

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 1/23/2019

Staff Report No. 19-024

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager
SUBJECT: Service Alignment with Operator Availability

ACTION ITEM

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider approving a series of service changes for the June 2019 sign-up that would normalize service levels to match the number of available operators.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

Since there is no change in the 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:

Following the passage of Measure BB in 2014, AC Transit developed and implemented a set of service improvements - funded by that measure and marketed as AC Go - that resulted in an increase in the number of operators required for planned service from about 1,250 operators in 2015 to 1,344 operators in 2018, including the Extra Board. These service enhancements have resulted in ridership increases District-wide, in particular on the lines that were improved as part of AC Go. However, this significant increase in the number of operators required to provide service has also placed strain on the District given the current environment of low unemployment. The District has struggled to hire at a rate faster than attrition, and at the same time operator absenteeism has increased by approximately 6 percent from the previous year.

For FY 2018-19 there are 1,353 approved operator positions. The District was able to maintain an operator workforce of 1,344 earlier in 2018 but availability began to diminish in the summer and now hovers around 1,300 operators, with the difference made up of 20 vacant positions and the rest of operators working out of position or absent for other reasons. As of December 2018 the 1,300 "active" operators available on any given day also account for 200 operators who are on short-term leave (out for less than six months) or using other types of unplanned time off. As a result, the District only has approximately 1,100 operators actually available to drive buses each day. The large amount of operators on short-term leave has most significantly affected how much service the District is able to deliver.

At the October 24, 2018 Board meeting, staff presented a report on operator absenteeism and its impact on

service delivery. Since that time, Service Planning staff worked with Operations staff to develop service adjustments to assist the District in delivering scheduled service with available operators as part of the sign-up. These changes are discussed below and are already included within the March 2019 sign-up.

The District is currently canceling local service each day based on Board Policy 471. Looking at October 2018 as a representative month, 1,138 missed trips were spread across 65 different routes. However, two routes - 57 and 51B - accounted for 22 percent of those missed trips, leading to a sizeable unplanned service cut for those customers. Exhibit 1 in Attachment 1 illustrates the breakdown of those missed trips by high-frequency routes operating every 15 minutes or better (62 percent of missed trips), Owl/Transbay/Supplemental Routes (4 percent of missed trips, and all other routes (34 percent of missed trips).

With a goal of minimizing the number of unplanned service cancelations and ensuring that customers can be confident in the schedules published by the District every day, staff identified service adjustments based on the following methodology:

1. Low-frequency and life-line service would not be touched given the significant impacts this would have on the most transit-dependent populations;
2. No impact to Service in District 2 as all of the service expansion associated with AC Go thus far has occurred in District 1;
3. Implement possible interlines and runtime efficiencies without affecting the frequency;
4. Maximum load points on lines under consideration for adjustment were reviewed to determine whether reductions in frequency would lead to overcrowding, and only lines where a modest reduction in frequency would not lead to a violation of Board Policy 545 were included.

Staff has already included adjustments to Lines 1, 6, 34/35, and 40 in the March 2019 sign-up given the critical short-term need to alleviate some pressure on the operator workforce; these are minor adjustments with minimal impact on these routes. These adjustments in the March sign-up are estimated to reduce the workforce requirement by 14 operators. Lines 34 and 35 are unique in that they can be interlined to reduce the bus requirement by one and preserve the same headways as today.

The service adjustments package recommended for implementation in June 2019 is detailed in Exhibit 2 of Attachment 1 and will reduce the operator requirement by as many as 26 operators, which - in addition to the 14-operator reduction in March 2019 - would bring the workforce requirement down to the current number of available operators. The headway adjustments and interlining also allow for runtime and layover time to be improved as a result.

The package in this report includes adjustments to Lines 10, 12, 14, 18, 33, 54, 57, 62, 72R, 73, 83/86, 88, and NL. All of these adjustments feature a small reduction in headways to allow for a reduction in the bus and operator requirement for the respective lines. Between the March and June 2019 sign-up adjustments, the operator count will be reduced by an estimated 40 operators.

Staff anticipates these minor reductions to normalize daily service will be temporary until the District can hire more new operators and increase the availability of current operators. Staff is in the process of developing a more aggressive recruitment plan to fill existing vacant operator positions. For current operators, staff is exploring ways to decrease the number of operators working out of position and have them return to bus

operator positions. In addition, the District has a renewed focus on service quality by: attempting to improve schedule adherence on all routes, implementing a line ride program to identify schedule improvements, and developing operator forums to closely examine all trunk lines for route and schedule improvements. Staff recently completed its first forum on Line 72/72M/72R and received excellent feedback from the operators and a board member on how to improve the quality of service along the San Pablo Corridor. It is critical to note these changes do not require a Title 6 Service Equity Analysis or Public Hearing as they do not reach the thresholds adopted in Board Policies 110 or 518.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

This package of adjustments will better align District service levels to the number of bus operators actually available to provide the service. It will reduce unscheduled overtime, operating expense, 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 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 reductions 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, staff's expectation is the number of available operators will hover at 1,300 for 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. These other lines are included in Attachment 1 as Exhibit 3. Staff has also discussed at length the possibility of making no changes to service levels but it is clear the number of operators available for service on any given day will continue to linger in the low 1,300 range, meaning some action needs to be taken to adjust service levels to better match operator availability.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

18-233 - Addressing Operator Absenteeism

Board Policy 110 - Public Hearing Process for the Board of Directors

Board Policy 471 - Cancellation of Scheduled Service Policy

Board Policy 518 - Title VI and Environmental Justice Service Review and Compliance Report Policy

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Exhibits

Approved by:

Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering

Reviewed by:

Salvador Llamas, Chief Operating Officer

Denise C. Standridge, General Counsel

Claudia L. Allen, Chief Financial Officer

Claudia Burgos, Director of Legislative Affairs & Community Relations

Beverly Greene, Executive Director of External Affairs, Marketing & Communications

Robert del Rosario, Director of Services Development and Planning

Michele Joseph, Director of Marketing & Communications

Derik Calhoun, Director of Transportation

Chris Andrichak, Director of Management & Budget

Sally Goodman, Title VI Administrator

Prepared by:

Michael Eshleman, Manager of Service Planning