



Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District

**Board of Directors**

January 28, 2021

Elsa Ortiz, President  
Ward 3

The Honorable Rob Bonta  
18<sup>th</sup> State Assembly District  
California State Capitol, P.O. Box 942849  
Sacramento, CA 94249-0018

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Director at Large

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Dear Assembly Member Bonta,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us earlier this month. We appreciate having had the opportunity to share with you how AC Transit is faring during the pandemic and the steps we are taking to continue to serve and keep safe the communities that rely on us during these challenging times.

AC Transit's riders are the healthcare and social service workers, grocery clerks, caregivers, emergency services personnel and others doing the critical work that has kept California functioning during the pandemic. Just as we rely on them to help us weather the pandemic, they rely on us to get them to their jobs. In response to a rider survey conducted during the shelter in place order, 40 percent of riders shared that they relied on us to make essential trips, such as to purchase food or seek medical care. Forty-three percent said they do not have access to a working vehicle. Additionally, as mentioned in our meetings, access to public transit is an equity issue as AC Transit riders are comprised of 65 percent low income riders and 75 percent of riders are people of color thus making our service critical to the daily lives of our riders.

Since its formation in 1960, AC Transit has also provided home-to-school bus service to students across our entire service area, from Fremont to San Pablo. This "supplementary" service is provided over and above the bus service provided to the general public, and thousands of families rely on it to get their children to and from school. Prior to the declaration of a pandemic last March, AC Transit transported 30,000 students to and from school every school day. Many of the families and students who rely on it are from the same low-income, Black and Latino communities that have borne the brunt of the pandemic. Not having access to reliable home-to-school bus service as schools begin to reopen risks further disadvantaging these already vulnerable communities.

Our focus remains on serving local riders who need to make essential trips and are transit dependent. Unfortunately, the economic fallout from the pandemic and its effects on transit ridership threatens our very survival. We are currently operating at about 75 percent of our pre-pandemic service levels and our ridership is down 60 percent. Sharp ridership declines and the associated revenue decreases challenge the District's financial health.

We currently anticipate a \$23 million deficit in Fiscal Year 2021-22. AC transit's share of the \$900 billion COVID-19 federal relief bill passed last month will help offset some of these losses, but we know that it is only a stopgap measure. California operators estimate they need \$3.1 billion to weather the pandemic and support the region's recovery. The LAO is estimating a \$26 billion windfall in fiscal year 2021-22. We urge you to take a leading role in making sure a portion of these funds support public transportation.

Finally, we want to stress how important it is that AC Transit's workforce be fully vaccinated as soon as possible. Recently, the state announced that it will transition to an age-based distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine following the prioritized vaccination of individuals aged 65-plus and workers in Phase 1B – Tier 1 (i.e., those in health care, emergency services, food and agriculture, and education). In doing so, the plan would effectively eliminate the prioritization of workers in Phase 1B – Tier 2, which includes public transportation operators like AC Transit. This could have profound impacts on our ability to provide safe and reliable transportation to the students, families, and essential workers who rely on us to get them where they need to go.

Therefore, we and our transit partners are urging the Governor to reconsider the age-based distribution plan in one of the two following ways:

1. Preserve the current sector-based distribution that keeps transit workers in Phase 1B – Tier 2;  
or
2. Elevate transit frontline workers to equal consideration alongside individuals age 65-plus and workers in Phase 1B – Tier 1.

AC Transit's employees and the service we provide were deemed essential at the start of the pandemic and will play a vital role in facilitating equitable access to the vaccine moving forward. Our 2,180 dedicated public servants have continued to provide transportation across the East Bay through the pandemic and are eager to support our region's reopening and recovery. I respectfully urge you to support efforts that ensure transit operators are vaccinated as soon as possible so we can fully and safely support the people we both serve.

Thank you once again for your time and your efforts to support our communities during the pandemic. We look forward to partnering with you on efforts to help our region recover and other transportation initiatives. Please don't hesitate to reach out if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,



Elsa Ortiz  
President, AC Transit Board of Directors



Michael A. Hursh  
General Manager, AC Transit

Cc. AC Transit Board of Directors