

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 8/5/2020

Staff Report No. 20-302

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Recovery Plan

ACTION ITEM

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider adopting the draft COVID-19 Recovery Plan - Version 1.0; in addition, receive an update on the District's health and safety activities related to bus operations.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Safe and Secure Operations
Initiative - Service Quality

The proposed COVID-19 Recovery Plan provides guidance to AC Transit on actions to keep bus service safe for riders and operators alike. It also focuses on providing the best quality of service and highest levels of service possible given the impacts of the pandemic and financial resources available.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

While the level of service recommended in the plan is lower than pre-pandemic service levels, the District would not realize significant cost savings except through the attrition of employees. In fact, the plan carries an overall cost due to the added safety protocols and communications required to keep operators and riders safe and aware of the District's latest efforts. Preliminary calculations estimate the cost for the District's response to the pandemic is \$2.5 million annually.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, AC Transit staff has made tremendous efforts to respond to the pandemic, keep operators and passengers as safe as possible, and continue with core business operations as feasible. In addition, staff has made every effort to plan for pandemic scenarios in a public transit environment that is changing on a daily basis and has an uncertain future.

Staff's plans and activities associated with the pandemic have been presented to the Board of Directors through several reports and presentations. On June 3, 2020, staff presented the preliminary components of a recovery plan, which addressed many topics including finances, workforce availability, bus operations and planning, fare collection, passenger safety, passenger communications, and employee health & safety. Since that time, staff has returned to the board with in-depth discussions on the budget, service planning and

vehicle capacity. On August 5, 2020, staff will update the Board on paratransit operations and planning.

The attached draft COVID-19 Recovery Plan - Version 1.0 summarizes staff's activities to date and high-level future plans under the following categories:

- **Health & Safety** for passengers and operators including vehicle sanitation
- **Planning & Operations** for Local, Transbay, Supplementary and Paratransit services
- **Community Engagement** with riders, communities, and stakeholders
- **Financial Outlook** including revenues and expense
- **Employee and Facility Health and Safety (SMART Plan)**
- **Innovation and Technology** to support activities and plans above

In addition, the plan summarizes activities under the various categories in relation to different phases of the pandemic that parallel the four stages of the California Resilience Roadmap. The proposed four phases of pandemic response for AC Transit are:

- 1. Emergency Response** - AC Transit's immediate response to the pandemic and the state and county Shelter-In-Place (SIP) Order, including the closure of businesses and facilities. This is equivalent to Stage 1 of the California Resilience Roadmap.
- 2. Stabilize** - AC Transit's response after having a better understanding of the severity and duration of the pandemic. County and other health authorities begin to lift the SIP Order and allow some businesses and facilities to reopen. This is equivalent to Stages 2 and 3 of the California Resilience Roadmap.
- 3. Recovery** - An end to the pandemic is in sight via the imminent development of a vaccine, a reliable treatment, or the virus has run its course. There is further lifting of the SIP Order but health and safety guidelines still exist. AC Transit can more clearly assess its financial outlook and plan accordingly. This is equivalent to Stage 4 of the California Resilience Roadmap.
- 4. Beyond COVID-19** - The virus is contained and the pandemic is over. Economic recovery is in full swing but traffic conditions are worse than pre-pandemic and travel patterns are different. AC Transit can start to grow service to pre-pandemic levels assuming commensurate revenue growth and no restrictions on ridership.

Content for the draft Recovery Plan has been drawn from official guidance at all levels of government from local to federal. Staff also borrowed from successful actions of local peers. In addition, a number of AC Transit staff are participating in various American Public Transportation Association (APTA) recovery committees where guidance is developed and staff can learn from best practices.

Staff collaborated with the District's labor unions on specific components of the plan such as the design and installation of operator protection shields, training and use of disinfecting fogger machines, and enforcement of safe practices to minimize spread of the virus. Content of the plan was developed by unionized employees who play an essential role in AC Transit recovery.

Given the recent uptick in positive cases coupled with the rollback of business and facilities opening, AC

Transit is unfortunately still in the Emergency Response phase of the Recovery Plan. However, some aspects of the District's activities will advance to the next phase such as the increase in bus service scheduled for August 9, 2020. Other aspects could advance or regress depending on changes in environmental and financial conditions. Flexibility is key for all of AC Transit's activities during the pandemic.

If approved, the intent of the plan is to provide full transparency to the Board, public, riders, staff, and stakeholders regarding the District's response to the pandemic. It is a planning document that can be reformatted and edited for use as a public-facing document or for other purposes.

The plan is truly a living document and will evolve over time as additional guidance, standards and laws are released by various governing entities such as the multiple counties that AC Transit serves, the state, APTA, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). In addition, the efforts of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force will develop additional guidance and direction for the region's transit agencies to adopt. Finally, future updates to the plan may be required as the Board considers adoption of a budget and service plan in the next fiscal year. As a result, staff envisions releasing multiple updates and versions.

Health & Safety Update

The development of Version 1.0 of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan gives staff the opportunity to update the Board on health and safety activities associated with the District's response to the pandemic. Here is a highlight of those activities:

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** - Once staff identified consistent suppliers, the District distributed masks, gloves, wipes, and hand sanitizer daily to all operators. Staff is investigating processes to distribute some PPE to riders as a safety mitigation.
- **Mask-wearing Enforcement** - Staff developed a public communications campaign requiring mask-wearing based on state regulation. Staff is developing an enforcement plan that is sensitive to law enforcement fears and minimizes the burden of enforcement on operators.
- **Physical Distancing** - The District promoted 6-foot physical distancing through limiting vehicle capacity to 10 passengers on a 40-foot bus. In addition, the District implemented rear-door boarding in part to promote a more even distribution of passengers on the bus. Staff does not recommend relaxing physical distancing standards until multiple criteria are met, per county guidance.
- **Contact Tracing** - Staff is obtaining the history of physical contact between employees that have tested positive and other staff. This information is kept confidential and shared only with affected staff in order to take the necessary health and safety action as directed by the counties and the CDC.
- **Vehicle Sanitation** - Staff has reinforced the proper procedures to clean and disinfect vehicles, including use of PPE for service employees. EPA-approved cleaning products were introduced in daily sanitation of vehicles at the fuel island. Finally, staff is engaged in daily disinfecting of buses by fogging.
- **Vehicle Ventilation** - The current practice is to run the vehicle HVAC system to bring air in and open

the rear roof hatch for air exit to facilitate air exchange. The operator's window is to remain closed to avoid interior airborne particulates from exiting past their face. Staff has also added filtration media to buses not equipped.

- **Fleet Assignments** - Where feasible, dispatchers are assigning the largest available multi-door vehicles to promote physical distancing and rear-door boarding/alighting.
- **Standby Shadow Buses** - Division Transportation staff, in coordination with Supervision and Planning, regularly deploy standby "shadow" buses to increase capacity on routes with ridership that often exceeds vehicle capacity. Deployment is based on trip-level ridership data collected through the Automatic Passenger Counter (APC) system. A sample of data collected and analyzed for this activity is attached. Staff will continue this as long as operators are available to support the effort and ridership demand continues to meet or exceed vehicle capacity.
- **Fare Collection** - The District suspended fare collection and moved to rear-door passenger boarding to protect bus operators. Staff will consider resuming fare collection upon the installation of temporary operator protection shields on all buses in operation.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

The primary advantage of developing a public-facing recovery plan is that it provides transparency for the District's activities in response to the pandemic. The primary disadvantage of releasing the plan is that information on the pandemic and the virus is constantly changing forcing AC Transit to pivot in response. Therefore, staff must regularly update the content of the plan and/or include language that allows for flexibility.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

Staff considered not releasing a recovery plan given the number of unknowns with regard to the pandemic and its precarious future in the Bay Area in the coming months. However, the severity of the pandemic led staff to further commit to releasing Version 1.0 of the plan to the public to demonstrate that the District is doing everything in its power to provide bus service to those making essential trips while keeping passengers and bus operators as safe as possible.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

June 3, 2020 - Board Workshop on COVID-19 Recovery

ATTACHMENTS:

1. COVID-19 Recovery Plan - Version 1.0
2. Sample Route-level Passenger Overload Data
3. Staff Presentation

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