



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

July 10, 2007

To: Honorable Mayor and
Members of the City Council

From: *PK* Phil Kamlarz, City Manager

Submitted by: Claudette Ford, Director, Public Works

Subject: Staff Response to AC Transit's Bus Rapid Transit Draft EIR/EIS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this information report is to advise Council, in general terms, of the type of CEQA issues staff is looking into as it reviews the Bus Rapid Transit Draft Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Impact Study (EIR/EIS). Also, this information report gives very basic information about the time and process of document review within the city, and impacts upon its own Southside Plan.

BACKGROUND

AC Transit released the long-awaited Bus Rapid Transit DEIR/EIS on May 4, 2007, and provided a formal review period of 60 days, expiring on July 3, 2007.

The DEIR/EIS describes and discusses a few alternatives for a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor between downtown Berkeley and BayFair BART or San Leandro BART.

Approximately six years ago, Council formally endorsed the Telegraph corridor as the transportation corridor of choice for studying the design and feasibility of BRT through the southern portion of Berkeley.

AC Transit's DEIR/EIS describes and analyses four alignment options through the Southside area, and two general alignment alternatives in the Downtown area. Because of the scope of the project, estimated to cost up to \$400 million, the locations of detailed traffic analyses have been carefully selected. AC Transit did not conduct a detailed traffic analysis of all corridors, intersections and neighborhoods along the approximately 16-mile route, because such a study would have been very costly.

Generally speaking, the significant traffic impacts are predicted at only a few intersections in Berkeley in the long term. Because AC Transit predicts that traffic will migrate from the BRT corridor to parallel corridors, the primary impacts are anticipated at College at Ashby, Bancroft at Fulton, and College at Alcatraz.

Because mitigations are proposed, one can conclude that there are no systematic fatal flaws that would technically preclude the operation of BRT through Berkeley.

BERKELEY'S SOUTHSIDE PLAN

City of Berkeley staff has analyzed traffic alternatives for its own Southside Plan, and work was temporarily delayed while waiting for the BRT DEIR/EIS. Staff will report separately on the Southside Plan. However, it is important to reassure Council that it appears as though none of the traffic circulation options being considered for the Southside preclude implementation of the BRT, nor are they constrained by the BRT proposals. Staff now hopes to release its DEIR for the Southside Plan this fall.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE BRT DEIR/EIS

As mentioned earlier, because of the large geographic scope of this DEIR/EIS, it was not practical for AC Transit to conduct detailed traffic analyses throughout the length of the study area. However, City of Berkeley staff will be commenting that more detailed study and details are required so that local stakeholders can fully comprehend the project and its impacts. For instance, impacts on adjacent residential neighborhoods and corridors need to be assessed, in detail, both from a traffic and parking perspective. In addition, staff is asking for more detail in the EIR/EIS focused on specific locations, related to analysis, designs, mitigations, and cost estimates.

Staff is concerned about the impact on and provision for local bus service, including bus stop spacing and UC Berkeley and LBNL shuttles, and this detail seems lacking in the DEIR/EIS.

Environmental issues are, of course, core to the support of BRT, and the air quality and the greenhouse gas emission analyses in the DEIR/EIS are, unfortunately, misleading. They compare the impact of this corridor project to Countywide emission levels, whereas the true comparison must be made for the corridors directly impacted by the BRT.

Bicycle facility design is also not sufficiently detailed to allow for staff to draw conclusions about its suitability. For the City of Berkeley, appropriate and safe bike flow, such as contiguous bike lanes along Telegraph between Dwight and Ashby will be a critical issue, so staff will request more detail on bicycle facility design in the EIR.

Similarly, pedestrian access, including ADA issues, need to be assessed in a detailed way, not currently provided in the DEIR/EIS.

At the time of this report, staff had not completed its review of the BRT DEIR/EIS, and do not expect that it will be attached to this report.

However, once completed, staff will forward its review to Council, and to the primary Commissions engaged in the discussion of the BRT DEIR/EIS, at its earliest opportunity.

PUBLIC AND COMMISSION CONSULTATION PROCESS

AC Transit has scheduled public hearings at the following locations on the dates shown at 5:30pm:

Oakland Thursday, June 7, 2007

San Leandro Tuesday, June 12, 2007

Oakland Wednesday, June 13, 2007

Berkeley Thursday, June 14, 2007

The Transportation Commission (TC) has been very active and instrumental in facilitating public notification and discussion. A subcommittee has been formed to provide opportunities for detailed debate. The current schedule of TC meetings to address BRT issues is as follows:

May 24 TC- Full Commission

June 6 Joint TC and DAPAC meeting

June 21 TC- Full Commission

July 10 Transit Subcommittee

July 24 Transit Subcommittee

The Downtown Area Plan Advisory Committee (DAPAC) has scheduled debate on this DEIR/EIS on June 6, 2007, and established a subcommittee to consider Downtown issues, such as streetscape design. DAPAC's current schedule to address BRT issues is:

June 5 BRT Subcommittee

June 7 BRT Subcommittee

The Planning Commission is scheduled to consider the issues on June 27, 2007. As of the date of this report, the Planning Commission has not established its own subcommittee to deal with the BRT DEIR/EIS.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

AC Transit staff has advised us that they expect to continue a dialogue with the City of Berkeley about details and options of the BRT alignment and designs, once the formal comment period has elapsed. Therefore, we can expect to be dealing with the BRT issues throughout the summer and fall.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

N/A.

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BRT website: http://www.actransit.org/brtdraft_eis.wu

