

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 12/11/2019

Staff Report No. 19-407

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager
SUBJECT: Overview of Fremont/Newark Bus Network Plan Alternatives

BRIEFING ITEM

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving report, and provide feedback, on two proposed service change scenarios in Special Transit Service District 2, which consists of the cities of Fremont and Newark.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service
Initiative - Service Quality

For a transit service to be convenient and reliable, it needs to be properly matched to the travel needs of its riders. In Fremont and Newark, the frequency improvements proposed in the two scenarios for a redesigned transit network tie directly into the District's goal to improve customer satisfaction through improvements in reliability, speed, frequency, and overall amenities.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

The proposed service alternatives have been designed to maintain operator counts and service hours equal with what the District currently operates in Fremont and Newark. Due to the return-to-source agreement that governs Special Transit Service District 2's incorporation into the greater AC Transit District, the plan alternatives are designed to be cost- and revenue-neutral.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

In late 2018, the District began its most recent efforts to improve the transit network to better meet more people's travel needs in Fremont and Newark. In the context of declining ridership on the District's service in Fremont and Newark and new transportation options in the marketplace, staff conducted an extensive existing conditions analysis to better understand 1) how people use transit in the area today and 2) how AC Transit service performs when it comes to ridership and quality of service. This effort was undertaken with the goal of developing a new service plan responsive to the needs of today's Fremont and Newark.

Survey Overview

In preparation for developing network alternatives, staff in Planning, Marketing and Communications, and Legislative Affairs and Community Relations have been hard at work to engage residents and others who travel

in and around Fremont and Newark in a dialogue about their transit needs. To round out the existing conditions analysis, staff developed a short survey geared to better understand the public's appetite for 1) an expansion of AC Transit's on-demand Flex service; 2) the appetite for increased service to better meet the community's needs; and 3) what kinds of destinations should be prioritized as part of redesigned transit network in Fremont and Newark.

The general public survey was primarily conducted online, with paper surveys incorporated strategically at in-person outreach events throughout Fremont and Newark beginning in August 2019. Reflecting the languages spoken in the cities, both digital and paper survey instruments were offered in English, Chinese, and Spanish.

In order to ensure as many individuals as possible had the opportunity to make their voices heard with respect to the future direction of AC Transit service in Fremont and Newark, staff logged approximately 250 outreach hours, engaging with those in both cities. Staff distributed materials in the following forums in order to solicit feedback from riders and non-riders alike.

- 8/3 and 8/4: Fremont Festival of the Arts
- 8/8: National Night Out @ Stevenson Terrace
- 8/15: Fact Sheets distributed at Fremont FRC, Fremont Senior Center, VA Center, Chamber of Commerce, Tri-City Health Clinics
- 8/18: Fremont Festival of the Globe
- 8/20: Newark Unified School District Meet and Greet
- 8/27 (6:00 am - 6:00 pm): Outreach Intercepts: Union City BART Station
- 8/28 (6:00 am - 6:00 pm): Outreach Intercepts: Fremont BART Station
- 8/28: Newark Gardens Senior Housing Community Meeting and Clipper Workshop
- 8/29 (6:00 am - 6:00 pm): Outreach Intercepts: Warm Springs BART Station
- 9/3: Tabling/Outreach at Fremont Senior Center
- Materials Distributed at Fremont Main Library
- 9/4: Outreach at Newark Senior Center
- 9/4: Outreach at Horner Junior High School
- 9/9: Outreach at Fremont Family Resource Center
- 9/12: Outreach at Washington High School
- 9/12: Newark City Council Public Service Announcement

- 9/3 Ohlone Community College President's Advisory Committee
- 9/17: Fremont City Council Public Service Announcement
- 9/17: Fremont Mayor Mei Facebook/Instagram Outreach
- 9/18: Outreach at Centerville Junior High School
- 9/22 Newark Days Community Information Fair
- 9/26: Outreach at Irvington High School
- 9/26: Outreach at American High School
- 9/27: Fremont Senior Housing Outreach; Pauline Weaver, Sequoia Manor, and Cottonwood Place
- October and November: Additional outreach, survey responses, and comments received from stakeholders at Ohlone College, Aviation Institute of Maintenance, Fremont Chamber of Commerce, the California School for the Blind, and the California School for the Deaf

Survey Results

The survey, which opened on August 2nd and closed on September 29th, yielded 774 responses. 439 responses were collected via paper and 335 via the online survey. With respect to the content, the stated preferences can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Most respondents preferred *traditional bus service* at a 30-60-minute frequency over an on-demand service without a set schedule that operates like Flex.
- 2) Most respondents preferred *more frequent service* either by reducing coverage or adding new taxes over maintaining existing service levels.
- 3) Respondents identified *BART* (74% of respondents), *Shopping/Retail* (30%), and *Service to Schools* (27%) as the highest priority transit destinations.

These preferences were relatively consistent across demographics and usage patterns, with minor variations. Low-income individuals, for example, tended to rank access to healthcare providers above service to schools, which was not reflected across other demographics, but can be explained by the significant sampling conducted within senior housing communities.

Two Scenarios

Building on the exhaustive analysis conducted as part of the existing conditions report and initial public engagement efforts, staff developed two different alternatives for transit service in Fremont and Newark. The survey results revealed a preference both for fixed-route over on-demand service and for bolstering frequency over what the District operates today. Currently, 100% of AC Transit's service in Fremont and Newark operates infrequently; no routes operate at every 15 minutes. Line 99, which is the most frequent service currently offered within this area, only operates every 20 minutes on weekdays.

Based on the survey data received with respect to on-demand service and its high per passenger operating costs and low productivity, neither scenario proposes expanding Flex service. With these considerations in

mind, staff is asking the Board to consider whether to retain the existing Newark Flex service or replace it with a comparable fixed-route service. The alternatives are divided into two scenarios on which staff will conduct further public outreach.

Scenario 1: Invest 50% of Resources in Frequent Service, 50% in Network Coverage

Under this scenario, the District would allocate approximately 50% of its resources in Fremont and Newark to providing frequent service (15 minutes or better) and approximately 50% of its resources in this area to providing a minimum level of service coverage. Given that this plan anticipates no new revenue, some lower-performing segments would be discontinued to improve transit access throughout the communities with an emphasis on improving service to BART, shopping and retail destinations, and service to schools.

Scenario 2: Invest 35% of Resources in Frequent Service, 65% in Network Coverage

Under this scenario, the District would allocate approximately 35% of its resources in Fremont and Newark to providing frequent service (15 minutes or better) and approximately 65% of its resources in this area to providing a minimum level of service coverage. Like Scenario 1, given that this plan anticipates no new revenue, some lower-performing segments would be discontinued to improve transit access throughout the communities with an emphasis on improving service to BART, shopping and retail destinations, and service to schools. With fewer resources invested in frequent service, fewer lower-performing route segments would be discontinued, and fewer segments would be made to operate frequently.

In line with Board Policy and the District's federal Title VI obligations, staff will conduct a Title VI equity analysis in advance of any Board decision on this plan.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

An advantage of either scenario included in the staff report would be that service frequency would improve in the parts of Fremont where service currently is most well-used and in urban environments that are generally better tailored towards transit access than others within Fremont and Newark. A disadvantage of both scenarios would be that certain neighborhoods where transit service carries fewer riders and where the urban environment is generally less well-suited for transit access would see either reduced or discontinued transit service.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

Rather than considering changes to the transit network that aim to address declining ridership and the pace of new residential and commercial development in Fremont and Newark, the Board could choose to preserve today's transit network. Staff does not recommend this because the existing conditions analysis and the first wave of public engagement activities have identified a need for changes that better match the cities' travel needs.

The Board could also direct staff to develop additional network alternatives favoring an allocation of more than 65% of the District's resources in this area into retaining network coverage at the expense of frequent service. Staff also does not recommend this option, given that it would not be consistent with its public engagement efforts conducted to date, which emphasize the public's interest in more frequent service in Fremont and Newark.

Staff could also develop a scenario that allocates more than 50% of its resources in this area towards more frequent service, but the result would provide significantly less network coverage than what exists today and a network accessible to a prohibitively small number of people and locations throughout the service area.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

12-306a - Public Hearing for the Implementation of the Central and South County Restructuring Plan; 14-247b - Line 275/Flex Service Public Hearing; 15-024 - Summary of Public Outreach for Comprehensive Operations Analysis, Round 1; 15-218a - Service Expansion Plan Public Hearing; 17-128 - AC Transit Flex Service Update; 19-009 - Flex Service; 19-137 - Update on Fremont and Newark Planning Efforts

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Final Existing Conditions Analysis
2. Redesign: Fremont/Newark Presentation
3. Table of Recommendations
4. Outreach Materials (Survey/Informational Brochure/Postcard)

Prepared by:

David Berman, Transportation Planner

In Collaboration with:

Michael Eshleman, Manager of Service Planning

Diann Castleberry, External Affairs Representative

Approved/Reviewed by:

Salvador Llamas, Chief Operating Officer

Ramakrishna Pochiraju, Executive Director of Planning & Engineering

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

Robert del Rosario, Director of Services Development and Planning

Claudia Burgos, Director of Legislative Affairs & Community Relations

Michele Joseph, Director of Marketing and Communications

Claudia L. Allen, Chief Financial Officer

Denise C. Standridge, General Counsel