



Office of the Mayor

CONSENT CALENDAR

September 18, 2007

TO: Members of the City Council

FROM: Mayor Tom Bates

SUBJECT: Developing a City Preferred Alternative for Bus Rapid Transit

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council directs the Transportation Commission, Planning Commission, and staff to develop a City preferred alternative for the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system under consideration by AC Transit. The Commission and staff recommendation to Council should be developed by January 2007.

BACKGROUND:

AC Transit issued a Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR/EIS) for a proposed "Bus Rapid Transit" system extending from San Leandro into Berkeley along Telegraph Avenue, through the Southside, and terminating in Downtown Berkeley. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a high quality bus based transit system that delivers fast, comfortable, and cost-effective urban mobility through the provision of dedicated right-of-way infrastructure, rapid and frequent operations, and excellence in marketing and customer service. BRT essentially emulates the performance and amenity characteristics of a modern light-rail transit system, but at a fraction of the cost. BRT generally requires dedication of two lanes of street-right of way. Regional Measure 2 provides operation funding for the proposed East Bay BRT Project. AC Transit is proposing to leverage existing funds with Federal Transit Administration's Small Starts program and regional funding through the Regional Transportation Planning process. Prior to preparation of a Final EIR/EIS, AC has requested that local jurisdictions work with the agency to define a "locally preferred" alternative.

The City is previously on record as generally supporting BRT as an intermediate step towards a preferred light-rail system. Since release of the DEIR, the Transportation Commission has held two public workshops to identify issues and discuss transportation circulation alternatives to accommodate improved transit on the BRT Corridor. The Downtown Area Plan Advisory Committee Subcommittee on Bus Rapid Transit and Planning Commission have also discussed BRT. The work of these bodies should be provided to the Transportation Commission to assist their work on BRT.

Although, as noted above, the City has indicated general support for BRT and has made some general comments about the adequacy of the DEIR analysis, the City of Berkeley has not yet defined a preferred alternative.

This proposal would request the Transportation Commission continue the public process on the proposed BRT Project with a final workshop in October to identify remaining issues and appropriate solutions, including options for technical improvements to the project to increase community benefits.

Based on the issues identified during the process, and on the comments AC Transit has received on the DEIR, Transportation Planning staff, coordinating with Planning staff and AC Transit staff, should develop a recommendation for a city-preferred alternative. Among the options that could be considered during the process are a “no project” alternative, partial and full implementation alternatives, including implementation with community mitigations.

Staff will present its recommendations to the Transportation Commission for review, comment and recommendation. The Transportation Commission recommendation should be presented to the Planning Commission for comment and potential recommendations. Finally, the item shall be brought to the City Council for a public hearing, followed by Council discussion and action.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Estimated at approximately 3/4 FTE in Public Works (Transportation Planning) and 1/4 FTE in Planning Department for four to six months. Existing Public Works (Transportation Planning) and AC Transit staff have been collaborating on this project and should continue this work at a more detailed analysis level. Staff resources are neither budgeted nor available given existing staff commitments.

In addition, the City will require consultant assistance in developing and illustrating alternatives and conducting further detailed traffic analysis. The costs for this consultant assistance have not been estimated. The City is seeking support from AC Transit to address these costs and provide analysis from consultants it has under contract. The City proposes to undertake this work only if AC Transit provides appropriate support.

CONTACT PERSON:

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