



Board Policy No. 455

Media and Public Statement Policy

ADOPTED:

RECENT AMENDMENT:

SEE ALSO: 101

SUBJECT CATEGORY: OPERATIONS

SUBSECTION: MARKETING & MEDIA AFFAIRS

CONTROL DEPARTMENT: GENERAL MANAGER

I. PURPOSE

This Policy formally establishes uniform standards for the issuance of news releases, media advisories, and official statements. It further outlines crisis management protocols to guide staff in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from events that may impact employees, operations, riders, or AC Transit's reputation. Additionally, the Policy confirms the authorized spokesperson(s) and defines the chain of command for responding to media inquiries, which reinforces transparent information sharing and reduces the risk of misinformation.

II. PERSONS AFFECTED

This Policy shall apply to all employees, members of the Board of Directors, Board Officers, temporary workers, volunteers, interns (paid or unpaid), consultants, vendors, contractors, and any individual or entity conducting business with or expressly identifying an affiliation with AC Transit.

III. DEFINITIONS

"Crisis" means any event, situation, or emergency circumstance that has the potential to significantly disrupt AC Transit operations, pose a threat to public safety, harm the District's reputation, or attract substantial media or public attention, requiring immediate, coordinated, and strategic communication and response.

"Journalist/Reporter" means any individual, organization, or platform that acts in a professional or semi-professional capacity to collect, report, or distribute information intended for public consumption, including but not limited to print, broadcast, and digital channels.

"Media" means any platform or outlet that disseminates information to the public, including but not limited to print publications (newspapers, magazines, newsletters), broadcast channels (television and radio), and digital platforms (websites, social media, blogs, and online news services).

"Official District Matters" means any subjects, actions, or communications relating to the District's governance, operations, policies, programs, services, finances, or public representation, including decisions or activities involving Board actions, strategic initiatives, capital projects, labor relations, public safety, service delivery, or any matter reasonably perceived to reflect the District's official position or affect its interests.

“Spokesperson” means an employee or individual authorized by the General Manager/CEO or their designee, who is solely empowered to speak on behalf of the District, issue official statements, respond to media inquiries, and represent the District in all public communications.

IV. POLICY

A. News Release and Official Statements

1. The General Manager/CEO retains discretion to decide and final approval authority for all news releases, advisories, and public statements and shall direct the Media Affairs Manager or their designee to prepare official statements.
2. Employees designated as topical subject matter experts shall make themselves available to assist Media Affairs in preparing responses to media inquiries, ensuring the accuracy, clarity, and consistency of information.

B. Approvals Process

1. All news releases, advisories, and public statements shall be drafted, reviewed, and distributed solely by the Media Affairs Department. Staff requesting the issuance of a news release, advisory, or public statement must provide the purpose, relevant background information and detailed key facts, and the desired timing for release and identification of the target audience.
2. News releases, advisories, and public statements constitute an official record of AC Transit. In the event of any factual errors, the District shall issue a corrected statement, clearly identified as a correction, and disseminate it broadly to ensure accurate public information.

C. Primary and Alternate Spokesperson

1. The Media Affairs Manager shall serve as the primary spokesperson for AC Transit and speaks with the full authority of the District. In the absence of the Media Affairs Manager, the General Manager, or their designee, shall assume spokesperson duties on behalf of the District.
2. The President of the Board, in accordance with Board Policy No. 101, shall serve as the official spokesperson for the Board on matters pertaining to policy, official actions, legislation, and organizational positions. The Board President, at their discretion, may delegate this responsibility to the Vice President or another Director, as deemed appropriate.

D. Emergency and Crisis Event

1. In the event of major or catastrophic emergencies, the Media Affairs Manager, in coordination with the General Manager, will activate the AC Transit Emergency Operations Plan.
2. Once the emergency's magnitude and scope are determined, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the Emergency Management Team (EMT) shall convene to assess the impacts of the incident. The team shall ensure that policies, priorities, and response strategies effectively address operational requirements, safety considerations, and communication needs.
3. The Media Affairs Manager shall determine the timing, format, and distribution of all public-facing information, including decisions regarding press conferences or media briefings.

E. Communication on Official District Matters

All media inquiries directed to any employee, member of the Board of Directors, Board Officer, temporary worker, volunteer, intern (paid or unpaid), consultant, vendor, contractor, or any individual or entity conducting District business that seek an attributable statement on Official District Matters shall be immediately referred to the General Manager/CEO, Board Administrative Officer/District Secretary, and Media Affairs Manager for coordination and response.

This Policy does not limit the rights of employees to speak to the media as private individuals or within the scope of protected union activity. Similarly, Board Directors may express personal opinions on matters under Board consideration or District operations, provided they expressly state such views are their own and do not represent the official position or endorsement of the District.

E.F. Media Contact with Employees

1. Employees may not communicate with media, in their official capacity, about District business, operations, policies, or activities without prior authorization from Media Affairs.
2. Employees may reference their District titles in biographies, resumes, or speaking engagements to provide context about their professional roles and experience.
3. All public statements – whether written, verbal, or digital – intended for media publication or broadcast must be coordinated through and approved by the Media Affairs Manager.

4. If an employee receives a media inquiry by phone, email, or in person, the employee shall respond courteously and advise the journalist/reporter that all inquiries are managed exclusively by the Media Affairs Department and provide the current contact information.
5. Employees are to assume that all interactions with reporters are “on the record.” Any statement made to a reporter, or in the presence of a reporter, may be subject to recording, quotation, and publication.
6. During active labor negotiations or related matters, statements on behalf of employee unions should be made by the union or its authorized spokesperson. This Policy does not restrict unionized employees from speaking to the media as private individuals or in protected union activity, provided employees do not represent their views as official District positions or statements.

F.G. Media Contact with Board Members

1. The Board shall be briefed on significant events that involve media attention or require coordinated public communication to ensure consistent messaging and alignment with District priorities.
2. All media inquiries shall be coordinated with Media Affairs and the Board Administrative Officer/District Secretary via email notification.
3. Statements or responses to media inquiries concerning official District matters shall be coordinated through the Board President, or their designee, and Media Affairs.
4. Board Directors may express personal views on matters before the Board, except when the Board has formally adopted an official position. In such cases, Directors shall adhere to the following guidelines:
 - a. In public forums – digital platforms, print, broadcast, or television – Board members shall clarify they speak personally or in their capacity as a Director, not on behalf of the Board or District.
 - b. Titles may be used for identification only, not to imply District endorsement.
 - c. Official titles shall not suggest Board approval of individual views.
 - d. Board members shall not use their position to imply District support for unauthorized commentary.
 - e. Board members may express dissent but must respect and uphold final Board decisions.
 - f. Board members shall maintain public trust by accurately representing Board actions and avoiding misrepresentation.

V. ATTACHMENTS

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