

MEMORANDUM

July 11, 2023

Project #: 213850.003

To: David Berman, AICP, Senior Transportation Planner
Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District
1600 Franklin Street
Oakland, CA 94612

From: Kittelson & Associates, Inc.

RE: **AC Transit Realign: Draft Guiding Principles**

Introduction

AC Transit Realign will restructure bus service in response to changing transportation needs associated with the pandemic and in light of declining transportation revenues. Realign aims to improve the customer experience through the following goals:

- Assess today's travel patterns and the community's current AC Transit service needs.
- Implement an inclusive planning process that incorporates quantitative and qualitative data along with rider and community feedback – including the voices of hard-to-reach equity communities.
- Align service schedules, coverage, and frequencies based on major needs identified by the community, riders, travel pattern data, finances, and workforce availability.
- Update our service standards with best practices for the design of our bus service.

This memorandum presents the draft guiding principles that will be used to guide the development of service alternatives. The guiding principles are informed by community input received through the online survey and in-person engagement events, as well as the findings of the existing conditions technical analysis.

Community input on the draft guiding principles will be solicited during Phase 2 of community engagement. This input will be used to develop a final set of guiding principles for review and approval by the AC Transit Board of Directors in September 2023. Community input will also be solicited to determine the relative priority of the guiding principles, recognizing that the relative priority may vary across the four subareas/planning areas within the AC Transit service area. The final set of guiding principles will be used as the basis for developing service alternatives.

The remainder of the memorandum summarizes the draft guiding principles. The discussion of each draft principle includes the following:

- Background – summary of the relevant input received through the community engagement and technical analysis
- Intent – the purpose and intended outcome for the principle
- Implementation – potential strategies, actions, and tradeoffs that illustrate how the principle would be put into practice through Realign

Draft Guiding Principles

Draft Principle #1

Equity: Provide bus service that prioritizes mobility for communities who need it the most.

Background

Over the last decade, displacement and gentrification have made it harder for low-income residents to stay in the area. The share of zero vehicle households in the service area decreased between 2013 and 2021. The share of lower-income households also decreased throughout the service area during this period.

The makeup of the AC Transit service area is changing due to an aging population. The share of residents 65 and older increased by 2.5 percentage points, while the share of youth under 18 years old is decreasing.

During the in-person outreach events held in Spring 2023, people emphasized the importance of frequent service on busier bus routes, particularly for seniors and individuals with disabilities. For these groups, 30-minute wait times were viewed as too long.

During the in-person outreach events, people stated that they would like more robust weekend schedules to accommodate riders with nontraditional work hours, in addition to early mornings and late evenings throughout the week.

Intent

This principle is intended to provide the greatest level of service where concentrations of the greatest mobility need exist, focusing resources on Equity Priority Communities within the AC Transit service area.

Implementation

Implementation of this principle would focus on Equity Priority Communities (EPCs) within the AC Transit service area. EPCs are defined as part of Plan Bay Area 2050 and are based on a combination of criteria and thresholds:

- People of Color (70% threshold)
- Low-Income (less than 200% of Fed. poverty level, 28% threshold)
- Level of English Proficiency (12% threshold)
- Seniors 75 Years and Over (8% threshold)
- Zero-Vehicle Households (15% threshold)
- Single Parent Households (18% threshold)
- People with a Disability (12% threshold)
- Rent-Burdened Households (14% threshold)

If a tract exceeds both threshold values for Low-Income and People of Color shares OR exceeds the threshold value for Low-Income AND also exceeds the threshold values for three or more variables, it is an EPC.

For EPCs within the service area, service frequencies and hours of operation would be maintained at current levels or increased, with the goal of providing high-frequency service (overall headways of 15 minutes or

better) for all areas. Nighttime and weekend service will be prioritized for these areas. Suspended lines that serve these areas may be restored.

Portions of the service area outside of EPCs may have service frequencies and hours of operation maintained or reduced to prioritize providing service to EPCs. High-frequency service outside of EPCs would be based on ridership demand, as would nighttime and weekend service. Suspended lines that serve areas outside of EPCs would not be restored.

Draft Principle #2

Reliability: Provide bus service that is reliable and predictable.

Background

Reliable service is a key element of the overall customer experience. When people were asked in the survey what aspects of AC Transit service could be improved, 39% of respondents mentioned reliability – buses being dependable, on-time, not departing early or late, or canceling without notice. For this question, reliability was mentioned the most of any topic.

During the in-person outreach events held in Spring 2023, riders also shared that they feel AC Transit's bus service lacks reliability and predictability.

Research across the transit industry has found that reliable, on-time service is the most important factor in retaining transit riders.

Intent

This principle is intended to provide adequate redundancy in operating resources to ensure that trips that are scheduled are operated.

Implementation

Implementation of this principle through the network redesign process may include: adding more recovery time to operator schedules to account for traffic congestion or unforeseen delays, adjusting running times, modifying route alignments to shorten running times or avoid bottlenecks, and headway adjustments.

Implementation of this principle also means that layover space and restrooms are conveniently located, which are key factors in providing reliable service.

While other on-going AC Transit efforts include the delivery of capital-intensive infrastructure enhancements including quick-build projects, transit signal priority, and other transit priority measures, those fall outside the scope of Realign's distinct focus on service planning and network design.

As with all of the guiding principles, implementation of this principle requires significant tradeoffs.

- Using more resources for existing services means that fewer resources are available to increase service frequencies or expand hours of operation.
- Reductions in service levels may occur to ensure that trips can be delivered consistently and reliably.

Draft Principle #3

Frequency: Provide frequent service to the most people. The importance of frequency will vary by location and will be balanced against geographic coverage and community needs.

Background

When people were asked in the online survey which single most important improvement AC Transit could make to improve their travel, 27% of respondents mentioned more frequent service. (26% mentioned more reliable service.) For this question, frequency was mentioned the most of any topic.

Frequency needs to match the market that the service is operating in. Denser neighborhoods present more opportunities for ridership, which is reflected in how routes perform within the AC Transit network. Most of the highest ridership routes primarily serve the Oakland-Alameda-Berkeley subarea, the densest area in the system. This matches findings from public outreach.

During the in-person outreach events held in Spring 2023, riders stated they would like to see frequently used bus lines return to pre-pandemic service levels. Compared to pre-pandemic service, there has been relatively little decline in geographic coverage. Most areas served pre-pandemic are served under current service. Instead, most of the reductions in service have been reductions in frequency.

The top 11 routes carry just over 51% of total system ridership but represent just 35% of total resources. Meanwhile, the bottom 50 routes carry just 23% of total system ridership but represent 37% of total resources. This suggests that frequencies in the core network are lower than demand, while frequencies in the outlying parts of the network may be greater than demand.

Research across the transit industry has found that frequent service is the most important factor in attracting transit riders.

Community Feedback on Related Tradeoffs

There are many tradeoffs associated with prioritizing more frequent service. The survey asked about three of them, and the findings on these tradeoffs are discussed below:

Frequency versus Geographic Coverage: In the survey, 60% of all respondents prefer prioritizing frequency over geographic coverage. This preference was shared across subareas and by both frequent riders and non-riders.

Frequency versus Fewer Transfers: The survey responses show a 50/50 split between buses coming more often (with more transfers) and bus routes that require fewer transfers (with less frequent service). Preferences varied across subareas. Lower-income respondents have a stronger preference for more frequent service (55% versus 45%). Higher-income respondents have a lower preference for more frequent service (47% versus 53%).

Frequency versus Shorter Walk to the Bus Stop: In the survey, 60% of all respondents prefer more frequent service and shorter wait times even if it means a longer walk to and from the bus stop. Preferences varied across subareas and demographic groups. Lower-income respondents are split evenly between more frequent service versus a shorter walk to the bus stop (50% for both). Higher-income respondents have a stronger

preference for more frequent service (67% versus 33%). Respondents with a disability have a lower preference for more frequent service versus a shorter walk (40% versus 60%).

The responses to the three tradeoffs vary by subarea within the AC Transit service area, as mentioned above:

Western Contra Costa County Subarea

- Frequency (58%) versus greater geographic coverage (42%)
- Frequency (56%) versus fewer transfers (44%)
- Frequency (55%) versus shorter walk to the bus stop (45%)

Oakland-Alameda-Berkeley Subarea (Northern Alameda County)

- Frequency (64%) versus greater geographic coverage (36%)
- Frequency (49%) versus fewer transfers (51%)
- Frequency (65%) versus shorter walk to the bus stop (35%)

Hayward-San Leandro Subarea (Central Alameda County)

- Frequency (58%) versus geographic coverage (42%)
- Frequency (63%) versus fewer transfers (37%)
- Frequency (48%) versus shorter walk to the bus stop (52%)

Fremont-Newark-Union City Subarea (Southern Alameda County)

- Frequency (61%) versus geographic coverage (39%)
- Frequency (54%) versus fewer transfers (46%)
- Frequency (51%) versus shorter walk to the bus stop (49%)

Intent

This principle is intended to provide the highest frequency service where the greatest demand exists while maintaining a network of high-frequency corridors (15 minutes or better) that includes all subareas.

Implementation

Implementation of this principle means that service would be focused on higher-density areas that generally correspond to the corridors with the highest ridership. Service levels would be maintained or increased to match levels of demand. Pre-pandemic service levels may be restored where demand exists.

Implementation of frequent service would be balanced against geographic coverage. Recognizing that most of the highest-ridership routes are within the Oakland-Alameda-Berkeley subarea, at least one high-frequency corridor would be maintained in each of the other subareas. Evening and weekend service would be maintained as part of these corridors.

Implementation of this principle would also be balanced against the needs to provide mobility throughout the AC Transit service area. Transbay routes and school routes would be prioritized to the extent they serve Equity Priority Communities, but some routes may be reduced in favor of providing high-frequency service where the highest demand exists. Microtransit or other alternatives to fixed-route service may be explored in areas with low ridership.

Where high-frequency service is not provided, implementation of this principle would also prioritize timed transfers so that riders can transfer between buses with minimal wait time.

Implementing this principle will also include service changes to make routes more efficient. For example, route deviations may be removed and some routes may be interlined.

As mentioned earlier, prioritizing frequency as a principle comes at the cost of geographic coverage. In particular, portions of the service area not near high-frequency corridors may have reduced service and/or hours of operation. Restoring suspended routes would not be prioritized, but all or part of some suspended routes may be restored based on context.

Other Issues Identified Through Community Engagement

AC Transit riders and non-riders identified several needs that extend beyond the bus service changes that will occur through Realign. While these issues will not be addressed directly as part of this project, the feedback will be used for other AC Transit plans and programs.

- Improved reliability for the AC Transit mobile app, including advance notice of delays or cancellations
- Comfortable sidewalk access to the bus stop
- Cleaner bus stops
- More lighting at bus stops during early morning and late-night hours
- More bike storage on buses and bike lockers at bus stops
- More support for bus drivers when they are managing disruptive passengers