

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 4/12/2023

Staff Report No. 23-233

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Proposed August 2023 Service Changes

BRIEFING ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST: ☐

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving a report on a series of service changes for the August 2023 Sign-up that would address concerns from bus operators about runtime and layover, as well as changes in service to close the gap between scheduled service and available operators.

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

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service
Initiative - Service Quality

Service reliability is a key strategic initiative. The District is currently scheduled for more service than can be filled on a daily basis, leading to missed service every day. The proposed changes in this report may mean some buses are scheduled to arrive less often, but the scheduled service will be filled more often and runtimes and layovers will better match conditions in the field.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

Since there is no change in the actual operator count, the budget impact of this proposal is minimal. There would likely be a decrease in unscheduled overtime costs because the reduction in the amount of scheduled service would relieve some of the District's unscheduled overtime needs. However, staff will not know the amount of unscheduled overtime reduction until the service changes are in effect. If approved, staff will report back on the financial outcomes of this proposal.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

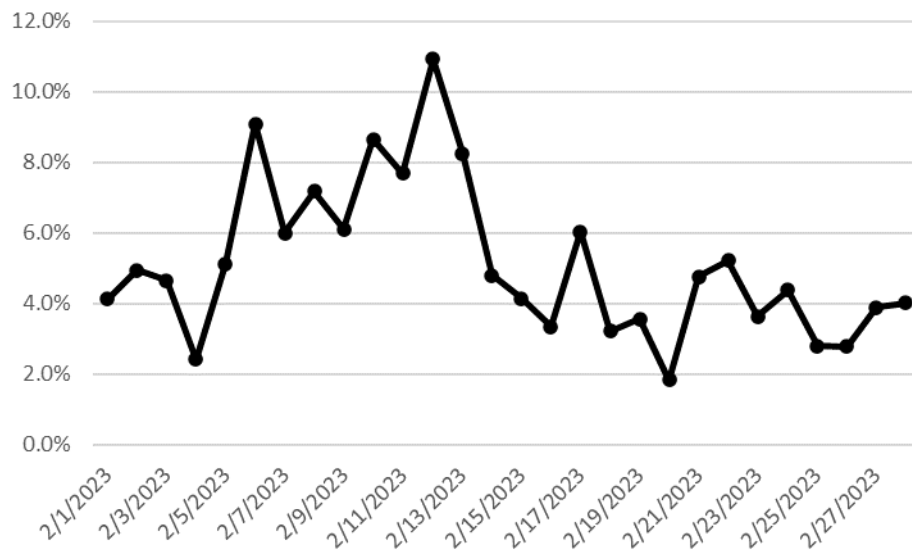
The service network is currently scheduled to require 897 regular operator assignments (or runs) and 311 extra board assignments, for a total operator requirement of 1,208 to fully operate service on weekdays and weekends. As of the week of March 20, 2023, the District had 1,185 operators available to operate service, leaving a gap of 23 operators to fill service and the extra board (which is used to cover service for scheduled and unscheduled operator absences). The available headcount has fluctuated from between 1,170 and 1,190

in recent months.

This gap between the scheduled service requirement and the number of available operators has been apparent primarily in the amount of service delivered each day. Every morning, each bus operating division identifies how many open “runs” or operator assignments it has. These runs are open either because an operator is unavailable (for vacation, sick leave, or for an unexcused reason), or because there are more runs scheduled than operators available at the division. The Dispatch team at each division then either assigns operators from the Extra Board to fill those runs, calls operators on their days off to fill those runs, or breaks the runs up into smaller pieces and works to find other operators at work that day willing to pick up those pieces with overtime within the limits of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and state law. Any run not filled results in missing trips that were assigned to that run until it can be filled.

In looking at February 2023, the District missed an average of 5.2 percent of trips each day, with a daily range between 1.8 and 10.9 percent. This average rate is much higher than it was before service was recovered during the pandemic and this is placing stress on operations staff at the divisions, burning out the operator workforce, and leading to customer frustration.

Exhibit 1 - February 2023 Missed Trips



The District has been forecasting improved hiring and retention as part of its service recovery plans, but operator availability has stalled out in recent months due to a number of factors (many out of the District’s control) and it is no longer prudent to continue to expect additional net operators when evidence across the last year shows no gains in available headcount for AC Transit or other transit operators across the country. As such, the District is proposing a series of service adjustments in August 2023 aimed at reducing the overall operator requirement for the daily operation of service. These changes are estimated to reduce the requirement for the number of regular runs by 24 and the extra board by nine positions.

In addition, increasing congestion and ridership, and the lack of restroom availability in close proximity has led to the schedules on some lines no longer working in real-world operating conditions. The District has been having regular discussions with leadership of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 192 (ATU) to identify key issues with specific lines and locations and the parties have agreed to include additional runtime and layover

on those lines in the August 2023 Sign-up. These improvements would add 10 additional regular runs and as many as four extra board positions to bring the total operator requirement from 1,208 to 1,222. However, when coupled with the operator savings also proposed for the Sign-up and discussed above, there is a net reduction of 14 regular runs and five extra board positions to bring the total headcount requirement for daily service down from 1,208 to 1,189. The net operator savings will be reduced to eight regular runs and three extra board positions if the extension of Line 7 to Emeryville Amtrak via Ashby Avenue pilot needs to be implemented.

While these proposed changes lessen the daily operator requirement to fill all of the district's scheduled operator run assignments, the budgeted operator count approved by the board through the fiscal year 2023 budget process will not change. Staff is committed to the goal of reaching the budgeted operator count through improved recruitment efforts. This goal is in line with recovering service back to pre-pandemic levels.

The changes proposed for August are summarized below (with more detail in Attachment 1):

- The following lines will have changes to their frequency (headway) to realize operator savings: 12, 20, 21, 29, 51A, 54, 79, and 88.
- The following lines will be interlined to save operators: 28 and 41.
- The following lines will have frequency reductions to improve runtime and reliability: 18, 33, 52, 96, 200, and 376.
- The following lines will have additional buses and operators to improve reliability: 39, 51B, 72, 72M, 72R, 76, and 97.

These service changes do not meet the District's threshold for a major service change and fall within the General Manager's authority under Board Policy 544 section V.B. to implement. Other lines may also be identified for minor, cost-neutral service adjustments. Taken together, these adjustments will accomplish two things: 1) reduce the number of missed runs on a daily basis, and 2) improve overall reliability (on-time performance) of the system through added runtime and layover for schedule recovery.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

This package of adjustments will better align District service levels to the number of bus operators available to provide the service. It will reduce unscheduled overtime, operating expenses, and missed trips while improving service reliability. At present, the lack of available operators means service cuts are happening unplanned, leaving customers with no notice or expectation of whether their bus will arrive on any given day. It will also reduce stress for current operators and staff at the operating divisions as there will be fewer empty runs to fill. In addition, staff can reinvest some of the savings into runtime and layover to improve on-time performance for the routes.

The disadvantage of implementing these changes is that while some trips are being missed and on-time performance is suffering, many of these trips are still being filled on a daily basis and these changes will impact customers, though minimally, as these lines will operate less often, though not by a significant amount in most cases.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

As an alternative to the package presented in this staff report, staff also evaluated cuts to fewer lines, but given forecasts for operator availability as well as recent trends despite staff's best recruitment efforts, staff is planning service for less operator growth than anticipated, particularly in the near future. Staff also evaluated other lines beyond those included in this report and determined the reductions in headway would either be too severe or too many lines would fall into concentrated areas. Staff also discussed at length the possibility of making no changes to service levels, but the number of operators available for service on any given day may not significantly increase in the near term, meaning some action needs to be taken to adjust service levels to better match operator availability until the District can hire more operators.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

Board Policy No. 110 Public Hearing Process for the Board of Directors

Board Policy No. 518 Title VI and Environmental Justice Service Review and Compliance Report

Board Policy No. 544 Service Adjustments

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Service Proposal Summary

Prepared by:

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Approved/Reviewed by:

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