

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 7/22/2026

Staff Report No. 26-309

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Salvador Llamas, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Line 51A/51B Transfer at the Rockridge BART Station

BRIEFING ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST: ☒

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving an update on the Line 51A and Line 51B transfer at the Rockridge BART station. [Requested by Director Peeples 11/11/2015, 10/23/2019 and Director Walsh 6/9/2021, 11/19/2025].

Staff Contact:
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STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service
Initiative - Service Quality

This report provides an update on staff efforts since presenting a staff report to the Board in November 2021 to improve the transfer between the lines 51A and 51B at the Rockridge BART Station. It also examines additional proposals to improve the transfer for Board consideration and reports back on other staff efforts.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

This report is informational only. Previous studies and proposed alternatives have costs associated with them but no action is recommended in this report.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

In 2006, staff began a service evaluation of Line 51 - the highest ridership route at the time - to identify solutions to bus bunching and low on-time performance. This evaluation resulted in two concepts. First, in 2010, AC Transit split Line 51 into two lines (lines 51A and 51B). The northern terminal of Line 51A and the southern terminal of Line 51B were located along College Avenue adjacent to Rockridge BART. Second, in 2012, the District invested \$10 million in Transit Performance Initiative (TPI) funds to install transit improvements- queue jumps and transit signal priority, in addition to optimizing bus stops. This project was substantially completed in 2015. Both initiatives improved service quality along the line but required some riders to transfer buses at the Rockridge BART station.

Today, lines 51A and 51B operate every 12 minutes for most of the day with 15-20 minute headways in the late evening and 30-minute headways before Line 851 late-night service begins at midnight. Together, these two lines carry nearly 14,000 riders (Winter 2026) per weekday and connect with five BART stations, major schools (including Oakland Technical High School, Berkeley High School and Alameda High School), hospitals (Kaiser, Alta Bates, Oakland's Pill Hill) and 27 AC Transit local or transbay routes. Table 1 details the bus stops along the two lines with the highest boardings. Rockridge BART has the third highest boardings (Table 1). However, not all riders are transferring between the routes and may instead be traveling in the commercial core around the station or transferring onto BART. Due to Clipper data limitations and the usage of other fare payments, transfer data is difficult to ascertain.

Table 1 - Top 5 Average Weekday Boardings on Line 51A + 51B

Stop Group	Daily Boardings
UC Berkeley	2052
Berkeley BART	897
Rockridge BART	891
12th BART	743
Fruitvale BART	570

In November 2021, staff presented SR 21-470, which included the Rockridge BART Station Alternatives Analysis (Attachment 1). The report examined four near-term and five long-term solutions to improve the transfer experience at the station. At that Board meeting, the Board and staff discussed two alternatives to improve the transfer: 1) Interline lines 51A and 51B and 2) Implement the Connection Protection feature in the District's Clever Devices communications system.

An interline of Line 51A and Line 51B was not implemented due to reliability concerns, which was consistent with Board feedback. Traffic conditions on College Avenue or through the Alameda Tubes could incur poor on-time performance that would impact both lines if interlined. Staff also evaluated the Connection Protection feature on buses, which would instruct an operator to hold for a defined amount of time in order to allow for riders to transfer, in the event the connecting trip was late. The Connection Protection was not implemented due to limitations in the existing version of the HASTUS scheduling software and concerns about reducing reliability on first time point departures for the connecting service. At this time, the District is working with the vendor to upgrade to a newer version where Connection Protection functionality is possible. Inclusion of this functionality, however, will compete with other District priorities for HASTUS maintenance hours and may require additional time to come online.

Since 2021, staff have worked to improve the scheduled transfer on lines 51A and 51B at Rockridge BART while balancing other priorities for these trunk routes. A seven-minute scheduled transfer window between the two services will allow enough time to get between the stops and accommodate for schedule delays. Table 2, below, identifies how many scheduled trips have at least four minutes and no greater than ten minutes at Rockridge BART for riders to make the transfer.

Table 2 - Percent of Schedule Connections in Ideal Range (4-10 minutes)

ALL DAY								
Day Type	From	To	Direction	2208FA	2308FA	2408FA	2508FA	2601WR
Weekday	51A	51B	Northbou	63.7	43.0	20.9	66.7	60.7
Weekday	51B	51A	Southbou	50.0	35.6	57.5	57.6	57.6
Saturday	51A	51B	Northbou	69.4	65.7	71.6	53.1	53.1
Saturday	51B	51A	Southbou	29.2	70.6	66.2	45.6	45.6
Sunday	51A	51B	Northbou	45.2	29.2	29.2	59.4	59.4
Sunday	51B	51A	Southbou	58.3	28.4	28.4	58.8	58.8

The scheduled service and customer experience can differ from what is delivered in the field. Table 3 highlights the percentage of service operated on the two lines by sign-up and day type. Both Line 51A and Line 51B are not meeting the District's goals of 98% for trunk lines nor the 99.5% for all other service. A gap in service can mean longer waits for transferring riders anywhere on the line, including at Rockridge BART. Overall, service operated has improved since Summer 2025 when the District launched the Trunkline Incentive Pilot (TIP) Program. This program offers bus operators on trunk lines, such as the 51A and 51B, \$2 an hour premium pay to operate these lines.

Table 3 - Percent of Scheduled Service Operated by Sign-up and Day Type

Sign-up	Line 51A			Line 51B		
	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
2208FA	89.82	90.87	89.56	93.91	94.48	97.08
2308FA	96.24	95.58	95.56	98.02	96.93	98.05
2408FA	92.38	90.96	88.10	95.26	92.10	95.59
2508FA	97.91	97.80	98.05	98.75	97.46	97.51
2601WR	95.53	90.68	91.35	97.78	97.45	95.17

Tables 4 and 5 show what a gap can look like for riders by showing the percentage of the time that the actual connections are greater than 15 minutes (i.e., too long) or two minutes or less (too short). Taken together, this means that, on average during the Fall 2025 service period, 77.6% of the time riders attempting to transfer from a northbound Line 51A bus to a northbound Line 51B had more than two minutes but less than fifteen minutes to make the connection. Attachment 2 breaks this down in more detail by time of day and across more service periods.

Table 4 - Percent of Actual Connections at Rockridge BART (Too Long)

ALL DAY								
Day Type	From	To	Direction	2208FA	2308FA	2408FA	2508FA	2601WR
Weekday	51A	51B	Northbou	11.8	9.6	10.0	10.1	10.0
Weekday	51B	51A	Southbou	18.0	7.8	18.6	8.8	10.4
Saturday	51A	51B	Northbou	15.8	22.0	17.6	15.9	15.8
Saturday	51B	51A	Southbou	24.2	18.6	27.0	18.2	25.9

Sunday	51A	51B	Northbou	14.9	18.6	17.9	16.2	20.1
Sunday	51B	51A	Southbou	23.0	18.3	30.3	17.7	22.3

Table 5 - Percent of Actual Connections at Rockridge BART (Too Short)

ALL DAY								
Day Type	From	To	Direction	2208FA	2308FA	2408FA	2508FA	2601WR
Weekday	51A	51B	Northbou	14.5	13.7	15.0	12.3	13.8
Weekday	51B	51A	Southbou	14.1	15.6	13.0	14.5	12.6
Saturday	51A	51B	Northbou	7.1	11.3	9.6	11.7	10.5
Saturday	51B	51A	Southbou	10.7	10.6	9.4	11.0	8.8
Sunday	51A	51B	Northbou	13.2	11.1	10.8	10.1	10.8
Sunday	51B	51A	Southbou	9.9	12.5	11.2	11.4	9.0

Staff also investigated customer comments and complaints for Lines 51A and 51B. In the period between April 2022 (the next service change after the Rockridge BART Transfer Alternatives Study) and October 2025, AC Transit received 1,577 unique comments on both lines. Only 12 of those comments were related to the transfer at Rockridge BART between the two lines.

Through evaluation of this data, customer feedback, ride checks, and conversations with bus operators, staff compiled four additional alternatives for consideration beyond the initial proposals of interlining and implementing Connection Protection.

- 1) Schedule Line 51A and Line 51B around the Rockridge BART transfer.
- 2) Redesign Line 51A and Line 51B to provide continuous service on College Avenue.
- 3) Station a Road Supervisor at Rockridge BART to improve the transfer.
- 4) Operate as a single line after peak hours.

Schedule Line 51A and Line 51B around the Rockridge BART transfer

Currently, Line 51A and Line 51B are both scheduled to maintain a consistent 12-minute headway throughout most of the day. This provides a predictable experience for riders, who know the bus is scheduled to arrive at regular intervals. During high-ridership periods, trips are frequent, so riders feel less need to consult the schedule or a trip planner to reach their destination. Staff could instead create variable headways throughout the day by building all schedules at Rockridge BART, ensuring a very consistent transfer window at the station for riders traveling through on College Avenue. This policy change would negatively impact other riders on the line, who would have to wait longer for their bus, create more scheduled bus bunching during peak periods, and lead to poor distribution of riders during school bell times when headways are more variable due to longer runtimes and traffic conditions. Additionally, canceled trips would still require riders to wait longer at Rockridge BART to continue their trip.

Redesign Line 51A and Line 51B to provide continuous service on College Avenue

Staff proposed restructuring Line 51A and Line 51B during the Realign service adjustments. The proposal would have had Line 51A operate between Fruitvale BART and downtown Oakland via Santa Clara Avenue, Webster Street/Posey Tubes, and Oakland Chinatown. Line 51A would have terminated at either Lake Merritt

BART or along 11th Street at Jefferson Street after serving the 12th Street Oakland City Center BART station. Line 51B would then have been extended to serve all of College Avenue and Broadway before sharing a terminal with Line 51A along 11th Street at Jefferson Street or at Lake Merritt BART. This would have removed the need to transfer at Rockridge BART and would have provided continuous College Avenue bus service. This proposal was ultimately rejected due to comments from Alameda riders, who would lose a one-seat ride between Alameda and Kaiser Hospital in Oakland. If this service change ever advances, staff would need to conduct outreach with riders along the routes and work with the City of Oakland to remove parking and identify sufficient layover and restroom space for buses and bus operators.

Station a Road Supervisor at Rockridge BART to improve the transfer

Supervision has three On-Time Performance shifts focused on collecting information and holding or advancing buses to maintain a consistent schedule. They work closely with the Operations Control Center (OCC) to provide direct communication with operators, which may result in changes outside the scheduled operation. This would require shifting supervisors from other critical tasks across the service area. Staffing gaps for Supervision staff or bus operators would result in similar “too long” or “too short” waits at Rockridge BART for riders.

Operate as a single line after peak hours

Line 851 operates today between midnight and 5 a.m., connecting downtown Berkeley and Fruitvale BART, serving the entirety of Line 51A and all but the University Avenue portion of Line 51B. In this proposal, staff would end service on Lines 51A and 51B earlier in the day, between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m., and instead start Line 851 earlier. Additionally, Line 851 would need to be extended to operate along the University Avenue corridor until midnight. Since traffic levels are generally lower during these evening hours, reliability and On-Time Performance issues may be reduced. This alternative does not address transfer issues during peak-hour periods and would require marketing and branding efforts to ensure riders unfamiliar with Line 851's late-night service are aware of how it operates.

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

In the near term, staff will continue to focus on service reliability for lines 51A and 51B. This means continued increases in our service-operated metric for both routes by prioritizing pull-out for these and other trunk lines in the district. Increasing service-operated will result in improved on-time performance, which will make transfers more consistent and reliable for riders on routes with very good frequency compared to the rest of the District. Staff can also improve on-time performance through better management of the network, including consistent spacing between buses to manage loads and on-time departures at the start of the line, as stipulated in the update to the District’s service standards under Board Policy 545.

Once staff has successfully implemented the HASTUS 2024 upgrade, we will investigate the feasibility of implementing Connection Protection to improve rider connections without impacting service reliability. This will include a potential application on lines 51A and 51B, provided service reliability is not impacted.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

Pursuing the near-term recommendation of activating the Connection Protection feature in Clever communications, presented in SR 21-470, will lead to improvements in connections at Rockridge BART. The primary disadvantage of this proposal is taking HASTUS maintenance hours from other important District

priorities. HASTUS is the scheduling, sign-up, and dispatch software for the District, so there are often many competing priorities for the vendor maintenance hours. In addition, Connection Protection requires buses to wait for connecting buses, causing the bus to be late and potentially impacting on-time performance, particularly at the first timepoint as both Routes have trips that start at Rockridge BART.

Other alternatives proposed in this report all present trade-offs for riders across the two routes. An interline between Line 51A and Line 51B will be less reliable, as Line 51A will once again be affected by poor traffic conditions on Line 51B (and vice versa). Building all schedules out of Rockridge BART will require most riders on the line to wait longer and possibly miss other connections to AC Transit, school bell times, or other BART stations. Rebuilding the routes to connect in downtown Oakland will shift the transfer burden from Rockridge riders to Alameda riders traveling to Kaiser and other destinations north of downtown. Supervision staff are already focused on many District priorities, and reassignment to Rockridge BART may lead to longer wait times for incidents on the bus elsewhere in the network. Lastly, operating as Line 851 in the evening periods may cause rider confusion and will not solve the transfer issue during peak hours.

Staff will continue to monitor and can prioritize filling the service on Lines 51A and 51B. However, this may mean deprioritizing service on other routes if there is a shortage of operators. Both Division 2 and Division 4 operate seven of the 12 lines in the Trunkline Incentive Program, so prioritizing the 51A and 51B may impact other frequent and high ridership services. Additionally, service cancellations are governed by Board Policy 471, which protects less frequent and supplementary school service before local and trunk line service.

Pursuing the long-term recommendations in SR 21-470 will require significant grant and capital expenditures but will yield real improvements for customers, provided the schedules are reliable and trips are filled.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

This report is informational on staff efforts to improve the transfer at Rockridge BART. There are no alternatives recommended to receiving this report.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

Staff Report 21-470 - Rockridge BART Station Transfer Point

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Rockridge BART Station Alternatives Analysis
2. 51A and 51B Actual and Scheduled Connections
3. 51A and 51B Connection Presentation
4. Agenda Planning Request

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