




Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

December 16, 2008

To:  Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From:  Phil Kamlarz, City Manager

Submitted by: Dan Marks, Director, Planning and Development Department

Subject: Status Report: Development of City Preferred Alternative for BRT

INTRODUCTION

On October 23, 2007, the City Council directed the Planning Commission, in collaboration with the Transportation Commission and staff, to develop a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system under consideration by AC Transit. Bus Rapid Transit is a form of transit where buses run in a dedicated lane on city streets, stopping at special stations built specifically for BRT. BRT is similar in character and operation to street-cars (light rail), but considerably more economical to develop. This item provides a status report on progress made to date and the planned next steps.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Per Planning Commission direction, the BRT process will consist of the following steps:

1. Staff will develop a "BRT for Berkeley" circulation option. This option will be used as a starting point from which to begin a focused community discussion and is open to change as feedback from the community dictates.
2. Two public workshops will be held to discuss the BRT for Berkeley option. These workshops will be designed to discuss the staff option, analyze impacts of this option and others on the community and collect input for the community. One workshop will be held with the Planning Commission and one with the Transportation Commission, but both workshops will have the same facilitator and cover the same information. The workshops are planned for January 2009.
3. Staff will meet with stakeholders in the community to discuss possible effects of BRT along the corridor and review a BRT for Berkeley option. These meeting will be held in December 2008 and January 2009.
4. The comments and suggestions from these meetings will be reviewed by staff, and a recommended draft LPA will be developed by staff for consideration by the Planning Commission.
5. The Planning Commission will review the draft LPA in March or April 2009 and make a recommendation to the City Council.
6. The City Council will review and finalize the draft LPA and forward it to AC Transit for evaluation and inclusion in the Final EIS/EIR. Requests for specific studies not included in the environmental analysis, (e.g. specific economic

analysis), can be included with the draft LPA. It is anticipated that this meeting will be held in June 2009.

### BACKGROUND

AC Transit's Draft EIS/EIR evaluated the impacts of the proposed transit corridor in a general manner. Four different possible alternatives were evaluated, related to the type of service and the length of the route. The effects of BRT, such as parking loss or service frequency, are given as a range, since the effect would vary based on which alternative is chosen.

The next step in the environmental review process is to study the more specific impacts of a "preferred" BRT project. Selection of a preferred alternative would allow a more efficient and focused evaluation of impacts, such as the parking space loss on a particular block. Because each city along the BRT corridor must ultimately approve the use of its streets for BRT, AC Transit has asked each city along the proposed corridor to select a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). AC Transit had assumed that selection of an LPA would involve reviewing and selecting among the alternatives presented in the draft EIR, or a combination of those alternatives. The City Council directed that the City consider a variety of options, including the no-build option.

In order to develop an LPA, staff initially met with AC Transit staff and their consultants to better understand the alternatives presented in the draft EIR and get additional technical information such as the more precise location of stations and possible effects on auto turning movements, etc. The Planning Commission and Transportation Commission have held various meetings to collect information on the BRT system and alternatives and to hear about public concerns:

April 9, 2008 – A joint meeting of the Planning Commission and the Transportation Commission was held to solicit public comments on the BRT project to identify issues that were not submitted during the DEIR comment period, which closed in July 2007. Thirty-nine people spoke, both in support of and against BRT.

June 11, 2008 – Another joint session of the Planning Commission and the Transportation Commission was held. This meeting was designed to provide the Commissioners with background information on the BRT system, such as a glossary of terms, an explanation of the basic elements of BRT, and a methodology for evaluating local impacts of various alternatives. The Commissioners reviewed the information and requested additional information that they felt was necessary to fully understand the impacts of BRT. Staff also proposed a BRT decision process, which consisted of a series of joint meetings between the two Commissions to develop a Locally Preferred Alternative to recommend to the City Council.

June 25, 2008 – The Planning Commission expressed concern about the collaborative process proposed by staff and the ability to adhere to the schedule of meetings. The Planning Commission also recommended that the staff make a recommendation regarding the BRT for the purpose of having a more efficient and effective decision-making process.

September 24, 2008 – Staff presented additional background information to the Planning Commission, based on the comments and requests made at the June 2008 hearings. Staff also presented a revised BRT decision process, outlined on page 1 of this report, which was approved by the Planning Commission.

Planning and Transportation Department staff also began participating in Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings with Oakland, San Leandro and AC Transit in order to gather additional information to bring to the Planning Commission and the public. The first TAC meeting was held on October 30, 2008.

#### POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Once the LPAs for all three cities (Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro) are forwarded to AC Transit, work on the final EIS/EIR analysis can begin. Because this analysis depends on establishing the cities' LPAs, City staff cannot predict when the final environmental report would be ready for review. Upon completion and certification of the Final EIS/EIR by the AC Transit Board, the City can use the information in the document to make a decision as to the use of City streets for dedicated lanes or any other proposed transit improvements. The City, through a vote of the City Council, has the final say on the dedication of City streets for BRT.

#### FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

The two public workshops will cost between \$30,000 and \$35,000. This will cover the cost of materials development, consultant staff time, training and documentation. Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates has been hired to conduct the workshop and develop workshop materials using funds approved by the Council on October 21, 2008 (account 010-4920-431-3038). Approximately ¼ full time equivalent staff is devoted to this project from the Planning and Development Department and Transportation Division of the Public Works Department.

#### CONTACT PERSON

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