

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 8/6/2025

Staff Report No. 25-369

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Salvador Llamas, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: SB 434 Final Report

BRIEFING ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST:

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving a report on findings of the Rider Safety Survey and accompanying focus groups as required by Senate Bill 434 (Min), including current and future efforts.

Staff Contact:

Claudia Burgos, Interim Executive Director of External Affairs, Marketing & Communications

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Safe and Secure Operations

Initiative - Service Quality

By gathering feedback from its riders, the District demonstrates its commitment to ensuring safe and secure operations while enhancing service quality. This project supports the District's goal of providing safe and secure operations and enhancing public and policymaker support.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

On June 12, 2024, the Board adopted Resolution 24-021 authorizing the General Manager or designee to execute a funding agreement with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for \$250,000. This funding, provided by Caltrans in the form of a grant to the District, supported compliance with Senate Bill (SB) 434 through the development, administration, and analysis of a rider safety survey and related focus groups.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

Senate Bill 434 (Min), *Public Transit for All: Improving Safety & Increasing Ridership*, passed in 2023, required the ten California transit operators with the highest ridership to conduct and publish survey data on "street harassment" experienced by transit riders.

The rider safety survey was administered between November 7 and December 1, 2024, using both online and intercept methods. Questions were based on the Mineta Transportation Institute's template and offered in English, Spanish, and Chinese. A total of 1,533 riders responded, 686 through intercept surveys and 848 online. Outreach emphasized equity priority communities and high-ridership routes. To carry out this work,

The District engaged D&A Communications, a consultant with expertise in community engagement and culturally responsive outreach.

As required by the bill, the District posted preliminary survey findings on the District's website by December 31, 2024. Preliminary findings were presented internally to the District's Service Quality Enhancement Task Force in January 2025.

In addition to the required survey, AC Transit facilitated a series of focus groups in the spring of 2025 to further explore key themes and provide additional context to the findings, particularly from rider groups who may be underrepresented in traditional survey data. Together, the survey and focus groups offer a comprehensive view of safety perceptions and experiences among riders.

Survey Findings

- 81% of respondents reported feeling *somewhat safe* or *extremely safe* using AC Transit
- Among the 42% who experienced or witnessed unsafe behaviors while using AC Transit:
 - Most said the behavior occurred onboard buses, particularly in Oakland and Alameda
 - 77% did not report what they experienced or witnessed to AC Transit staff, law enforcement, or another authority
 - Of those who did report 42% felt the response was inadequate
- Most survey respondents identified as women (58%), which may influence both the types and frequency of unsafe behaviors reported

As with most self-administered surveys, there is a possibility of self-selection bias, especially given the focus on safety. Participants with personal experiences or strong views may be more likely to respond. Also, the survey's anonymity may encourage greater disclosure of sensitive experiences. While these factors are important to consider, the demographic diversity and sample size lend strength to the overall findings.

In April 2025, five focus groups were held to explore these survey findings in greater depth. The sessions were conducted in English, Spanish, and Cantonese, and included specific groups such as:

- English-speaking riders
- Spanish-speaking riders
- Cantonese-speaking riders
- Youth riders (ages 15-19)
- Riders with disabilities

Participants described concerns about safety shaped by identity, location, and time of day. Many expressed uncertainty or dissatisfaction with reporting options, especially those with limited English proficiency or disabilities. The presence of supportive drivers, visible ambassadors, and discreet communication tools were all mentioned as potential enhancements. Youth in particular called for cleaner buses and a visible staff presence to improve safety and emphasized that staff should treat all riders respectfully and avoid making assumptions based on appearance or identity.

Overall, the findings indicate that while many riders generally feel safe, safety concerns are not evenly distributed across the system. Factors such as gender, race, language spoken, and disability affect riders' sense of security. The findings also identified gaps in the reporting process.

Together, the survey and focus group data present a valuable foundation for future agency discussions around safety and reaffirms the District's commitment to a safe environment for all riders.

Tracking Harassment Incidents

In response to the need for more comprehensive tracking of harassment and other unsafe behaviors, the District has expanded its data collection efforts beyond rider and employee surveys. Beginning in May 2024, the Alameda County and Contra Costa Sheriff's Offices-under contract with the District-initiated systematic reporting of harassment-related incidents. This data is incorporated into AC Transit's annual Protective Services report provided to the Board of Directors, contributing to a more consistent and data-driven understanding of public safety concerns.

For Fiscal Year 2025, 18 incidents were classified as street harassment. For internal purposes, these reports generally reflect unwelcome, inappropriate, or threatening behavior that causes discomfort or distress but does not rise to the level of a criminal offense. Such incidents are documented as non-criminal and are tracked separately from offenses such as assault or battery. If harassment escalates into a criminal act, the more serious offense is recorded and categorized, accordingly, these incidents are not included in the non-criminal harassment count.

Internal Efforts:

In addition to this survey effort, the District is actively working to enhance safety for riders and operators through initiatives such as:

Past Efforts

- In September 2019, the District launched *Ride with Kindness*, a public education campaign encouraging awareness and courtesy toward riders with disabilities through clear, friendly tips.
- In March 2021, the District publicly affirmed its support for the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community through an article on its website, aligning with national efforts to combat hate crimes.
- In January 2022, AC Transit joined transit agencies nationwide in the *Put the Brakes on Human Trafficking* campaign, raising awareness through onboard signage and digital outreach. The District received an APTA AdWheel Award for its educational impact and partnership approach.
- In August 2024, the District launched a safety brochure to promote kindness and safe behavior among student riders, using a colorful brochure with student-friendly guidance distributed.
- In May 2024, the sheriff (who the District contracts with) started collecting data on harassment. Since then, the District has averaged 4.7 non-criminal harassment-related reports per quarter. It is important to note that these figures do not include incidents classified under criminal statutes.
- In November 2024, the District joined the California Transit Association's (CTA) efforts to secure an author to introduce statewide legislation focused on enhancing penalties against those that commit crimes against transit employees, AB 394 is currently advancing through the State legislature.
- In July 2025, Operator safety decals were installed on operator barriers across the fleet to highlight the significant penalties for assaulting a transit worker.

Current Efforts

- In July 2025, the District will roll out a mental health training in partnership with the Employee Assistance Program called Navigating Mental Health Encounters in Transit. This training is designed for operators and District staff to build awareness around biases related to riders experiencing mental health challenges which may or will result in reduction of stress, anxiety, and support longevity in the field.
- The District is currently completing the installation of 282 permanent driver protective barriers on buses, bringing the total to 535 buses to be equipped with this enhanced safety feature.

Future Efforts

- Following the initial launch of Mobile App 2.0, planned for late 2025, the District will explore features to enhance rider and operator safety in future App releases for real-time incident reporting and improved feedback loops.
 - The estimated initial cost for implementing this technology is \$75,000, which includes set-up and the first year's subscription. The ongoing estimated annual subscription cost is \$60,000.
- The District is exploring the development of a formal Rider Code of Conduct, similar to policies adopted by TriMet and LA Metro, to clarify expectations and support a safer, more respectful transit environment.
 - While planning is underway, the cost and implementation timeline for this initiative are still to be determined.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

This project fulfills the District's requirements as set forth in SB 434 and provides a meaningful dataset to inform ongoing conversations about rider safety. The main challenge moving forward is ensuring staff capacity to sustain internal focus and ensuring adequate resources for any future initiatives.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

This report is presented for informational purposes; no alternatives were considered.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

SR 24-293: SB 434 Implementation and Current Rider Harassment Reporting Procedures

ATTACHMENTS:

1. SB 434 Final Report: Riders' Perception of Safety on AC Transit
2. Letters to the Legislature
3. TriMet Rider Code of Conduct
4. Samples of Collateral from Past Campaigns

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