

LeConte Neighbor – Steve Finacom

As a starting point, it's important for Le Conte residents (and our neighbors in Willard, Halcyon and Bateman) to understand that all the discussion of "options" or "alternatives" for BRT involve areas other than our part of Telegraph.

There are various "alternatives" AC Transit is studying for how and where BRT buses would run north of Dwight, in Downtown Berkeley, and in parts of Oakland. But along Telegraph, from 20th Street in Oakland to Dwight Way in Berkeley, there is only ONE proposed "alternative".

Telegraph is four traffic lanes wide along this stretch. AC Transit proposes to take the two center lanes to run buses only (this is called a "transitway" in parts of the DEIR). Other traffic would be restricted to the remaining one lane in either direction.

Telegraph would become, functionally, a two-lane street (similar to College Avenue, or Shattuck, south of Ward). That's the most important item to understand when approaching a discussion of this issue.

Now, the more specific questions:

1. Locations of bus "stations".

BRT would have limited "stations"; to make the bus go fast, a minimum number of stops are proposed (a similar approach to how BART works). There is a BRT "station" proposed for Telegraph in the vicinity of Dwight / Haste, and another for Woolsey / Telegraph, and others downtown and on the Bancroft edge of the UC campus. Under one option, there's a possible "station" at Derby / Telegraph. Otherwise, BRT will just be running past Le Conte and Willard; under most alternatives, anyone from these neighborhoods using BRT will have to walk north to Dwight or south to Woolsey to catch BRT. ("Local" buses would still run).

2. What happens to the cross streets?

See page 3-49, item "Left-Turn Prohibitions and Cross Street Through-Movement Restrictions. The presence of a dedicated bus lane would also prohibit left-turn movements between on-alignment streets and many, minor, unsignalized cross streets. Through movements crossing the BRT alignment along these minor streets would also be restricted."

Howe Street, Oregon, Carlton, Parker, Ward, and further south...that means you. Essentially if you parse out the jargon, it means that vehicle traffic on those streets would not be allowed to cross Telegraph or turn left onto Telegraph, and cars would not be allowed to turn left off Telegraph onto those streets.

Effectively, those "minor" streets would only be open to traffic turning right off, or right onto, Telegraph, while all other traffic would have to use the streets with signals (currently Blake, Derby, Stuart, Russell). Traffic patterns in Le Conte and Willard would shift.

Remember the controversy a few years ago over the impacts of the new signals at Stuart and Russell? We may get to do it all over again, but this time involving six intersections along Telegraph in the Le Conte neighborhood, not two.

3. Who polices the bus-only lanes?

With miles of reserved lanes on Telegraph, Shattuck, and other streets, there will be a temptation for drivers to use them if traffic is heavy in the remaining public lanes (think of the situation on the freeways at rush hour where many single drivers duck into the carpool lane to bypass congestion.)

AC Transit has a contract with the Alameda County Sheriff to provide law enforcement services. For example, if a bus gets in an accident, I believe a Sheriff's deputy responds to take the report. I don't know if this will extend to patrolling to keep private vehicles out of the bus lanes. If not, will the City of Berkeley police be expected to perform that duty? If so, how will other police services be affected? Have the Berkeley Police given any thought to the service and cost impacts of this issue?

4. Do Berkeley, Oakland, and San Leandro get any performance guarantees from AC Transit?

There are projections of bus frequency in the DEIR, but can they be fulfilled? Over five years, ten years, the long-term future? If it turns out AC Transit ultimately ends up underfunded and has to cut back on BRT service, can the communities that have supplied the on-street bus lanes get them back for other uses? Should the City of Berkeley require a binding and enforceable commitment on specific levels and types of service, in exchange for providing exclusive use of certain parts of the streets?

5. Who will maintain the portions of the streets that AC Transit buses only use?

Does AC Transit keep them up, or is the City expected to fix potholes and do periodic repaving, etc? If the City approves BRT, should the City receive a payment for the exclusive use of those lanes that at least covers reasonable projections of long term maintenance costs?

6. The DEIR proposes that if metered parking space are removed to make way for stations or bus lanes, AC Transit would "replace" it nearby.

Replacement appears to mean putting meters on existing street parking spaces that aren't already metered. Since every space along Telegraph is already metered, this can only mean in Willard and Le Conte that meters might be suggested for some parking spaces on cross streets, if Telegraph meters are lost.