



Berkeley City Council

CONSENT CALENDAR
October 23, 2007

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Laurie Capitelli
Councilmember Kriss Worthington

Subject: Developing a City Preferred Alternative for Bus Rapid Transit

RECOMMENDATION

Direct the Planning Commission, in collaboration with the Transportation Commission and staff, to develop a City preferred alternative for the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system under consideration by AC Transit, and, if funding for the process is received from AC Transit in a timely manner, to complete its deliberations by March 1, 2008, and to report back to the Council no later than March 25, 2008.

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, terminating in Downtown Berkeley. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a type of bus system that is considered intermediate between light-rail systems, which operate on fixed rails in streets, and a standard bus system, in that the buses operate on an exclusive right of way in the street and include developed stations along the route. BRT generally requires dedication of two lanes of street right of way.

The City is previously on record as generally supporting BRT as an intermediate step towards a preferred light-rail system. The City of Berkeley's General Plan calls for support of "regional efforts to develop light-rail or bus rapid transit service connecting East Bay cities." It also supports a specific study by AC Transit that calls for long-term rail on Telegraph Avenue, and promotes advocacy for extensions west on University to San Pablo Avenue.

The proposed BRT system was included as a specified project within the last Alameda County transportation bond measure, but insufficient funding was included to fully fund the development of the system. AC Transit is proposing to leverage the local bond funds with Federal and regional transportation funding to build the system. Prior to proceeding to prepare a Final EIR/EIS, AC has requested that local jurisdictions work with it to define a "locally preferred" alternative.

Since release of the DEIR, there has been much discussion about AC Transit's proposed BRT system. 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 requests the Planning Commission in collaboration with the Transportation Commission to hold a public scoping session on the proposed BRT to identify any issues that have not yet surfaced as part of the comments on the Draft EIR. Based on the issues identified during the meeting and on the comments AC Transit has received on the DEIR, have staff develop recommendations. Among the issues previously identified are: 1) loss of street parking, 2) possible diversion of traffic into residential neighborhoods, and 3) impacts on the business districts adjacent to the proposed route.

In light of other aspects of the General Plan that support links to other transit routes, and the City's "Transit First" policy, we recommend that staff and both commissions consider a separate proposal to AC Transit, which would include the following:

- A feasibility study, including possible funding mechanisms, of a corridor-wide EcoPass program, including all communities along the BRT route.
- A formal request to fund and prioritize their study of a future extension of Rapid Bus/BRT that would link the proposed Ferry Terminal and the Amtrak Station to the Downtown.

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

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The City is seeking support from AC Transit to address staff costs and provide analysis from consultants it has under contract. City staff should explore the possibility of utilizing consultants already in contract with the City (for DAPAC and the Southside Plan respectively) in order to expedite time frame and minimize staff time.

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