# The Willard Neighborhood Association

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To: Mayor, City Council and Commissions

From: Willard Neighborhood Association

Date: August 16, 2007

Re: Bus Rapid Transit in Berkeley

The Willard neighborhood is a strong advocate of effective public transit. That has been one of the strongest points of consensus throughout our discussions about Bus Rapid Transit – discussions that have been on going now for several years and have included a neighborhood forum last year that drew over 100 people from the Willard neighborhood and surrounding neighborhoods. At that forum, we raised a number of points that have never been addressed by AC Transit.

After carefully reading the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Report, the Willard Neighborhood Association is opposed to BRT as it is currently proposed and we are not alone in that stance. Votes in opposition to BRT have been taken by the Berkeley Alliance of Neighborhood Associations, the Downtown Berkeley Association and the Claremont Elmwood Neighborhood Association. Straw polls have been taken in the LeConte neighborhood and our own neighborhood both with unanimous opposition.

Based on the deficiencies in the Draft Environmental Statement/Report and the clear neighborhood opposition, no official body should be talking about or, even worse, facilitating the implementation of BRT. We should be talking about what we want a transit system to do and then looking at what is the most cost effective way of achieving those goals.

To begin with we need any transit alternative to provide a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. From the DEIS/R we can reasonably infer that there will be almost no net reduction of green house gasses from a fully implemented BRT. CO2 was not even studied in the DEIS/R. For the gases that were studied, the numbers are not promising. There was virtually no difference between the Build and No Build alternatives. There is no reason to believe that CO2 will be any different than the other gases studied. With Berkeley committed to a massive reduction in greenhouse gases we cannot build a system that does not demonstrate conclusively that it will reduce greenhouse gasses more than not building the system will do.

A second point is we need to keep through traffic on the main arterials that have been well established in Berkeley. The woefully inadequate analysis of cut through traffic in the neighborhoods is a major deficiency. AC Transit's traffic study did not look at most of the smaller through streets when figuring the least path route. Their analysis of current traffic for traveling from Woolsey and Telegraph to downtown Berkeley showed the fastest path is a left on Ashby and a right on Shattuck. Anyone who drives knows that going straight through Ashby and taking a left on Parker or Carlton misses the congestion when turning left onto Ashby, misses the congestion on Ashby at Shattuck and misses the congestion at Berkeley Bowl. With a current traffic analysis that is that badly flawed, why should we assume that their dismissal of cut through traffic in the neighborhoods once BRT is fully implemented is any more accurate?

The third point relates to maintaining an adequate stock of parking both for residential and commercial property. BRT as is currently proposed will remove significant amounts of parking along Telegraph in front of small independent merchants who depend on that parking to keep their doors open. Businesses like the Looking Glass are perfect examples of what even a small reduction in parking can mean to their bottom line. When Telegraph Ave. was re-striped to accommodate the bike lanes and parking at either

end of the block removed, the Looking Glass saw an immediate and significant drop in its business. Couple the commercial impact with the "mitigation" of adding meters in the residential neighborhoods abutting Telegraph and you have a clear case of small business bankruptcy and residential parking nightmares.

The Willard Neighborhood Association feels that because the impact on our neighborhood cannot be realistically identified based on current documentation, the City must stop its drive to implement BRT. A viable public transit alternative is implementation of Rapid Bus + starting today.

What is Rapid Bus +?

AC Transit has implemented a bare bones version of Rapid Bus +. They call it Rapid Bus. It was a low impact change of service and did not even require an Environmental Impact Statement. The reason its environmental impacts are so low is that Rapid Bus travels in the same traffic lanes as autos and it uses the existing bus stops along the route.

Rapid Bus has two features that separate it from the 40L busses it replaced. The first feature gives buses traffic signal priority which means buses will be slowed as little as possible by the lights along the route. The second feature is real time bus arrival information at the stops. Unfortunately, AC Transit has put this second feature into only a very few stops, not even all the stops that they themselves identified as major transit pick up and drop off locations.

Rapid Bus + is a greatly enhanced version of Rapid Bus. It would start with the two features already in place for Rapid Bus and would add the two features of BRT that AC Transit acknowledges will most cut transit time and add ridership: proof of fare and greatly reduced time between buses.

Rapid Bus + has distinct advantages over BRT by maintaining the mixed use roadway where both autos and buses can share the lanes rather than implementing a transit only lane and also maintaining the current level of parking for businesses and residents by using the existing bus stops.

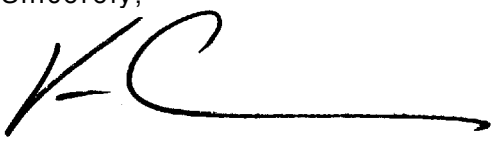
We have a unique opportunity today to create Rapid Bus + in our community. AC Transit has laid the groundwork for it in their implementation of the limited Rapid Bus service. There are many reasons that Rapid Bus + would benefit the community including the low cost of implementation, the low environmental impact of its infrastructure and the greatly increased speed and reliability of the buses on the line. We can do all this at a fraction of the cost projected for the implementation of BRT.

A fuller discussion of Rapid Bus + can be found in the EB Express on-line edition:

http://www.eastbayexpress.com/2007-08-08/news/letters-for-the-week-of-august-8-14-2007/2

We highly recommend implementing Bus Rapid + so that the community may receive the immediate benefits of $CO_2$ reduction while then engaging in research on a future public transit system, such as a light rail system, that would achieve many goals so important to the community and the city.

Sincerely,



Vincent Casalaina
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