

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 12/13/2023

Staff Report No. 23-250e

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Realign Network Plan Phase 3 Overview & Next Steps

BRIEFING ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST: ☐

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving a status update on Realign, including an overview of Phase 3 input received to date and next steps, and provide direction to staff as needed.

Staff Contact:

Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering

Beverly Greene, Executive Director of External Affairs, Marketing & Communications

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service

Initiative - Service Quality

The Realign planning effort meets the Service Quality initiative by combining a comprehensive review of existing service and conditions, robust public outreach and stakeholder engagement, and market research and analysis to craft a new service network for the District that responds to the changing travel needs and maximizes service within forecasted resource constraints.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this informational item.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

This report is an update on progress since the Board Workshop of November 1, 2023. Through AC Transit Realign, staff, with the help of a consultant team led by Kittelson and Associates, is reviewing the input received on the three Service Scenarios unveiled at that meeting and making sure the Draft Final Service Plan is responsive to the feedback from our riders, communities, employees, and the Board.

The project is divided into five key phases, the first three of which are complete (as of 12/13/23):

1. Develop Plans and Learn Rider Needs (Mar 2023-Jun 2023)
2. Align Guiding Principles with Community Assessment (Jul 2023-Aug 2023)
3. Develop Service Plan Scenarios and Gather Feedback (Sep 2023-Dec 2023)

4. Draft Final Service Plan and Plan Adoption (Jan 2024-Apr 2024)
5. Develop Service Standards and Inform Riders about Service Changes (Apr 2024 - Sep 2024)

The planning process is now moving into Phase 4, which focuses on creating a single, draft service plan for another round of engagement.

The team is working on reviewing the comments and input received to date and weighing tradeoffs as the line proposals from the two cost-neutral scenarios are merged into a single scenario. While as of the writing of this staff report, staff is in the middle of Phase 3, and is providing updates in a number of key areas.

Phase 3 Engagement Summary

Staff has prepared the Phase 3 Engagement Initial Report (Attachment 1) which includes a summary of outreach activities, with a snapshot of initial findings and a summary of digital and print strategies and activity reports to date. The Phase 3 engagement window commenced on November 1 and concluded December 13, 2023. Staff and the consultant team are currently reviewing all feedback on the draft proposals to develop a single preferred service plan that will be presented to the Board in January.

In the first 3 weeks of Phase 3, there were 17,574 Realign page views on the AC Transit website, making it the 3rd highest viewed page on the District website. Additionally, at the time of the writing of this staff report, there were three pop-ups, one Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) meeting, one open house event, and 24 presentations to city councils, school boards, committees, commissions, and community organizations within the service area. The Phase 3 Engagement Summary report will be provided at the January 24, 2024 Board meeting with a complete report on activities.

Key Data Requests

AC Transit has received numerous requests for additional data on existing service conditions and the two proposed scenarios being discussed during the Phase 3 engagement period. Attachment 2 includes extensive data on the following:

- Service Quantity by Scenario and Time of Day;
- Paratransit Service Coverage Impacts;
- Estimated Service Costs by Line by Scenario;
- Service Levels by Line, Day of Week, and Hour for Each Scenario; and
- Scheduled vs Actual Runtime by Time of Day.

Hard Tradeoffs on Lines

Several lines have received the greatest share of comments. Staff is working on determining the correct adjustments for the Draft Final Service Plan:

Both Scenarios:

- Lines 6 & 51: The public has generally been positive with these proposals as they provide one-seat rides between downtown Oakland and Berkeley along major corridors. Some concern has been expressed about using Line 12 to serve Berkeley Marina instead of Line 6 along University. Bus operators have had significant concerns with lengthening Line 51 which they believe will make it unreliable and lead to long periods in the seat.

- Lines 72, 72M & 72R: The public and bus operators have expressed concerns about the proposals for consolidating San Pablo Avenue service into two blended local lines with longer stop spacing and a higher level of service at individual stops. Operating with two local lines allows for a consistent 7.5-minute headway at all stops (whereas only Rapid stops have better than every 15-minute service today). However, the tradeoff would be that those who use the Rapid to travel longer distances would now use this hybrid local service.
- Line G: The shortening of the line has generated a mix of positive and negative comments, with those who still have service liking the faster, more reliable trip and the rest upset about the loss of service in West Berkeley.

Frequent Scenario Only:

- Line 19: The loss of this line leaves an area of Alameda with lots of recent and planned growth without a line north of Santa Clara.
- Lines 20 & 21: Eliminating Line 21 and switching Line 20 to a crosstown means those on Bay Farm Island must transfer to lines 39, 51, or O to reach Fruitvale BART. There have been some concerns that without a direct connection to Fruitvale BART, the line will not generate much ridership.
- Line 28: Line 28 provides service to Castro Valley schools and those stakeholders have expressed concerns about the loss of regular service via the current Line 28.
- Line 65 & 67: Berkeley Hills residents are concerned about consolidating these two lines and losing access to service along Grizzly Peak and Tilden Park.
- Paratransit Coverage: AC Transit made a decision to maintain its pre-COVID (i.e. 2019) Paratransit coverage even though some of those areas may not currently be served by fixed-route service. Attachment 2 includes some estimates of how many residents in the service area would lose paratransit coverage under three scenarios: 1) if the District adjusted Paratransit coverage to match its current network, 2) the Balanced Coverage Scenario, and 3) the Frequent Service Scenario (the scenario where coverage losses are greatest like in El Sobrante and the Berkeley Hills).

Reliability Improvements

Staff have been conducting an analysis of every line in the system and what would be necessary to improve reliability for customers and ensure more breakeven for bus operators. This analysis calculated the amount of time buses are late to their terminal (last stop on the line) and added that time to the peak cycle time (in-service runtime plus layover) of each line. Staff then recalculated the number of buses needed on each line with this new, longer runtime and layover. This resulted in an estimated need for 20 additional buses to improve operator layovers, which should also improve service reliability. This translates to about 40 additional bus operators beyond the service scheduled today and the constrained scenarios under Realign.

Given the District does not have the bus operators to accommodate this additional runtime and layover, these reliability improvements would need to come from the level of service (frequency, span, or service on weekends). Staff is working to build this additional runtime and layover into the Draft Final Service Plan that will be brought to the Board to call a Public Hearing in January. However, adding this time in a cost- or operator-neutral environment could mean 20 lines will need to come less often than originally proposed by between two and ten minutes (e.g., a 15-minute line may come every 17 or a 30-minute line may come every 40). Alternatively, staff could also eliminate additional coverage service. A summary of the analysis is included in Attachment 3.

Micro Transit Model

The cost-neutral scenarios include an on-demand service zone in the Warm Springs area to cover portions of Line 212 and 239, which are proposed to be re-routed. The project team is still working through the best means to deliver this on-demand proposal and are considering a number of different options:

- **AC Transit:** The project team is evaluating options for how on-demand service could be provided by in-house operators. This could range from how AC Transit FLEX was provided prior to the pandemic - stop-to-stop using short cutaways and senior operators with third-party software - to using smaller vehicles using an operator position with a Class B license. It's unclear how long it would take to procure the software for this option and there is currently no Class B operator position. The Board would need to approve the new operator classification in addition to recruitment.
- **East Bay Paratransit:** The District could contract with East Bay Paratransit (EBP) to use their vehicles, operators, and trip management software. While the new contract to operate EBP isn't expected until July 2024, it will include terms to add on-demand service. In addition, EBP is in the process of procuring new software that can accommodate the scheduling of on-demand trips.
- **Third-Party Contractor:** The District could release an RFP to solicit services from a third-party mobility provider who specializes in on-demand mobility, but procurement timelines can be long, and this could mean using non-AC Transit labor, depending on what the District elects allow a contractor to operate.
- **Transportation Network Company (TNC) Subsidy:** This option would entail providing a subsidy to riders in the specified area to cover a portion of their TNC trip cost for trips originating in the designated area.

Next Steps

The project team will be developing a single Draft Final Service Plan that will be brought to the Board on January 24, 2024 to call for a formal Public Hearing. During this period, staff will be seeking feedback on that plan until March 2024 when the public comment period will be closed. Staff will then revise the plan a final time based on public comments received to bring to the Board for approval in April 2024 and planned implementation in August 2024.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

This report provides an update on current activities and, as such, there are no advantages or disadvantages.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

Staff has evaluated whether it is feasible to extend the project timeline to allow for more time for analysis, revisions and additional outreach. Extending project timeline requires contract extensions, additional budget and staff time. In addition, extending timeline would also mean that existing network that is still focused on pre-pandemic mobility patterns will remain place longer. If the District want to advance any reliability improvements discussed in this staff report, they would be delayed as well because they would require a separate public hearing that could otherwise be handled through the Realign service change process. An alternative timeline is given below which requires discussions with the District's labor partners to switch the March 2025 Sign-up from a 'Division-Only' sign-up to a 'General S'ystem-wide sign up.

Date	Item
<i>Dec 13, 2023</i>	<i>12/13 Board Meeting - Phase 3 Engagement Closes</i>
<i>Dec 2023/Jan 2024</i>	<i>Revise proposals and create single Draft Final Service Plan</i>
<i>Feb/Mar/Apr 2024</i>	<i>Phase 4 Engagement on Draft Final Service Plan</i>
<i>May/June 2024</i>	<i>Revise Plan</i>
<i>July 2024</i>	<i>Call Public Hearing for September 2024</i>
<i>July/Aug/Sep 2024</i>	<i>Public Comment Period</i>
<i>Sep 2024</i>	<i>Hold Public Hearing</i>
<i>Sep/Oct 2024</i>	<i>Final Plan Revisions</i>
<i>Oct 2024</i>	<i>Request Board Approval of March 2025 Service Changes*</i>
<i>Nov 2024 - Mar 2025</i>	<i>Public and Rider Communications Regarding Approved Changes</i>
<i>Mar 2025</i>	<i>Plan Implementation</i>

*For Fall 2024 Service Changes, Board approval is needed in April 2024

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

SR 22-502 Network Redesign Timeline Update and Procurement Approval

SR 23-250c Realign Network Plan Update and Revised Guiding Principles Approval

SR 23-250d Realign Draft Service Scenarios

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Summary of Initial Phase 3 Engagement
2. Data Request Summary
3. Reliability Improvement Summary

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