

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 3/13/2024

Staff Report No. 23-250g

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: AC Transit Realign Phase 4: Updates and Key Decision Points

ACTION ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST: ☐

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving updates on project timeline changes and strategic options associated with Realign, setting a special Board meeting focusing on Realign plan revisions and draft Service Standards on June 5, 2024 at 5:00 p.m., and directing staff to incorporate the staff recommended strategies provided in the staff report in future plan revisions.

Staff Contact:
Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering
Beverly Greene, Executive Director of External Affairs, Marketing & Communications

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service
Initiative - Service Quality

The Realign planning effort meets the Service Quality initiative by combining a comprehensive review of existing service and conditions, robust public outreach and stakeholder engagement, and market research and analysis to craft a new service network for the District that responds to new travel needs and maximizes service within available resources.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

The proposed strategy options are designed to work within existing resources and the number of bus operators available to the District today.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

At the January 24, 2024 Board meeting, the Board directed staff to extend the Realign process by six months, to refine the draft plan to eliminate disparate impacts on equity priority communities, to cease the study of using non-union operators in the District's service area, and to approach the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) - Local 192 about another General Sign-up, and to advise and consult with the Board within three months.

Proposed Timeline Adjustments

A new Realign network was initially slated for implementation in August 2024. In line with the Board's direction, an additional six months would put implementation in the Spring 2025 Sign-up (March 2025). Staff has assembled an expedited schedule designed to facilitate this timeline. Staff's proposed revised project timeline is depicted below.

| Date | Phase 4 Activity |
|---------------------|--|
| MAR 13, 2024 | Board Meeting: Realign update, Review/Approve Updated Strategy |
| MAY 1, 2024 | Start Public promotions and outreach announcements; "updated Draft Service Plan Coming...." |
| MAY 15, 2024 | Public Release of updated Draft Service Plan / Public Engagement window <u>OPENS</u> (3 Weeks) |
| MAY 23, 2024 | AC Transit Realign Workshop via Zoom - Updated Draft Service Plan Review/Q&A (Public) |
| JUN 5, 2024 | Updated Draft Service Plan Open House |
| | Special Board Meeting: Realign workshop and feedback on updated Draft Service Plan |
| | <u>CLOSE</u> public feedback window on updated Draft Service Plan |
| JUN 2024 | Refine Draft Service Plan incorporating Board and public feedback |
| JUL 2024 | Prepare Board Report for Aug 7 |
| AUG 7, 2024 | Request to set Public Hearing on draft Final Service Plan / Public Hearing Comment Period <u>OPENS</u> |
| SEP 9, 10, 11, 2024 | Public Hearing(s)* / Public Hearing Comment Period <u>CLOSES</u> |
| OCT 9, 2024 | Board Decision on Final Service Plan |
| OCT 10, 2024 | Implementation Team begins, schedule development, communications development, testing and training |
| FEB 2, 2025 | Public information, education and communications begin and continue through March 30, 2025 |
| MAR 9, 2025 | Implement new Network Service Plan |

***Public Hearing Notes:** 9/9 at 6:00 PM AND 9/10 at 9:00 AM (Staff-led); 9/11 2:00 PM and 6:00 PM (Board-led)

Given the significant feedback heard at the January 24, 2024, Board meeting from the members of the Board and the public, staff recommends at least one additional plan revision and feedback period before asking the Board to set a public hearing and open a public comment window on a *Draft Final Service Plan*. This gives staff about two months to retool the project approach, schedule additional as-needed consultant support, and develop a revised plan in-house for dissemination for a short (3 weeks) outreach window in May 2024.

This additional plan revision and the accompanying outreach window between May 15 and June 5, 2024 allows a three-week public comment period for staff to incorporate any additional feedback from the Board and community in advance of creating a revised draft Final Service Plan intended to be brought for a Public Hearing in September 2024. Although the public outreach window will be short, it is necessary to do the

following:

- 1) Proactively provide an opportunity for public feedback and Board direction that helps guide an additional plan revision before the formal public hearing process, and;
- 2) Meet the March 2025 implementation timeframe prescribed by the Board.

In parallel, the project team has started work on updates to the District's Service Standards (Board Policy 545) and will present a draft policy at the proposed special board workshop on June 5, 2024. The team will update the draft service standards and ask for board approval of a final Board Policy document in August 2024.

Disparate Impacts and Equity Priority Communities

Staff's analysis presented at the January 24, 2024 meeting showed the Board how access would change in equity priority communities versus non-equity priority communities, with well under a one percent differential in access to jobs, hospitals, and grocery stores and falls below the Board-adopted 15 percent threshold of "disparate impact" referred to in Board Policy 518.

Proposed frequency reductions that serve equity priority communities drew the Board's focus. In response, staff has brought forward a strategy that would add more frequency on trunk lines by either measured investments in reliability where it can be measured via Key Performance Indicators (KPI), or to reduce frequency or coverage in non-Equity Priority Community (EPC) areas.

Non-Union Operators in the District's Service Area

During the initial stages of Realign, staff explored various options, such as collaborating with Uber, Lyft, Via, or other contractors to offer flexible and affordable services in low-density transit areas. These areas were similar to those covered by AC Transit Flex, the District's previous microtransit service, before COVID-19.

Board direction on this issue makes clear that any discussion of using non-union contracted operators is not acceptable. Staff is exploring in-house solutions for any flexible service proposals and continues to discuss future possibilities beyond Realign that would improve coordination between the District and local transit operators with a union workforce, including the possibility of moving all Dumbarton Bridge services onto the Dumbarton Express contract for a more seamless customer experience.

Approach ATU Local 192 about March General Signup

Staff is in the process of initiating discussions with ATU leadership on the possibility of a General Sign-up in March 2025 in order to implement Realign if approved by the Board. Staff will have additional updates of the feasibility of this option when we report back to the Board with a revised network plan.

Pursuing Future Plan Refinements

Staff received clear direction at the January 24th Board meeting to add time to the project schedule to refine the plan. Board comments also requested exploration into what would be needed to increase operator counts to reduce plan tradeoffs. While operator hiring and retention fall largely outside the scope of Realign, staff has summarized comments directly related to Realign as follows:

- Reliability is a project guiding principle, but reliability improvements must be measurable and more closely linked with AC Transit's Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

- Frequency remains a key guiding principle of Realign and trimming service on major corridors or trunks to free up resources for reliability is unacceptable.
- Equity also remains a key goal of Realign and cutting service within Equity Priority Communities (EPCs) is unacceptable.
- Transbay service serves disproportionately high-income customers compared to local service and current service levels were largely preserved in that plan proposal at the expense of local service to EPCs. As part of Realign, currently suspended Transbay lines have already been proposed for elimination but will be considered in future network vision planning efforts.

In response, staff have conducted additional analysis and identified a recommended package of improvements that addresses the themes above and better manages tradeoffs; however, no solution comes without a cost, either in terms of operators, service quality, or coverage.

Staff Recommended Strategy (March 2025 Implementation)

The staff recommendation includes a rollback of the 40 operator investment proposed at the January 24, 2024 Board Meeting. With a few exceptions, noted below, staff recommends that the proposed route alignments remain the same as in the January 24th plan. Staff's recommendation for March 2025 implementation includes the following strategies:

Improve Reliability

Make targeted reliability improvements (additional resources for layover above collective bargaining agreement minimums) that address field conditions and other impacts to lines that fall below 70% on-time performance and where proposed service changes would not already result in recovery time increases.

Broaden Frequent Network

Add lines 10, 18, 57, and NL into the frequent network (operating every 15 minutes or better). Relative to other less frequent lines as proposed in the January 24th plan, these see higher ridership and productivity, disproportionately serve low-income individuals and people of color, and span a significant number of Equity Priority Communities throughout the District. Relative to the Jan 24th plan, including these lines in the frequent transit network brings frequent network access from just above a fifth of the District's total service area population to just under a third.

Tune Frequency for Efficiency

Implement minor frequency changes (e.g., every 60 min. -> every 63 min.) that allow for resource savings with minimal impacts on service quality.

Additional Plan Changes

Based on public feedback and City comments, staff will revisit the proposed Line 19 extension to serve the Main Street Ferry terminal and consider other service alternatives more useful for Alameda residents.

If by October 2024, staff sees a net increase in operators, the District will invest additional resources in March 2025 to bring service that runs every 15 minute or better to more corridors, strengthening our core Inner East Bay transit network in line with the project guiding principles. In the more detailed plan revisions for public input in May and August of this year, staff will provide lists of investment priorities for near-to-mid-term implementation in line with our project guiding principles. These changes will be designed to dovetail with the

additional work by the project team to be completed on a longer-term visionary network plan beginning in fall 2024.

Note that the staff recommendation includes planning-level assumptions with conservative resource projections; as timetables and detailed service schedules are developed, additional efficiencies and/or costs may be identified.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

Key advantages of the staff recommended strategy include:

- **Reinforces reliability** by improving average recovery times throughout the local network.
- **Adds lines operating every 15 minutes or better along transit-oriented corridors**, boosting access to frequent transit from just over 1/5th of the District's population in the Jan 24th plan to just under a 1/3rd, with heavy focus on equity priority communities.
- **Service throughout West Contra Costa County will improve to every 30 minutes** or better.
- **Crosstown lines in Central Alameda County** (San Leandro, Hayward, Castro Valley, Unincorporated Area) will **improve from every 60 minutes to every 40 minutes**.
- Existing **Line 96 will extend to Brooklyn Basin**, providing transit access to an additional 2,000 - 3,000 residents in a parking-light development and providing transit access for East Oakland residents to new high-quality parkland at Township Commons.
- New **crosstown connections along Alcatraz and Stanford** in South Berkeley and North Oakland will better connect Equity Priority Communities to retail and jobs in Emeryville and Rockridge.
- Reintroduces **permanent service on the Ashby corridor**, with direct connections to Emeryville and the UC Berkeley campus.
- New **crosstown connections to the Bayside Newark** development and direct service between Warm Springs BART and Pacific Commons will better connect retail and jobs.
- **Keeps existing 600-series Supplementary Service lines** intact to ensure access for those traveling to and from schools.

Key disadvantages of the staff recommendation include:

- Existing operator counts are assumed, meaning **all changes are cost- and operator-neutral**, and overall service in March 2025 will remain **below pre-pandemic service levels**.
- The **72R San Pablo Rapid** line will be reduced to **operate every 30 minutes** to allow for investment in frequency throughout the rest of the district, in addition to the proposed reliability improvements. Lines 72 and 72M would continue to operate at existing frequencies for a combined average frequency of every 10 minutes at Rapid stops (every 15 minutes at local stops) along the portion of the corridor where all three routes operate.
- **One-seat rides to destinations for some residents will change** under the staff recommendation, including direct access for Alameda residents to Kaiser Oakland.
- **Suspended Transbay lines are not proposed to return as part of Realign** given ample capacity for travel to San Francisco via existing local service and BART.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:**Timeline Alternatives**

Staff considered forgoing an additional plan revision and short outreach window in May and instead bringing one plan revision forward with a longer public hearing window starting in August 2024. However, one plan revision and a lengthened public hearing window would preclude any formal opportunity for staff to solicit and incorporate public and Board comments into the proposal before the formal public hearing process begins. Given the significant interest generated by earlier plan proposals, even a short window for public comment within the longer but still aggressive timeline will be imperative to allow staff the time to adjust the plan if necessary and ensure the plan reflects the Board's vision for service.

Trimming Transbay

At the January 24th Board meeting, some Board members discussed the possibility of repurposing Transbay resources to fund local service.

Reasons to consider reducing Transbay service to invest in local service include the following:

- Per Attachment 2, Transbay ridership recovery to-date is worse than local service, with Transbay service having recovered approximately 26% of overall pre-pandemic ridership, and 45% of pre-pandemic ridership recovered when normalized on a per-trip basis. Both metrics make clear that the Transbay network continues to underperform relative to the local network.
- Most markets (though not all) served by Transbay lines are also served by local lines, with time-competitive bus-to-BART connections to downtown San Francisco. Forthcoming MTC free transfer pilots will offset costs for riders transferring between local bus service and BART.
- The local bus network and BART have current capacity to accommodate the Transbay riders that the District serves today. Moreover, BART boasts significantly more room for future ridership growth than AC Transit Transbay service as BART's Fleet of the Future continues to expand in size and forthcoming train control system improvements increase Transbay Tube capacity. Also, funding for renovation and expansion of AC Transit operating divisions in support of a significant expansion of Transbay and/or local service has yet to be identified should the need arise due to a significant increase in demand.
- Per the 2017-18 AC Transit On-Board Survey (the most recent comprehensive, statistically rigorous data on riders available at the route level), local riders are nearly twice as likely to be low-income as Transbay riders and Transbay riders are over seven times as likely to have incomes above \$150,000 as compared to local riders. More recent data at this granularity are unfortunately unavailable.
- Test runcuts show that the District would save 20 operators by eliminating peak-only Transbay service (all lines save lines O, F, and NL) even while retaining all existing 600-series lines that serve schools. Accurate saving estimations of smaller subsets of peak-only lines would require additional test runcuts due to the complexity of school/Transbay interlining. Staff project an additional ten operator savings by restructuring All-Day Transbay services (Lines O, F, and NL) to run only within the East Bay.

Challenges associated with reducing Transbay service include the following:

- The District's overall bus fleet includes a sub-fleet of new MCI commuter coaches and Alexander Dennis double-decker commuter coaches best suited for limited stop express bus service rather than for use on local bus routes. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant funding agreements require buses to be used continuously and appropriately throughout their useful life, or else the assets and/or the federal grants to procure those assets must be surrendered and/or repaid. Should the District

consider discontinuing additional commuter bus service, staff may need to work actively with the FTA and/or peer agencies to make appropriate arrangements.

- Transbay service is heavily subsidized by bridge toll revenues for “regional express bus” service from Regional Measure 2, and now monies from Regional Measure 3. Any significant changes to this financial framework would require additional consultation and/or negotiations with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) likely beyond the timeline required to begin Realign implementation in March 2025.
- Transbay service represents a significant portion of the service level calculations that price the EasyPass/ClassPass institutional pass program. Without Transbay service, District revenues could be negatively impacted by lower institutional pass prices and/or the loss of customers such as Stanford University.
- Reductions to Transbay service would further reduce the utility of the District’s annual contributions to support the Salesforce Transit Center and Bus Storage Facility operations, which for FY 23-24 are estimated at \$4.35m. Any significant changes to this financial framework would require additional consultation and/or negotiations with the Transbay Joint Powers Authority (TJPA) and MTC likely beyond the timeline required to begin Realign implementation in March 2025.

The District’s Transbay service is popular among those who use the service, with a loyal and vocal user base, and has been supportive in helping the District secure regional funding.

Staff’s recommended strategy for Transbay consolidates lines L and LA and lines OX and W and does not restore pre-pandemic Transbay lines or service levels given the significant fleet, funding, and issues associated with implementing any changes on the aggressive Realign project schedule and the ample capacity that exists for travel to San Francisco via existing local service and BART.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

SR 22-502 Network Redesign Timeline Update and Procurement Approval
SR 23-250 Realign Network Plan Update
SR 23-250a Realign Network Plan Update
SR 23-250b Realign Network Plan Update
SR 23-250c Realign Network Plan Update and Revised Guiding Principles Approval
SR 23-250d Realign Draft Service Scenarios
SR 23-250e Realign Phase 3 Summary
SR 23-250f Set Public Hearings: Realign Draft Final Plan Proposal

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Presentation
2. Transbay Service Performance Overview

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