



The Willard Neighborhood Association

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To: Mayor, City Council and Commissions

From: Willard Neighborhood Association

Date: August 29, 2007

Re: Bus Rapid Transit proposal for Berkeley

After careful consideration of the information provided by AC Transit in its Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Report (DEIS/R), the Willard Neighborhood Association has voted to oppose the implementation of Bus Rapid Transit as currently proposed. Our opposition matches the stance taken by other local groups, including the Berkeley Alliance of Neighborhood Associations, the Claremont-Elmwood Neighborhood Association, the Downtown Berkeley Association, and others. We are also aware that a large number of merchants on Telegraph Avenue near the U.C. campus have expressed significant concerns about BRT.

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. The issue is not whether we prefer to encourage people to use personal automobiles less, but how best to accomplish that goal. The DEIS/R for BRT underscored some of its limitations in this regard, and highlighted some of its detriments.

Based on those problems 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.

First, we need a transit plan that provides a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The DEIR shows that BRT, if fully implemented and operating through 2025, will make only a negligible reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This can be inferred from the carbon emissions table provided in the DEIR. While CO₂ emissions were not specifically studied, they are believed to correlate well with the other pollutant gases that were measured.

Second, we need to keep through traffic on the main arterials that have been well established in Berkeley. We are concerned that BRT will cause a significant increase in the cut-through traffic in the Willard Neighborhood. It is our belief that the DEIR downplayed this issue in ways that are unrealistic, given our current experience with increased traffic on our residential streets whenever Telegraph Avenue and College Avenue are congested.

Third, we need to maintain an adequate stock of parking both for residential and commercial property. We believe that the proposed elimination of many parking spaces used by businesses and residents will harm the livability of our neighborhood. The scarcity of parking is already a source of much neighbor and merchant concern, and this problem would be further exacerbated by BRT.

If you would like to get involved in the WNA, please contact Joe Halperin at 981-1993 or joelynn@comcast.net

For the above reasons, the Willard Neighborhood Association feels that the City of Berkeley and AC Transit must stop their drive to implement BRT and that a full community discussion of all the pertinent issues must take place.

We believe a viable public transit alternative could be implemented starting today and that alternative is Rapid Bus Plus.

AC Transit has implemented a bare bones version of Rapid Bus Plus. They call it simply 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. A feature that is not fully implemented today.

Rapid Bus Plus is a greatly enhanced version of Rapid Bus. It would start with the full implementation of the two features described above 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 Plus 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. Other benefits to the community include 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 achieve all this at a fraction of the cost projected for the implementation of BRT.

We have a unique opportunity to create an effective public transit system by implementing the features of Rapid Bus Plus we've described here. AC Transit has laid the groundwork for it in their creation of the limited Rapid Bus service. We just need the will to make cost effective public transit a reality in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'VC' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Vincent Casalaina
President, Willard Neighborhood Association

A fuller discussion of Rapid Bus Plus 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>