

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 3/8/2023

Staff Report No. 23-123

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager
SUBJECT: Update on Pilot Services and Options for Ashby Avenue

BRIEFING ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST: ☒

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving a report on potential options for providing service on the Ashby Avenue segment of Line 80. [Requested by Director Beckles - 1/11/23]

Staff Contact:
Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service
Initiative - Service Quality

Restoring service suspended during the pandemic is a key component of post-pandemic recovery for the District and meets the 'Convenient and Reliable Service' strategic goal.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no budgetary impact associated with this informational item. However, staff estimates implementing the alternative discussed in the report would require three additional buses, six additional full-time operator positions, and cost \$3,221,000 annually at \$258 per platform hour. Staff has identified reductions in service on other routes to fully off-set the cost of the alternative.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

Staff requested Board authorization in May 2021 to implement three new pilot services. Two of the pilots have been implemented - one in Hayward and one in Alameda. The third, a re-route of Line 79 to serve the portion of suspended Line 80 along Ashby Avenue, has not been implemented due to lack of resources, the loss of service for some customers on existing Line 79, and the approval of subsequent service recovery priorities in 2022.

Prior to the pandemic, Line 80 provided service along Ashby, in West Berkeley, and in Albany every 20 minutes. Ridership was lower on this route than other local routes serving Berkeley, but it did provide

important transit access to the communities it served. Once the pandemic started, ridership dropped significantly on all routes, but in particular on Line 80 and other crosstown lines. In addition, AC Transit faced a critical shortage of bus operators and funding.

Between March and August 2020 many lines continued to see very low ridership while other lines serving disadvantaged communities and major corridors (San Pablo, Foothill, International, etc.) were passing essential workers up due to overcrowding and social distancing protocols. Staff made the difficult decision in August 2020 to suspend service on the lowest ridership lines - Line 80 included - to restore service in areas where passengers were being passed up. Since that time, staff has been able to restore service from 65 percent of pre-pandemic levels in March 2020 to 88 percent of pre-pandemic levels today based on the list of Board-approved recovery priorities. The District has restored the first 14 lines slated for restoration in Staff Report 22-209 and Line 80 is #40 on that restoration list (the memo with priorities and methodology is attachment 2 for this staff report).

It is important to highlight that Ashby is a strong ridership corridor, representing nearly 40 percent of Line 80's total ridership. Understanding that Ashby is a key crosstown corridor in south Berkeley, staff evaluated multiple alternatives that could provide meaningful service to the corridor. That analysis is discussed in more depth in Attachment 1.

The alternative that shows the most promise is an extension of Line 7 from downtown Berkeley, along Bancroft/Durant, down College, then along Ashby and into Emeryville Amtrak. Line 7 currently runs every 30 minutes from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on weekdays but this plan would resume weekend service and extend the service day to operate from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. (7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. on weekends) to better match the service parameters of Line 80 before it was suspended. Another option would be to extend the line on weekdays only and not extend the service day or add back weekend service, which would cost \$1,481,064 but would still require the same number of weekday buses and operators.

The Line 7 extension alternative would require three additional buses, an estimated six full-time operator positions, and would cost approximately \$3.2 million per year to operate. Staff do not forecast having the operator resources to add this service without cutting service elsewhere.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

Advantages: The Line 7 extension alternative for service on Ashby allows for service restoration on this corridor in the most cost-effective way, by extending a line that has slack in its round-trip cycle. This solution also reduces layover strain in downtown Berkeley, where the District currently has too many buses laying over for the amount of space available. The design of this service also seeks to resolve a critical issue with the way Ashby was served by Line 80. It connects downtown Berkeley and UC Berkeley with Ashby via College and Bancroft, which are high-ridership corridors. In doing so, it gives riders along those corridors another option and reduces overcrowding on line 51B. This alternative also will result in improved service, restored weekend service, and operating span for customers along existing Line 7.

Disadvantages: Implementing Line 7 extension alternative would mean cutting service on other lines that were already restored because they had higher pre-pandemic ridership than Line 80. Line 80 carried about 1,000 riders a day before the pandemic of which about 400 were along Ashby. In addition, if implemented before

staff reaches Line 7 at #36 in the Board-approved service priorities, it would allow lines 7 and 80 to “skip the line” and be restored ahead of many other lines serving disadvantaged communities, including Lines 28, 70, 83, 90/98, and 99. This alternative only covers the Ashby portion of suspended Line 80, so there would still be no service to portions of west Berkeley, Albany, or El Cerrito that used to be covered by Line 80. Finally, this restoration would not be consistent with the District’s goal of improving service reliability and meeting the key performance indicator for service operated.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

Staff evaluated multiple alternatives that are discussed in Attachment 1, but a summary of the disadvantages over Line 7 extension are listed below:

- 1) Line 67 Extension - Would only have a layover on one end of the line, which would make the work assignment more difficult for operators on the line.
- 2) Line 65 Extension - Would only run every 40 min, which is too low for the Ashby corridor and would only have a layover on one end of the line, which would make the work assignment more difficult for operators on the line.
- 3) Line 79 Extension - This would cut off a segment of Claremont and would be double the cost because of round-trip cycle-time constraints.
- 4) New Ashby-only Line - This would be too short and would require an interline with Line 36, creating an extremely long, unreliable line.
- 5) Line E Local - This alternative would not have a connection to downtown Berkeley or UC Berkeley and would result in the loss of Transbay service for existing customers.
- 6) Restore Line 80 - Line 80 had very low ridership and would cost nearly twice as much to restore to pre-pandemic levels as a Line 7 extension and more than twice as much as some other alternatives.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

SR 21-255 Proposed Pilot Services

SR 22-209 Service Recovery Priorities Update

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Ashby Service Alternatives Memo
2. Service Priorities Memo
3. Ashby Trip Generators Map

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