important to note that the standards' performance-based approach uses multiple performance indicators, including crowding, service productivity, and cost metrics by time of day and day type as rationale for making future service adjustments. Moreover, increasing the minimum Span of Service standard would require the District to identify the resources to be compliant since we are currently only compliant with a 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. proposed standard.

From Public Advocates:

Microtransit:

Public Advocates' letter supports microtransit's removal from the standards by staff. Should the concept be reintroduced, Public Advocates calls for productivity standards at or above those for local service. At this time, per Board direction, additional language has been added addressing first mile/last mile issues, and staff will further engage with the public on how future District-led solutions might look.

Span of Service:

Public Advocates' letter calls for the Primary Route Network (PRN) standards to be better than 7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m., suggesting that 5:00 a.m. - 12:00 a.m. be applied to routes we operate today rather than as an aspirational goal. Correspondence also argues that the standards should explicitly prescribe the preconditions where Local service would be operated between 7:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m., which is not explicitly discussed in the draft policy.

Operating all routes within the PRN from 5:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. throughout the week would be cost-prohibitive at this time, with operator staffing representing an additional challenge. However, based on current operations, staff has incorporated a near-term 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. weekday minimum and a 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. weekend minimum for the PRN.

Frequency:

Public Advocates' letter calls for the aspirational local standard to match the 20-minute All-Nighter standard in the November 2025 draft. In response, staff has maintained the aspirational Owl standard at 20 minutes while maintaining the aspirational minimum for Local service at 30 minutes. Compared to Local service, staff aspires for AC Transit's All-Nighter network to be a nighttime complement to the District's PRN in the District's core transit markets. The long-term strategy for All-Nighter is to continue an expansion of high quality transit where it already exists, including in overnight periods.

The letter also argues that the frequency standards should explicitly prescribe the preconditions under which Local service would operate between 7pm and 1am. Similar to much of this policy, staff's approach to service at times above and beyond the prescribed minimums aims to be driven by actual service performance. Under the policy, staff would consider bolstering evening service for lines that perform better than their peers and consider reductions for those that perform worse.

BRT versus Local Service:

Public Advocates' letter objects to a higher standard for cost per boarding for BRT versus local (\$5 versus \$20 per boarding), suggesting that expecting high performance for capital-intensive BRT services like Tempo would be inequitable, citing the potential for less cost-effective Local services to be prioritized for investment in additional service over BRT. Public Advocates also objects to a higher crowding standard (2x the number of seats on BRT versus 1.25x the number of seats on the Local fleet).

Staff incorporated a higher standard for cost per boarding for BRT as compared to local service because the District, together with federal and local funds, invested more than \$200 million in the International Blvd corridor to provide a high-quality transit service through an equity community with significant transportation needs. Since they require significant capital investment, the District and its funding partners expect BRT to perform favorably in terms of cost. It is also important to note that cost per boarding is not the only factor staff would consider when prioritizing a corridor for additional service; service productivity and crowding metrics, among other network design considerations detailed in the policy, will be considered accordingly. Board Policy 545 will also be complemented by forthcoming updates to the District's Title VI program and Board Policy 518 (Title VI and Environmental Justice Service Review and Compliance Report Policy).

Staff incorporated a different load factor for crowding for the BRT sub-fleet because the BRT fleet's unique double-sided door configuration has fewer seats (35) and can physically accommodate more standees than other buses in the AC Transit fleet relative to a typical 60-foot coach (47-52 seats, varying by specific bus type).

On a BRT bus, a load factor of 2 corresponds with a planned 85th percentile load of 70 individuals, as compared to 65 individuals, which corresponds to a load factor of 1.25 on a 60-foot conventional New Flyer bus in the AC Transit fleet. While the double-door configuration allows for fewer seats than a conventional bus, it speeds boarding and alighting and helps the District realize the benefits of premium BRT design features like level boarding and precision docking to improve reliability and decrease travel times.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

Approving the amended policy reflects the District's Strategic Plan, shaping how the District plans future service, monitors the quality of service delivery, and makes improvements. This updated policy will help the District better use new technologies and methods to make better data-driven decisions.

Other than cost to achieve some of the goals and standards of the policy, staff can identify no disadvantages.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

The Board could choose to retain the existing version of the policy and forego the adoption of a revised policy, but this is not recommended given that this revised policy draws upon nearly two years' worth of analysis and community outreach and engagement work to help align the District's practices with today's transit industry best practices.

The Board could also elect to receive this report, provide additional feedback, and direct staff to receive another round of feedback on this draft from the public and ATU and have staff return with a third proposed final draft that reflects that feedback. The Board could direct Staff to further include specific elements already discussed, or further direct staff to explore other performance management avenues. Given the multiple rounds of feedback and revisions and the urgent need for a policy that better meets the District's needs, these options are also not recommended. New standards will bolster efforts to identify issues and implement solutions in a virtuous cycle that benefits the District's customers and operators.

Policy changes and decisions on possible alternatives are discussed in the Background section of this report.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

SR 24-384a Updated Board Policy 545 - Service Standards

SR 24-384 Draft Board Policy 545 (Service Standards) Update

BP 501 - Bus Stops

BP 518 - Title VI and Environmental Justice Service Review and Compliance Report Policy

BP 544 - Service Adjustments

Existing BP 545 - Service Standards and Design Policy

BP 546 - Standards for Operation of Supplementary Service

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Revised BP 545 - Service Standards and Design Policy (proposed final draft)
2. Existing BP 545 - Service Standards and Design Policy
3. BP 545 Redline comparing November 2025 draft and January 2026 Draft

4. Table of Peer Agency Service Spans from Peer Review

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