



Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District Board of Directors

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RE: potential options for providing service on the Ashby Avenue segment of Line 80

Dear AC Transit Board of Directors,

We are writing to urge AC Transit to restore Line 80 service in the form of an E Local option. We acknowledge that restoring daily bus service to Ashby Avenue is necessary and urgent. We strongly support re-directing the E-line from a transbay bus to a local Ashby bus, while remaining skeptical of a 7 Arlington extension to Ashby, for the reasons listed below. At the end we address proposals to add branching to alleviate 51B congestion on College Avenue.

We reject the assumption that the only useful form of transit is trips to and from central business districts. Just because a bus line doesn't run to Downtown Berkeley doesn't mean its ridership will be low. Our constituents take many trips along Ashby Avenue or from east to west and vice-versa in South Berkeley and North Oakland. This has become particularly important since the rise of remote work, which has decentralized transit commute patterns.

The staff analysis understandably aims to avoid transfers, but this fear leads to overly extended and infrequent bus routes where transfers are not competitive. An E-local option would generate the highest ridership with the fewest buses, so we urge you to choose this. By focusing on frequent crosstown service in a dense and high-demand corridor such as Ashby, north-south transfers can be more reliable.

Ashby is already well served by North-South bus lines. The proposal to extend the 7 line from West Berkeley to Claremont does not offer any significant advantages for riders, who can still get to downtown Berkeley via each perpendicular arterial along Ashby. At Seventh St is the 36; at San Pablo Ave is the frequent 72-51B transfer; at Sacramento is the 88; at Adeline/MLK are BART, the F & 12; at Shattuck is the 18; at Telegraph is the 6; at College is the 51B; and at Claremont Hotel is the 79. Not only are all these trips more direct to and from UC Berkeley and Downtown but they're all more frequent than the 7.

Since the drawbacks to both the 67 and 7 are identical, with the exception of a restroom at Grizzly Peak, the 67's considerably shorter length than the 7 would make it a better candidate for extension and frequency. The 7 line is considerably longer and thus increasingly vulnerable to delays.

There's no purpose in connecting an Ashby route to downtown, which only offers a slower and less direct way along two congested corridors. The 7-extension will look better as a revenue generator, but *only* because the new trips generated will be intra-Ashby trips that the 80 already served, without serving the low-ridership corridor along Sixth Street. The 7's ridership numbers will mostly be inflated by the already high demand for 51B buses on College Ave.

Moreover, the 7 Arlington already has a one-way runtime around 30 minutes, and sending it through congested Southside and Elmwood to reach Ashby will certainly put it over an hour. This creates potential for bunching and unreliability along a routing that is unlikely to share many riders with the existing alignment.

Below we have outlined specific responses to AC Transit staff's arguments against a singular bus line from Emeryville to Caldecott/Parkwoods via Ashby (termed E-Local in staff's report):

Staff Argument 1: No potable water or restrooms at 261 Tunnel Rd.

Answer #1: Add one additional bus stop at Lake Temescal, which is a 3 minute drive, non-stop from the Parkwood Commons terminus. It also expands AC Transit access to a popular EBRPD park which will increase ridership.

Answer #2: Operate the Ashby bus as a turn-and-burn, with only one layover at Emeryville. A round trip on this route will likely take 60 to 90 minutes, roughly matching the one-way runtime of the 72 San Pablo. Turn-and-burn operation is not new to AC Transit (see route 36).

Staff Argument 2: Transbay commuters will be affected.

This is at odds with the staff's equity argument for restoration. The Claremont Hills is a high income area situated between two BART stations, Rockridge and Ashby, and BART is nowhere close to full capacity. It is unclear how AC Transit's service restoration principles are upheld by providing commuter shuttles to San Francisco, bypassing these two underused stations, while adding redundant service on Claremont where the 79 bus already runs.

Transit ridership has become less centralized and radial after the height of the pandemic, necessitating a transit network that allows for trips from anywhere to anywhere. In fact, despite the current operating model, a considerable proportion of E ridership already rides locally. This suggests that there is unmet demand for a dedicated Ashby bus and a local line to Hiller Highlands, closing a large gap in east-west service in South Berkeley/North Oakland. This would be better for connectivity than the E line's current transbay service.

Regarding the lost coverage on Claremont Avenue: The E currently serves only two unique stops on Claremont, at Chabot Road and Hudson Street, both of which had fewer than 36 daily boardings total in both directions pre-pandemic. Both of these stops are just two blocks from frequent BART and bus service at Rockridge station. The rest of Claremont Avenue is served by the 79.

Staff Argument 3: The Line would not go to Downtown Berkeley, same problem as the 80.

This must be reiterated: the 80 was not a low-ridership line because it did not go to downtown Berkeley. It was also not low-ridership because of insufficient demand along Ashby, it's a dense urban area seeing additional household formation. Rather, the 80 bus generated relatively little revenue because Sixth Street and Ashby Avenue did not need to be served by the same bus, and ultimately served neither well.

Staff essentially told EBTRU representatives that the 80 was too infrequent on Ashby Avenue to be useful. They also explained that they struggled to find ways to serve Ashby and Sixth Street effectively. But there is no reason to solve these problems simultaneously: Ashby is a state highway, while Sixth Street is a secondary feeder road to I-80 or San Pablo Avenue.

The E-local works because it focuses on one thing: where crosstown trip demand is, on Ashby, rather than trying to serve both high-demand crosstown service and low-demand north-south corridors simultaneously that don't have any relation to each other. An E-local does more by doing less.

Throughout the report, staff judges the fairness of Ashby bus line restoration over other low-income serving routes in the district, based on the fare recovery performance of the 80. We acknowledge that lower-revenue lines pose significant material tradeoffs, and for this reason, we must emphasize that we are not advocating for restoring the pre-pandemic status quo. Our constituents need frequent bus service along Ashby Avenue, regardless of the name of the line.

Sixth Street and Pierce Street would be better served with existing lines. Routes like the 29 via West Oakland and Emeryville could be extended along Sixth Street and either terminate at or traverse up Cedar Street and function as an cohesive Eastshore bus line. The 52 could be extended a short ways to 99 Ranch via Pierce Street (and terminate at Costco or El Cerrito Plaza BART), to serve a high-demand grocery store and the Gateview Condominiums in Albany.

These are all better options than trying to serve them with an Ashby crosstown line. The 80 line suffered because there's no demand for trips going to the Fourth Street shopping area or Bayer from the industrial areas of West of San Pablo Avenue, and frequent transfers between north-south lines would better serve riders heading to Ashby than infrequent service attempting to do too much

For these reasons, we request you adopt the E-Local option.

Sincerely,

Councilmember Terry Taplin
City of Berkeley - District 2

Vice Mayor Ben Bartlett
City of Berkeley - District 3