

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 6/11/2025

Staff Report No. 25-318

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Salvador Llamas, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: BART Early Bird Express Agreement 2025-2028

ACTION ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST: ☐

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider authorizing the General Manager to negotiate and execute an agreement with the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) to provide early morning bus service for a period effective August 8, 2025, through February 10, 2028, with three (3) additional single-year options.

Staff Contact:
Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Strong Public and Policymaker Support
Initiative - Service Quality

Since February 2019, AC Transit and other transit agencies in the Bay Area have provided early morning bus service, branded as the Early Bird Express, on behalf of District BART while it conducts long-term state-of-good-repair maintenance of its right-of-way during early morning hours. The Early Bird Express provides critical regional mobility for those who would otherwise take BART before 5:00 a.m. BART has expressed interest in continuing the Early Bird Express for approximately three additional years.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

The District is reimbursed by BART for all costs associated with operating Early Bird Express service. As the Early Bird Express service network has been greatly reduced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the estimated annual cost to operate Early Bird Express at current service levels and the agreed upon \$203 hourly rate under the last agreement is approximately \$762,085. BART and the transit agencies which operate the Early Bird Express network on its behalf also maintain open lines of communication should there be a need to adjust the service levels.

Using the most current fully-loaded rate of \$281.48 based on preliminary reporting to the 2024/2025 National Transit Database, and assuming no escalation for the term of the agreement, the estimated annual cost to operate the Early Bird Express at current service levels is \$904,634. Staff will negotiate with BART to bring the previous hourly rate more inline with current costs. Staff will also negotiate for the new agreement to contain

language permitting the hourly rate adjustment should operating costs increase.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

Following the passage of Measure RR in 2016, BART began significant maintenance of its track and right-of-way. To support this effort, AC Transit and other transit operators in the region began operating the Early Bird Express network in February 2019 to allow BART to begin its weekday operating day later and allow for a longer maintenance window during the overnight hours.

After the pandemic was declared in March 2020, BART reduced the scope of the Early Bird Express network, suspending service on some lines in their entirety and reducing the number of daily trips on others. Since then, BART has directed the participating transit agencies to adjust Early Bird Express service levels as dictated by passenger demand.

The term mutually agreed upon between the District and BART and approved by the Board of Directors covered the period from service inception in February 2019 through August 2025. BART has requested a new three-year agreement to continue the Early Bird Express service and the provision for up to three (3) single-year options as there remains significant value in the extended overnight right-of-way maintenance period. BART has requested that the base term of this new agreement end on February 10, 2028, to align it with the agreements it has with other transit agencies providing Early Bird Express service.

Presently, AC Transit operates a total of four Early Bird Express trips on three separate lines on weekday mornings as follows:

Line	From	Trip Start Time	Scheduled Arrival Salesforce Transit Center	Average Daily Ridership, Winter 2024
701	Pittsburg/Bay Point BART	3:53	4:40	34
701	Pittsburg/Bay Point BART	4:05	4:50	21
702	Pleasant Hill BART	4:04	4:40	11
703	Dublin/Pleasanton BART via Bay Fair BART and Fruitvale BART	3:47	4:40	9

All three lines end at Salesforce Transit Center.

While ridership is relatively low, especially compared to pre-pandemic ridership, the Early Bird Express provides lifeline service at a time of day when no other public transit options exist.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

Advantages: Continuing Early Bird Express service will reinforce the District's strong collaborative relationship with BART and permit the upkeep of a key piece of regional infrastructure. The service also provides an opportunity for the District to keep a portion of the double-decker fleet in operation since they are limited as to where they can travel.

Disadvantages: While fully funded by BART, the service requires operator resources that could potentially be used to provide service elsewhere in the District. However, because of the off-peak time of this service and its short duration, other uses of these resources would be of limited productivity since the service is tied to early morning AM peak service.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

Staff evaluated whether to extend the Early Bird Express agreement but determined it would result in a sudden loss of service for customers and would mean the District's withdrawal of participation in addressing a key regional service gap.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

Staff Report 18-219b, BART Early Bird Express Contract Amendment

ATTACHMENTS:

None

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Approved/Reviewed by:

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