

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 10/13/2021

Staff Report No. 21-445

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager
SUBJECT: FY20-21 Annual Ridership and Route Performance Report

BRIEFING ITEM

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving the FY20-21 Annual Ridership and Route Performance Report in accordance with Board Policy 545 - Service Standards and Design Policy.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service
Initiative - Service Quality

The Annual Ridership and Route Performance Report is a key document to measure the District's improvement in service quality. Since adopting the Strategic Plan, this report has served as the baseline for measuring future improvement.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

There are no budgetary/fiscal impacts associated with this report.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

The FY20-21 Annual Ridership and Route Performance Report provides a summary and assessment of the District's service performance with respect to ridership, productivity, passenger loads, frequency, and on-time performance (OTP). The detailed analysis by service type and route-level are provided in the attachments and identify COVID-19 pandemic impacts on ridership and service.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic had significant negative impacts on overall ridership in FY20-21. These factors included:

- 1) March 2020 COVID-19 initial shelter-in-place (SIP) orders and school closures that initiated the steep drop in ridership
- 2) A modified Sunday service schedule that went into effect 03/31/20 - 08/08/20, with suspended service or reduced frequencies for various routes including Supplementary Service and the majority of Transbay routes
- 3) Bus capacity limits and physical distancing restrictions that were in effect for most of FY20-21 and were

not lifted until 06/21/21

- 4) Low ridership that persisted through the fiscal year due to ongoing COVID-19 safety measures to counter positive COVID-19 case surges and several outbreaks

Ridership - Summary [Attachment 1 - Chart 1.1, 1.2]

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, system-wide ridership across all modes totaled 21.2 million annual riders, reflecting a 52% year-over-year (Y-Y) decline. Average monthly ridership during this reporting period was 1.7 million riders, well below the typical 4.5 million riders per month pre-pandemic. Significant ridership loss occurred across all service modes. While Local service [MB] was down 55% Y-Y, Transbay [CB] lost 97% ridership as the majority of Transbay lines were suspended. Flex service [DR-DO] remains suspended since March 31, 2020. Dumbarton [MB-PT] and Paratransit services [DR-PT] declined 58% and 64%, respectively. On a positive note, Tempo Bus Rapid Transit [RB-DO] went into service in August 2020 and has seen continued growth, reaching 250k monthly riders in June 2021.

Ridership Productivity - Top 10 Routes [Attachment 1 - Chart 1.3]

Due to COVID-19 pandemic impacts, productivity across all service types saw drastic reductions. Weekday service averaged only 12.5 passengers per hour across all service types. This compares to 26 passengers per hour in the prior year. Among the top 10 routes, the introduction of Tempo BRT service ranked at the top in productivity, averaging 31.6 passengers per hour, and 7,600 avg weekday riders.

On-Time Performance (OTP) [Attachment 1, Chart 1.4]

During FY20-21, system-wide OTP averaged 76.5% on weekdays, 75% Saturdays, and 77% Sundays, improving a few percentage points from the prior year on all day types and above the District's OTP goal. The scatterplot comparison in the report shows that while OTP improved, there was a significant drop off in ridership based on passengers per hour. Shelter-in-place orders increased remote learning and telework during the pandemic, contributing to lighter than usual traffic congestion patterns to help improve OTP. In addition, lower ridership resulted in less dwell time at bus stops resulting in improved reliability.

Passenger Loads [Attachment 1, Chart 1.5]

Overall, average passenger max loads dropped significantly from the prior year, correlating with low ridership during the pandemic period. Loads varied greatly by service type and were further restricted by COVID-19 physical distancing safety measures which limited capacities to allow for six-foot distancing requirements. These restrictions were lifted late June 2021, which has resulted in increased passenger loads as riders gradually return to transit use.

Industry and Emerging Trends [Attachment 1 - Chart 1.6]

Ridership data from other transit providers were summarized to compare the severity COVID-19 impacts on ridership declines across the transit industry. Filtered by the largest transit providers with at least 9 million annual riders, all agencies experienced Y-Y declines, averaging -44%. As we enter Fall 2021 period, recent data shows positive signs of ridership picking up since the August Sign-up restored additional service that was either suspended or operating at reduced frequency. As most schools return to in-person learning and businesses bring back employees to the office, expanded economic activities will be needed to stimulate public transit demand. However, as of this writing, the COVID-19 pandemic is experiencing another surge and outbreak in cases across the country which will likely continue to impact transit ridership recovery across the industry. As part of the board-approved service recovery principles, staff will continue to monitor ridership

trends and provide up-to-date analysis on trajectories and impacts from COVID-19.

Passenger Trips, Service Hours [Attachment 2 - Service Type Performance]

Overall service levels were significantly reduced while operating under the emergency COVID-19 schedule, equivalent to Sunday service. Subsequent service changes through the fiscal period resulted in the operation of roughly 75% of pre-pandemic service, with suspended routes or reduced frequencies across the District. As of this writing, the August 2021 Sign-up changes has restored various service routes including Supplementary Service routes in anticipation of riders returning to transit usage, bringing the system service level to 83%.

Bottom quarter performing routes [Attachment 3]

Low performing routes are rank-ordered and compared against other routes within the specified service type. Due to COVID-19, many lines were suspended during FY20-21 or had significantly low ridership, further impacted by vehicle capacity and physical distancing safety measures. This resulted in an incomplete picture to assess routes with the lowest productivity. This information will be updated as prior suspended lines are gradually restored in upcoming service changes.

Route Level Performance [Attachment 4]

Individual route performance and statistics are summarized by day type for FY20-21. Various route suspensions are noted and limited the Y-Y comparisons. Comparison metrics were based on ridership, productivity, OTP, and passenger loads. While OTP performance saw improvements, ridership, productivity and loads were all negatively impacted across the system.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

There are no advantages or disadvantages associated with this report as it solely reports on service and route performance as required by Board Policy 545.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

There are no alternatives associated with this report.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

SR 20-367 2020 Annual Ridership and Route Performance Report
Board Policy 545 - Service Standards and Design Policy

ATTACHMENTS:

1. FY20-21 Ridership Performance Summary
2. Service Type Performance
3. Bottom Quarter Performing Routes
4. Route Performance (Weekday, Sat, Sun)

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