

# ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



## STAFF REPORT

**MEETING DATE:** 11/13/2024

**Staff Report No.** 24-440

**TO:** AC Transit Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Michael A. Hursh, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer  
**SUBJECT:** Overview of AC Transit, Oakland Ballers Partnership

### BRIEFING ITEM

**AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST:**

**RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):**

Consider receiving an update on AC Transit's partnership with the Oakland Ballers. [Requested by Director Walsh - 6/12/2024]

Staff Contact:  
Nichele Laynes, Director of Marketing, Communications & Customer Services

**STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:**

Goal - Strong Public and Policymaker Support  
Initiative - Financial Efficiency and Revenue Maximization

The partnership with the Oakland Ballers increases financial efficiency and extends the District's marketing and communications outreach, increasing fare revenue and ridership.

**BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

**BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:**

**Oakland Ballers Background**

With Oakland's Major League Baseball team leaving the city after this season, a new independent baseball team was developed by community groups and supporters to fill the void for local East Bay baseball fans. The Oakland Ballers, who are part of the Pioneer League, invested \$1.6 million to revitalize Raimondi Park in West Oakland ahead of their inaugural season which launched in June 2024.

**2024 AC Transit Ballers Partnership Overview**

Representatives from the Oakland Ballers initially reached out to BART in early 2024 to identify game-day transportation and partnership opportunities. AC Transit was included in the discussion as the most direct service to the ballpark is through AC Transit service. Initially the Ballers were most interested in adding a new bus stop adjacent to the ballpark. During these early discussions, staff leveraged the opportunity to secure a

multifaceted partnership between AC Transit and the Oakland Ballers utilizing in-kind trade of marketing and advertising assets, coordination with BART for transfers and promotion, new bus stop locations, and pedestrian improvement suggestions. The Oakland Ballers have made a commitment to promoting public transit to fans traveling to their games, making them a great fit for this type of partnership.

This co-marketing partnership developed by AC Transit staff provided the District significant visibility at West Oakland's Raimondi Park during Ballers home games. These marketing assets included:

- Large outfield signage
- Multiple PA and video board announcements
- TV commercials for televised games
- On-air reads for radio broadcasts
- AC Transit's logo on tickets
- Branded gameday giveaway items
- Social media promotions

These elements have provided AC Transit with the opportunity to promote its brand and services around the ballpark, specifically Lines 29, NL, and 14, as well as to support hiring and recruiting efforts aimed at local East Bay baseball fans. In kind, AC Transit offered the Ballers interior and exterior bus ads, social media posts, and a special Oakland Ballers bus wrap which served Oakland out of Division 4 this summer (attachment 1).

### **Coordination with BART and others**

As part of the digital marketing campaign, AC Transit developed social media content promoting transit use for games, collaborating with the Oakland Ballers, BART, and the Oakland 68s, an independent non-profit group of fans supporting baseball and other sports in the City of Oakland, on video content. These posts accounted for 55 percent of total social media engagements between May 23 and June 7, despite comprising only 10 percent of total posts. This successful partnership with the Oakland 68s and the Ballers resulted in the second most viewed video on the District's Instagram.

Staff also coordinated with BART to promote connecting to Line 29 from the West Oakland BART Station for Ballers games, including additional social media posts highlighting the transfer (both agency's accounts) and the addition of a large co-branded AC Transit/BART banner in the West Oakland Station.

### **New Bus Stop and Pedestrian Improvements**

To address the Ballers' original request, staff researched and identified the opportunity for new stops closer to the ballpark and worked with AC Transit's Planning team and the Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) on improvements needed to move existing stops, and add additional stops, to Line 29. Existing Line 29 stops were moved one block south from Peralta and 17<sup>th</sup> St. to Peralta and 16<sup>th</sup> St. New stops were also added to Peralta and 20<sup>th</sup> for Raimondi Park (attachment 2). This new stop location is currently in service and gets fans within one block of the ballpark. District planning staff also worked with OakDOT to provide suggested improvements and changes to the area surrounding Raimondi Park. These recommendations included more visible cross walks, curb installations, curb painting, sidewalk additions, and other pedestrian improvements to enhance fan experience.

### **Raimondi Park Bus Service**

In anticipation of increased ridership for Line 29 on gamedays, staff coordinated with maintenance and transportation before the season started to ensure bus sizes were increased from 30' buses (regularly used on this line before the season) to 40' buses to increase capacity. Customer service did not receive any feedback regarding overcrowding on buses for Ballers games this summer, but staff will continue to monitor ridership and customer service activity around Raimondi Park and address any issues that may arise. Initial reporting on Line 29 has indicated a 5% increase in ridership on game days this summer. Staff is currently working on comprehensive at-stop reporting for all stops in the radius of Raimondi Park to further identify how games are impacting ridership and rider experience.

### **Future Partnership and Fare Promotion Opportunities**

A fare promotion for Oakland Ballers ticket holders was discussed before the start of the 2024 season but was deprioritized by both organizations to focus on the inaugural season promotional activities and to see how these games specifically impacted ridership. With the season now over, AC Transit and the Oakland Ballers have had initial discussions on continuing and enhancing the co-marketing partnership with both parties expressing interest in a potential fare promotion for the 2025 season.

Staff is now in the early stages of exploring a fare promotion for 2025; there are many considerations and details that need to be addressed before the District is able to move forward. These considerations, as detailed below, include funding, operational coordination, potential ridership impacts and finalizing an agreement with the partner.

#### **- Research**

In preparation, staff met with other Bay Area transit agencies to better understand their strategies in fare promotions for special events. These discussions provided more background on funding, agreement structures, and utilizing tickets as a flash pass for fans. Staff also attended the "Mobilizing Millions" session at October's APTA TRANSFORM Conference for insights on navigating the deployment of transit service for large events.

#### **- Funding**

One of the largest considerations is funding the fares for the promotion, which will need to be covered by the partner. Funding sources that can be utilized for this include:

- Surcharge on all tickets sold
- Surcharge on merchandise/concessions
- Surcharge on parking

Additionally, the District could opt to absorb the cost of this fare promotion. No other transit agency staff met with covered the cost of this kind of fare promotion, therefore this is not recommended.

#### **- Operational Coordination**

Fare promotion implementation will require coordination between multiple departments including Operations, Legal, Planning, Communications, Marketing, Customer Service, Legislative Affairs and Finance.

#### **- Potential Ridership Impact**

Ridership estimates and increases will be a key consideration as well, both for funding and logistics. At-stop

reporting currently being developed will give Marketing and Planning staff better insight on ridership impacts and estimates. It is important to note that staff is operating under the expectation that additional service will not be needed. Any additional trips will increase the promotion's expense and would need to be addressed.

- ***Finalizing Agreement***

Once all other considerations are addressed, AC Transit and the Oakland Ballers will need to finalize an agreement for the fare promotion in coordination with the District's legal team. This agreement outlining the promotion logistics and funding details would need to be confirmed well before the 2025 season.

**Next steps**

As mentioned earlier in this report, discussions are already underway between AC Transit and the Oakland Ballers for continuing the co-marketing partnership for next season. Details for this partnership, along with a finalized fare promotion plan, will need to be executed by Spring 2025 in order to launch the partnership before the season begins in late May or early June 2025.

**ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:**

The advantage to partnering with local organizations is that it gives the District more visibility to new audiences and offers the opportunity to promote our service and brand to increase ridership.

**ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:**

No alternative analysis was conducted by staff for this Agenda item

**PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:**

Board Policy 451 - Advertising on District Property <[https://www.actransit.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/BP%20451%20-%20Advertising%20on%20District%20Property\\_0.pdf](https://www.actransit.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/BP%20451%20-%20Advertising%20on%20District%20Property_0.pdf)>

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Oakland Ballers Partnership Marketing Assets
2. New Line 29 Stops for Raimondi Park
3. Agenda Planning Request Form

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