

Bus Rapid Transit as proposed by AC Transit Quick Summary

Pro

Bus Rapid Transit is a bus system that uses dedicated bus-only lanes and other features to improve bus service. It uses the bus-only lanes to decrease bus travel times, raised platforms to ease boarding, bus arrival time displays to inform passengers, and external pay machines to speed boarding times. AC Transit plans to eliminate two traffic lanes on Telegraph Avenue all the way from Bay Fair Station in Hayward through the center of San Leandro and through Oakland to UC Berkeley. After reaching the southern border of the UC campus at Telegraph and Bancroft, the route is planned to continue to the center of Berkeley's downtown by using additional dedicated bus-only lanes.

Proponents of the BRT plans include UC Berkeley, ABAG, MTC, members of Livable Berkeley and other "smart growth" advocacy groups, some Berkeley city officials, some members of the Transportation Commission, and other citizens.

Con

AC Transit's plan to eliminate two heavily-used traffic lanes on the entire length of Telegraph Avenue will create serious traffic disruptions. Not only will drivers experience delays, they will also be forced to adopt new driving patterns due to restricted left turns and limits on through traffic on side streets crossing Telegraph. This will change Telegraph from a functional thoroughfare into a two-lane road like College Avenue, which is avoided by many during rush hour. Thus, one concern is that more traffic will be forced into the neighborhoods. Another important question that must be considered is that AC Transit also has non-BRT buses that must travel on the same route (because the BRT stops are too far apart for elderly and disabled passengers). If the slow buses travel in the bus-only lanes, then they will slow down the faster BRT buses. If the slow buses travel in the traffic lanes, then they will cause even more delays for automobiles, and leave drivers no opportunity to pass the buses at all on Telegraph.

Many neighborhood residents and groups and some city officials have expressed concerns about AC Transit implementing BRT. The Mayor of San Leandro is completely opposed to the dedicated lanes in her city. The merchants in the Temescal area and on Telegraph north of Dwight have also expressed strong misgivings about the plan.

Responses to Sharon Hudson's Questions on BRT from Mr. Cunradi

If the answers to these questions are to be provided in the DEIR, please indicate where in the document they will be found. If they are not going to be provided in the DEIR, include them as public input on the DEIR. Thank you.

Two of these questions are related to content of the Administrative Draft EIS/EIR. The EIS/EIR is a combined NEPA/CEQA document where AC Transit is the lead for state portion (CEQA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is responsible for the federal portion (NEPA). The FTA has reviewed the EIS and AC Transit is addressing issues raised by them. However, until the FTA gives its approval for the public release of the document, AC Transit cannot legally release the document or portions of the document. Answers to the following questions cannot be answered at this point, but will be addressed in the EIS.

- 2a
- 3b

The answers to all the other questions are given below.

1.
 - a. How many BRT systems in the United States have included reducing a major transit corridor to one lane in a city whose population density is similar to the south campus area in Berkeley?
 - b. Of these cities, what was the impact on traffic on the corridor, in nearby neighborhoods, and on nearby corridors?
 - c. What factors make these situations similar to or different than the Telegraph situation in Berkeley?

1a,b,c) There are many international examples of roadways that were converted from four traffic lanes to a layout that has two traffic lanes and two bus lanes. In the US, the BRT project most similar with AC Transit's is Cleveland Ohio's Euclid Corridor. Cleveland's and AC Transit's proposals are similar in the design of the BRT and in the characteristics of the city neighborhoods where they are being built. Below is a link to the environmental assessment that was conducted in 2000. This site may answer your questions.

http://euclidtransit.org/ECTP_documents/BusRapidTransitEnvironmentalAssessment2000.pdf#search=%22cleveland%20brt%22

2.
 - a. How many vehicle-trips on Telegraph Avenue will be removed because the travelers that normally drive on Telegraph will choose to use the BRT?

Answer to [this question] cannot be answered at this point, but will be addressed in the EIS.

b. How did you get this data?

2b) The number of auto trips is derived from the US Census Journey to Work survey. This data is then calibrated by traffic counts and bus passenger counts conducted in 2004. To estimate the future year (2025) traffic and transit ridership we add the growth in employment and housing that are projected by the Association of Bay Area Governments. These assumptions were then given a final review by each city.

c. Do you have data on Telegraph drivers that shows WHY they are driving on Telegraph—trip purpose, etc?

2c) The Census gives a breakdown by trip purpose (the “why”). Categories of trip purpose include work, school, shopping and social/recreational. These data do not mention specific streets but do have information on origins and destinations of trips. We also conducted a survey of shoppers on Telegraph Avenue to discern the pattern of shopping and the transportation choices. I have attached a copy of the survey report.

[Note: This is the study done between February 20 and March 16, 2002, surveying Telegraph shoppers north of Dwight Way.]

d. Do you have any studies of other BRT systems that provide data relevant to this question?

2d) No.

e. Do you have data showing the relationship between stated hypotheticals (“If BRT is installed, I will use it instead of driving 3 days per week”) and subsequent actual behavior?

2e) Not yet. We will conduct a “before & after” study one year after the project is in place. We will also do this for the Rapid Bus project slated for implementation in December 2006.

3. a. If BRT diverts traffic into neighborhoods, will AC Transit pay the entire cost of the mitigation of developing comprehensive neighborhood traffic plans for impacted neighborhoods and implementing such plans, including lights, barricades, etc.?

3a) Traffic mitigation measures will be proposed wherever necessary and the cost will be borne by AC Transit.

b. What actions will AC Transit take to mitigate the impacts of traffic diverted onto other corridors (for example, if people choose to drive on Shattuck and then come up Ashby or Dwight, or take Dwight instead of Ashby)? Impacts both for traffic and for the people who live on these corridors?

Answer to [this question] cannot be answered at this point, but will be addressed in the EIS.

4. Do you have studies showing how much traffic will be diverted onto Dwight and Haste if access to Bancroft, Durant, and/or Channing is closed to traffic coming north on Telegraph?

We measure changes in traffic volume on Dwight and Haste for all BRT alternatives. Some of the alternatives restrict auto use on Telegraph and some permit auto access. There are no plans to restrict auto access to Durant or Channing. The city has put forward an alternative that would restrict auto access on Telegraph and Bancroft. We have studied this option as well. Public disclosure of the impacts will be through the EIS process. Details cannot be provided prior to the release of the document as mentioned in my introductory remarks.

5. a. If BRT were installed and traffic lanes removed, and later Berkeley decided it was a mistake, what would be the procedure for undoing it?
b. Who would pay for undoing it?
c. How much would it cost to remove BRT and return Telegraph to two lanes each way between Dwight and the Oakland border?

This was done once before with the Key System. Miles of transit infrastructure were torn out when it became an inconvenience for motorists. The notion that a public agency could make a large investment as a “test” and then uproot it later trivializes the importance of the decision facing the city. An important reason for having fixed infrastructure for transit is to create a sense of permanence to influence long term travel behavior of residents, students, workers and visitors and to encourage sustainable urban development oriented to the transit system. AC Transit realizes that the decision to implement BRT is important for Berkeley’s future but is also not an easy issue on which we can achieve complete consensus. We will move forward with the system that best balances the needs of public transit, business access, motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and local neighborhoods.

Additional Questions about the proposed BRT service

1. Who is BRT meant to serve?
2. How will BRT impact the parking along Telegraph and access to businesses on Telegraph (particularly north of Dwight) and in the downtown?
3. How will the installation of the platforms and raised sidewalks impact the existing green space along the route, including mature street trees?
4. Does AC Transit have a good record of being responsive to public concerns about its service?
5. Doesn't the proposed BRT route parallel a route already served by BART?
6. Should the public commons be given to a bus company?
7. Why has the general public been largely excluded from the planning process for this proposal.
8. Is there a current demand for this service?
9. How will this diversion of funds to BRT affect other routes and proposed improvements on AC Transit?
10. Will there be any stops between Webster and Dwight?
11. What will be the frequency of service on the Telegraph BRT line?
12. What security measures/policing would be in place, especially for evening passengers?
13. Have other traffic reduction steps been discussed such as allowing odd-numbered license plates on certain streets on certain days (as is done in Athens, Greece)?
14. What are the specific plans to mitigate traffic diverting to neighborhood streets?

15. What is the average time saved per rider considering that most riders only will use a small portion of the total route? Would that time saved truly be enough to encourage more riders?
16. What, if any, impact will the Telegraph Ave. BRT have on College Ave. traffic?
17. How will the BRT co-exist with existing Buses (or will it replace them)?
18. If the BRT buses are in addition to existing buses, would the existing buses use the one lane of vehicular traffic, making congestion that much worse?
19. If there are no stops planned for the LeConte/Willard neighborhood, won't that make neighbors use their cars? Are we (the LeConte/Willard neighbors) being asked to sacrifice for the convenience and benefit of others?
20. How many citizens in Berkeley participated directly in the planning process?
21. Where is there a working example of a place where there is only one lane of traffic left in each direction on a major transit corridor?
22. Won't the BRT system "compete" with BART?
23. Are there any plans to install the "POP" system on existing buses now?
24. Have you surveyed the people who live and work along the proposed route?
25. Where are all the additional riders you assume will use the BRT come from and where are they going?
26. What are the plans to replace parking that you might need to eliminate?
27. Wouldn't curb-side stations be more patron-friendly than the median stations?
28. How did AC Transit pay for the "Rapid Bus" program that has been installed on San Pablo and is currently being installed on Telegraph?
29. What is the cost to maintain the BRT lanes once built? Who would then be responsible to maintain them (repairing pot holes, etc.) over the long term?

30. Do any of the BRT options not require the closure of two lanes of traffic south of Dwight?
31. How did you arrive to the forum this evening? By bus or by car?
32. Isn't the real reason you aren't proposing Bus-Only lanes in San Leandro the fact that city officials long ago refused to give them to you?
33. What is the projected ridership increase vs. the potential ridership increase?
34. When you refer to thousands of people living within a 5-minute walk from the corridor, how does that relate to actual blocks?
35. What law-enforcement agency would be responsible for policing the bus-only lanes?