



Overview

AC Transit is one of the nation's premier bus systems, serving over 235,000 riders a day—nearly 71 million passengers a year. AC Transit has a high, yet achievable goal—to provide the East Bay with a truly world-class transit system. For the riders and communities we serve, this goal will not only increase the local transportation choices, but also improve the quality of life, air quality and mobility for our entire East Bay region.

To meet this goal, AC Transit is striving to provide fast, frequent, reliable service on a wide variety of routes with attractive vehicles and an easy-to-use fare structure at affordable levels. By implementing these elements, AC Transit anticipates increasing ridership to about 85 million by 2005/06 and to about 100 million by 2010. We have developed the Strategic Vision Plan to demonstrate how—given adequate funding—we can achieve this goal.

One aspect of our Vision relies on investing in the urban corridors—areas that traditional transportation investment decisions have ignored. From a social equity and Environmental Justice standpoint, as well as concerns for fiscal responsibility and cost effectiveness, this makes sense. We want to give our riders and taxpayers the best “bang for the buck.”

While most rail investments can cost over \$100 per new rider, AC Transit's proposal has noticeably lower costs—about \$3 to \$15 per new rider. And, the benefits of these lower cost improvements can be just as significant, if not more so, as the higher cost alternatives.

AC Transit's Strategic Vision Plan was formulated in response to input from riders, elected officials and local community groups. To address local concerns, achieve significant ridership increases, and enhance mobility in the service area, the Vision proposes a two-phase implementation plan of both capital and service improvements.

The Plan features high-frequency Enhanced Bus routes, new attractive low-floor vehicles, on-street rider amenities, signal-priority on major streets and round-the-clock service. By partnering with our local jurisdictions, these projects can become a vehicle for community development and urban revitalization as well, particularly in core areas that have been ignored by others in the push for suburban sprawl. Part of our initial advocacy has resulted in a recommendation from the transit industry's national organization (APTA) for a new category of federal capital funding for Enhanced Bus services in the upcoming TEA-21 reauthorization. Changes to the fare structure could provide even greater ridership gains, and include maintaining or lowering fares and a reciprocal BART/AC pass.

Phase One of the Plan will provide comprehensive service enhancements throughout the system with special attention in the urban core, where buses will operate at least every 15 minutes. High ridership corridor routes will operate even more frequently—about every 7.5 minutes—and include some limited stop service. Phase One of the Plan also will implement “Enhanced Bus” style capital improvements on the 10 heaviest corridors in the system, including real-time traveler information at comfortable bus stops. Innovative approaches for “demand responsive service” in lower density areas are also planned.

Phase Two proposes higher priced capital improvements on the four AC Transit corridors that have the greatest potential for ridership growth. These improvements, generally described as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), are intended to achieve the speed, frequency, and reliability usually associated with light rail at less than half the cost of most rail improvements.

The Strategic Vision, although cost effective in nature, does require additional funds to implement and operate. On behalf of our community, AC Transit is committed to working with our regional funding agency partners to implement the plan, and improve the quality of life for East Bay residents.

Introduction

AC Transit's long-standing commitment to preserving and improving the quality and quantity of transit service for our East Bay passengers is matched by its financial responsibility to taxpayers and employees. As the largest bus-only transit provider in California, the District's goal is to serve the greatest number of passengers with reasonable costs and modest fares.

The return of night and weekend service on our busiest corridors, along with improved equipment and expanded service hours have set the stage for providing more and better transit services to our riders. Beyond these immediate improvements, AC Transit envisions a group of practical strategies for a greatly enhanced system that can be implemented as resources become available. This “Optimal Plan” includes service improvements and supportive policies that will encourage many more people travelling within the East Bay to choose AC Transit.

While additional funds are needed to create and operate the proposed system improvements, when calculated for total riders or for new riders, the total operating and capital costs are significantly lower than for many transit investments that are currently being funded in the region.

AC Transit Listens & Responds

Prior to developing its Plan, AC Transit made substantial efforts to poll riders, local residents, business and neighborhood groups. This is what we heard from them.

Travel time is an important consideration in deciding whether to use the bus.

Even with improvements, the existing system will not take large numbers of new riders out of their cars, largely because of travel time. Many existing riders stated that they would not use the current service if they had a faster alternative.

Transfers are acceptable as part of a fast transit trip.

BART and AC Transit must work as a unified system, especially on integrated fares.

Survey respondents indicated that where trade-offs need to be made, the goal of reducing total travel time must be paramount. For example, faster service with fewer stops is preferable to slower service with stops closer together, even if this means a longer walk to reach the service.

The Service Vision

In response to this assessment by our riders and potential riders, AC Transit has developed a plan that emphasizes speed, comfort and reliability. Through the proposed plan, the District expects to see ridership increase from about 70 million riders currently to about 85 million in 2005 and nearly 100 million by 2010. The following elements are central to fulfilling this vision.

Attractive and comfortable low-floor vehicles

Increasing the frequency of buses to reduce wait time

Reducing delays along routes through such improvements as signal priority

Greater frequency of service during midday, evening and owl travel times

An easy to use, integrated fare system

Flexible routings where possible

High-frequency services on major arterials

Adequate round-the-clock service

A redesigned network that matches travel patterns and helps meet demand in the high-density urban core

Gradual transition to “Bus Rapid Transit” in the highest ridership corridors with exclusive bus lanes and frequent service usually associated with light rail

Improvements at bus stops, including real-time display of bus arrival times

Innovative Tools & Policies

At the heart of the practical improvements listed above are two crucial innovative concepts that enliven the AC Transit plan: “Enhanced Bus” and “Bus Rapid Transit” services.

Enhanced Bus services are designed around street level improvements that reduce travel times, improve passenger comfort and increase operational efficiency. Such improvements may be the ultimate improvement in a particular corridor, or they may represent a first step towards the implementation of Bus Rapid Transit.

Bus Rapid Transit involves more extensive improvements, including bus-only travel lanes, sophisticated station stops, and a coordinated effort to minimize travel time while maximizing passenger comfort and convenience.

Focusing on areas with the greatest opportunity for increasing ridership, the District Plan is proposing Enhanced Bus service on 10 heavily used routes and Bus Rapid Transit on the four busiest routes. Table ES-1 summarizes the proposed improvements and shows the projected benefits of each phase of the plan. The level of ridership growth indicated in Table ES-1 is possible only through significant investment in both capital and operating resources. In addition, these expenditures must be supported by coordinated policies both at the District level and in partnership with the jurisdictions served by the District.

TABLE ES-1: KEY ENHANCEMENTS ON AC TRANSIT'S BUSIEST CORRIDORS

LINE	SERVING	ESTIMATED RIDERSHIP GROWTH	TOTAL CAPITAL COST	ANNUAL INCREMENTAL OPERATING COST	COST PER NEW RIDER	COMMENTS	IMPLEMENTATION TIME
ENHANCED BUS SERVICE							
San Pablo Avenue	Oakland • Emeryville • Berkeley • Albany El Cerrito • Richmond • San Pablo	15% • 800,000 new riders/year	\$10,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2.92	Increased frequency and enhanced bus improvements will give urban core passengers a much better ride along this 16-mile corridor.	One and a half years to completion.
Telegraph/Int'l Blvd. (East 14th)	Berkeley • Oakland • San Leandro	32% • 2.3M new riders/year	\$175,000,000	\$2,700,000	\$2.64	Enhanced bus service offered in short term, with an ultimate Bus Rapid Transit improvement.	Two years.
Foothill/MacArthur	Oakland • East Oakland • San Leandro	40% • 1.6M new riders/year	\$41,000,000	\$4,800,000	\$3.80	Important to addressing Environmental Justice issues in the East Bay.	Two years to first significant improvement; four to six years to all improvements.
MacArthur/Oakland Airport	East Oakland • Oakland Airport	38% • 1.1M new riders/year	\$38,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$2.19	Includes provision of real-time bus arrival information, especially important to time-sensitive airport market.	Two years to first significant improvement; four to six years to all improvements.
Shattuck/Alameda	Albany • Berkeley • Oakland • Alameda	33% • 1.16M new riders/year	\$30,000,000	\$1,100,000	\$2.03	Combines current Line 43 north of Oakland combined with a corridor running across Alameda from downtown.	Two years to first significant improvement; four to six years to all improvements.
College Ave/University	Berkeley • Oakland	18% • 638,000 new riders/year	\$20,000,000	\$400,000	\$2.11	Initial service frequency improvements ultimately in an Enhanced Bus corridor.	Two years to first significant improvement; four to six years to all improvements.
Hesperian	Hayward • San Leandro	50% • 510,000 new riders/year	\$20,000,000	\$300,000	\$2.24	Builds on existing approved project increasing frequencies.	Two to four years for full implementation of enhanced bus service.
6th St./Hollis	Berkeley • Oakland • Emeryville	115% • 1.5M new riders/year	\$17,000,000	\$3,200,000	\$2.51	New service in a developing corridor will attract substantial new ridership.	Two to four years for full implementation of enhanced bus service.
Sacramento/Market	Berkeley • Oakland	72% • 840,000 new riders/year	\$23,000,000	\$1,400,000	\$2.78		Two to four years for full implementation of enhanced bus service.
Mission/Outer East 14th	Oakland • San Leandro • Hayward	159% • 525,000 new riders/year	\$33,000,000	\$1,200,000	\$4.64		Two to four years for full implementation of enhanced bus service.
BUS RAPID TRANSIT CORRIDORS <i>Improvements Shown are Incremental Over Initial Enhanced Bus Improvements</i>							
Telegraph/East 14th	Berkeley • Oakland • San Leandro	62% • 3.3M new riders/year	\$175,000,000	\$4,100,000	\$9.61	Separate bus lanes and other enhancements will further increase ridership.	Two years after enhanced bus implementation.
Foothill/MacArthur	Oakland • East Oakland • San Leandro	13% • 2.3M new riders/year	\$234,000,000	\$3,900,000	\$15.35	Separate bus lanes and other enhancements will further increase ridership.	Four to six years for full implementation.
Shattuck/Alameda	Albany • Berkeley • Oakland • Alameda	12% • 1.66M new riders/year	\$126,000,000	\$2,800,000	\$13.55	Separate bus lanes and other enhancements will further increase ridership.	Four to six years for full implementation.
MacArthur/Airport	East Oakland • Oakland Airport	13% • 1.6M new riders/year	\$198,000,000	\$2,100,000	\$17.45	Total implementation of enhanced bus concepts.	Four to six years for full implementation.

A Phased Approach

Recognizing that not all improvements can be implemented at once, the District is recommending a phased approach that can respond as resources become available. Each implementation phase is based on specific service deployment guidelines.

Service increases should be concentrated on the most heavily used routes that operate in the most densely populated areas of the District to maximize the number of people using the system, generate more fare revenue, and help alleviate air pollution and traffic congestion.

Trunk routes should offer the highest frequency service and connect with a clear crosstown network at multiple transfer locations

Other routes may operate less frequently than trunk routes, with service allocated depending on the population density and productivity of the route

Flexible service strategies need to be developed to provide mobility options to serve passengers when traditional fixed route service is ineffective

Initial improvements using existing and projected resources are already being implemented and are described in detail in the 2001-2010 Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP). These include increased frequency of service on major arterials, i.e. trunk routes, with target frequencies of 10 minute, and 15 to 30 minute frequencies on feeder routes. Frequencies can improve as future phases are implemented.

PHASE ONE: COMPREHENSIVE ENHANCEMENTS THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM

Key strategies for Phase One include:

Capital and operating improvements to implement Enhanced Bus service in the busiest corridors, as shown in Figure ES-1, including:

New, more attractive vehicles.

Shorter wait times between buses (7.5 minutes all day on busiest routes and 15 minute service on others)

Bus stop relocation and consolidation

Traffic signal priority

Real-time passenger information displays at major stops that show when the next bus will arrive

Enhanced passenger amenities, such as shelters and benches

Increased midday frequencies throughout the system, with minimum 15 minute frequencies during the midday systemwide

Improved owl service (between 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m.)

Flexible routing to serve low-density, low-ridership areas more efficiently

Improved fare strategies such as eliminating transfer charges and allowing reciprocity between BART and AC Transit for pass holders

In Phase One, all routes within the urban core would be served at least every 15 minutes. Higher volume routes, such as Telegraph, International/East 14th, University, Foothill, Shattuck, College and MacArthur avenues would operate every 7.5 minutes, and limited-stop service on several of these routes will be added. In addition, this phase includes service increases in the midday and owl period beyond those currently funded. Flexible services will be implemented in this phase to better serve the lower density areas of the District that may not be appropriate for traditional fixed-route bus services.

PHASE TWO: BUS RAPID TRANSIT

While Phase One improvements are distributed throughout the system, Phase Two concentrates on the four corridors that have the greatest ridership potential. These improvements are intended to achieve the speed, frequency, and reliability usually associated with light rail. Phase Two focuses on longer term capital improvements that will convert existing travel or parking lanes to bus-only lanes in the busiest corridors served by AC Transit. These are:

Telegraph/International/E.14th Street (Berkeley-Oakland-San Leandro)

Foothill Boulevard (Oakland-San Leandro)

Shattuck/Alameda (Berkeley-Oakland-Alameda)

MacArthur Boulevard (Oakland-Emeryville)

Bus Rapid Transit is designed around a dedicated, bus-only right-of-way on city streets along with highly developed stations. In addition to providing a high quality bus riding experience, Bus Rapid Transit also focuses on supporting transit-oriented development around stations and on maximizing the comfort and safety of passengers.

In Phase Two, the frequencies on these key routes would improve to every five minutes during peak periods, thus allowing riders to travel without thinking about bus schedules or worrying about wait times. Bus stops would be converted into “transit stations” that provide a high level of comfort and convenience to passengers.

Supportive Policies

AC Transit’s Strategic Vision recognizes that service enhancements alone will not result in the ridership increases or mobility options that the region requires. To maximize the impact of service changes, the plan includes a number of supportive strategies, including fare policy enhancements and strategic partnerships with cities and other agencies served by AC Transit.

While fare strategies can be used to enhance the District’s goals of increased ridership, setting the optimal level of fares is complex. Higher fares can reduce ridership, and the time required for fare collection is a major source of delay on buses. On the other hand, fares provide about 30 percent of the revenue needed to support AC Transit’s operations.

The following strategies are proposed to enhance the service changes included in the Strategic Vision Optimal Plan. However, these fare strategies must be considered as part of an overall plan to enhance the system, not as strategies that by themselves will result in significant ridership increases. All of the fare strategies will require significant additional financial resources to implement.

Fare Policies

- **Keeping fares at 2002 levels.** The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) expects the region’s transit agencies to periodically adjust their fares to keep pace with inflation. However, AC Transit’s riders are very concerned about further increases in fares above their current level. For this reason, AC Transit hopes to avoid raising fares in the foreseeable future.
- **Eliminating transfer charges.** Only about 20 percent of the nation’s transit agencies charge an additional fare for transfers. Since the design of the system encourages transferring, the transfer charge can be a significant impediment to increasing ridership. The transfer charge also adds needless complexity to the process of paying fares by slowing down operations.
- **Establishing a proof-of-payment system on trunk routes.** Buses can operate faster if passengers can use all doors to get on and off the bus. This is made possible by a proof-of-payment fare system in which passengers who already have a pass or transfer could board at any door. Everyone paying a cash fare or buying a ticket would receive a free transfer as proof of payment while on board. Roving inspectors would randomly board buses and issue citations to those who do not have a pass or a transfer. This system is used on most light rail systems throughout North America and Europe. There is no reason it could not be extended to bus services. The San Pablo corridor has been selected for testing of the proof-of-payment system, with other high ridership corridors to be added later.
- **Annual student pass.** The proposed annual student pass would be available for sale to all high school and middle school students in the service area. However, for those who qualify for free school lunches, the annual pass would be distributed free of charge. (A pilot program is currently being developed that will allow students who qualify for the free school lunch program to receive free passes.) The annual student pass would replace the existing mixture of tickets, cash fares, and youth passes, thus decreasing the time needed for boarding at schools.

Additional Fare Policies

A few potential policies would require additional incremental service increases, and a new means to subsidize them. These are presented as contingent fare policies and include:

- **Reducing fares.** Lower fares mean higher ridership, but the increase in riders doesn't make up for the lower fare, so an additional subsidy would be needed.
- **AC Transit/BART reciprocal pass.** BART has long accepted Muni passes for travel within San Francisco, making BART and Muni part of a seamless payment system. A similar arrangement in the East Bay would allow customers to buy a pass for rides on AC Transit and BART within the AC Transit service area. This improvement could generate significant new ridership if implemented with the service improvements outlined in the optimal plan. Because additional service would be needed to complement the fare strategy, this is presented as a contingent item, despite its obvious benefits in helping East Bay residents to perceive and use AC Transit and BART as part of one seamless system.

Other Supportive Policies

Full implementation of AC Transit's vision requires a partnership with the communities we serve. Implementation of these strategies is largely outside of the control of the District but is a necessary part of encouraging transit ridership.

Local Cities and other jurisdictions served by AC Transit must adopt "transit first" policies on the District's trunk lines. These policies include adjustments to signal timing to give preference to buses, allowing for signal priority and queue jump lanes that will help speed bus travel times.

Employers in the region should be encouraged to consider "parking cash out" programs that offer their employees the choice of subsidized parking or an equivalent value in subsidy for travel by other modes. Where this policy has been implemented, employee vehicle trips have been reduced by up to 6 percent.

Transit oriented development should be encouraged around key transit stops and stations to increase the number of people who are able to access these high capacity services by walking and biking.

Caltrans and other regional agencies must recognize the special value of a highly functional Transbay bus system, especially as congestion increases due to seismic work on the Bay Bridge. Special funding and planning may be needed to ensure that this system operates at peak efficiency during this difficult period.

Other regional transit agencies, including the ferry system and BART must continue to plan in coordination with AC Transit to move towards a seamless regional transportation network.

Lifeline services, designed to offer a 24-hour network of transit service throughout the Bay Area, must be planned in consultation with transit operators

Public/private partnership opportunities should be explored wherever possible to help AC Transit meet the needs of expanding and emerging markets.

A Regional Priority

The goals outlined in the Strategic Vision are all achievable if they become a regional priority.

On a positive note, implementation of the vision plan is already underway. Funding made available through the passage of Alameda County's Measure B, the 1/2 cent sales tax for transportation, will make it possible for the District to implement the service improvements planned in its Short Range Transit Plan. The Optimal Plan improvements, however, are unfunded.

While the benefits of the Optimal Plan to the entire region cannot be ignored, AC Transit can implement the plan only as fast as financial resources become available. Questions of how much, when, who will pay, all remain challenges to improving the system. Nevertheless, before one can build it, one must dream it. Only then can one understand it and work for it. We have made the first step; now it must become a regional priority to make it happen.

Figures in this document show the fiscal resources that will be necessary to make these plans a reality. Working together with local, regional, state and federal partners, we can prioritize those elements of the Strategic Vision that can be funded or identified for advocacy. With the help of all of our partners, the residents of the East Bay will be able to witness the genesis of a world-class transit system that keeps the East Bay livable and vital.



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