



CITY COUNCILMEMBER
RIGEL ROBINSON
 DISTRICT 7

11

CONSENT CALENDAR
 January 28, 2020

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Councilmember Rigel Robinson and Mayor Jesse Arreguin
 Subject: Letter in Support of a Dedicated Bus Lane on the Bay Bridge

RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, Assemblymember Rob Bonta, Assemblymember Jim Frazier, State Senator Nancy Skinner, and Senator Jim Beall in support of the reinstatement of a dedicated bus lane on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.

BACKGROUND

On January 15, 1961, the State of California established a temporary dedicated bus lane on the Bay Bridge to alleviate rush hour congestion. The bus-only lane enabled buses to remain on schedule and reduced bus travel time across the bridge from 25 minutes to 13 minutes, twice as fast as automobiles during rush hour. Implementation had an immediate effect on AC Transit ridership — Transbay ticket sales increased 12.8 percent in just a year, from \$134,699 in January 1961 to \$153,912 in January 1962.

On January 31, 1963, the San Francisco Division of Bay Toll Crossing under the California Department of Public Works, now renamed the Division of Bay Toll Crossing, announced that it would be removing the bus express lane after only a year of operation. As reported by the San Francisco Chronicle, the chief engineer overseeing the bridge reconstruction project said that “the bus lane [would] be needed for general auto traffic because the upper deck of the bridge [was] going to be repaved.” The lane was converted into a combined bus and carpool lane.

The reconstruction project, which paved the upper deck one lane at a time and opened the bus lane to car traffic, ensured that “motorists would suffer no inconvenience.” However, bus commuters would see their commute times doubled to 25 minutes again. This decision was made despite the fact that during peak hours at that time, half of all East Bay commutes were by bus. An eastbound bus left San Francisco every 14 seconds, and 238 coaches crossed the bridge between 4 and 6 PM.

The Bay Bridge is currently owned and maintained by the California Department of Transportation, or Caltrans. The reconstructed Bay Bridge has a short bus-only lane that allows buses to bypass the FasTrak toll booths. However, on the majority of the bridge, buses share the road with general automobile traffic.

As Bay Area residents are priced out of San Francisco and move to the East Bay and other more affordable regions, Transbay automobile traffic has increased proportionally.

According to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, weekday congestion-related delays on Bay Area freeways have broken a new record, surging by 80 percent since 2010. Former MTC Chair Jake Mackenzie states that “eight of the top 10 most crowded commutes [in the Bay Area] are routes to or from the Bay Bridge or Silicon Valley.”

At the same time, the rising demand for Transbay bus service is evident. AC Transit Transbay ridership has “undergone substantial ridership growth,” necessitating the staff decision to add additional trips into the schedule and take steps to manage overcrowding. Transbay routes experienced a 20 percent increase from 11,000 daily riders in 2013 to 13,500 in 2015. In 2018, Transbay ridership increased by another 1.8 percent, making up 10 percent of total weekday ridership.

In order to accommodate growing Transbay ridership, improve the efficiency and appeal of Transbay public transit, and reduce automobile congestion, Caltrans should explore reimplementing a dedicated bus lane on the Bay Bridge.

A bus-only lane implemented in a dense, congested area to speed up transit without major capital improvements is also known as a tactical transit lane (TTL). Ideal conditions for a TTL are commuter corridors where transit speeds and headway reliability are of concern, and allowing transit to bypass car traffic yields the greatest benefits. According to a 2019 study by the UCLA Institute of Transportation, TTLs increase bus ridership by “speeding up travel times, improving [the] passenger experience and enhancing overall perceptions of riding the bus.” The Bay Bridge, designated by the MTC as the most congested freeway corridor in the Bay Area at peak commute times, is an excellent candidate for a tactical transit lane.

Cities across the country are beginning to understand the importance of dedicated bus lanes for transit reliability. Permanent bus-only lanes have been implemented in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Chicago, Baltimore, and right here in Berkeley. Additional pilot programs are underway in cities such as Boston, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Cambridge.

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) conducted a before-and-after study of the dedicated bus lane on Market Street, and “found that three bus lanes painted onto downtown streets in 2014 improved transit delays (despite increases in car traffic), boosted transit reliability by 25 percent, and cut collisions by 16 percent.”

During peak hours, Market Street accommodates more than 200 buses per hour. Several dedicated bus lanes have been implemented on streets that serve far fewer buses — 4th Street, one of San Francisco’s major transit corridors, services only 40 buses per hour at peak times. There is a great need for a dedicated bus lane in such a congested, public transit-rich corridor.

In order to encourage Transbay commuters to choose public transit over cars, Caltrans must provide the infrastructure needed to make buses the more efficient and reliable

option. Ultimately, a dedicated bus lane on the Bay Bridge would take pollutant-emitting and traffic-congesting cars off the road while improving the public transit experience.

Staff should send the attached letter of support to Caltrans, the MTC, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, Assemblymember Rob Bonta, Assemblymember Jim Frazier, State Senator Nancy Skinner, and Senator Jim Beall.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Improved Transbay public transportation will incentivize commuters to take public transit instead of driving, therefore reducing vehicle miles traveled.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Rigel Robinson, (510) 981-7170

Attachments:

- 1: Letter
- 2: San Francisco Chronicle: Fast Bus Lane on Bay Bridge Ups Ticket Sales (February 8, 1962)
- 3: San Francisco Chronicle: Bridge Buses to Lose Special Lane (January 31, 1963)



To: California Department of Transportation

Date: January 28, 2020

Re: In Support of a Dedicated Bus Lane on the Bay Bridge

Dear California Department of Transportation:

The City of Berkeley is committed to reducing our negative environmental impact through innovative transportation solutions. One of our most valuable partners in our effort to reduce vehicle miles traveled, encourage residents to use sustainable modes of transit, and promote transportation equity and accessibility has been AC Transit. However, the reliability, efficiency, and quality of bus service for Bay Area residents and commuters depends on intentional and well-planned infrastructure. Therefore, the City of Berkeley is writing in support of reinstating a dedicated bus lane on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.

In 1961, the State of California established a temporary dedicated bus lane on the Bay Bridge to alleviate rush hour congestion. The bus-only lane increased AC Transit Transbay ridership by 12.8 percent, enabled buses to remain on schedule, and reduced bus travel time across the bridge from 25 minutes to 13 minutes. However, after just one year of operation, it was removed in 1963 to make room for general automobile traffic.

Cities across the country, including Berkeley, are beginning to understand the importance of dedicated bus lanes for transit reliability. San Francisco's bus-only lanes improved transit delays, boosted reliability by 25 percent, and cut collisions by 16 percent. Dedicated bus lanes are especially beneficial in dense, congested commuter corridors such as the Bay Bridge.

As Bay Area residents are priced out of San Francisco and move to the East Bay and other more affordable regions, Transbay automobile traffic has increased proportionally. According to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, weekday congestion-related delays on Bay Area freeways have broken a new record, surging by 80 percent since 2010. The Bay Bridge is the most congested freeway corridor in the Bay Area, and eight of the top 10 most crowded Bay Area commutes are routes to or from the Bay Bridge and Silicon Valley.

At the same time, the rising demand for Transbay bus service, which now makes up 10 percent of AC Transit weekday ridership, is evident. In order to accommodate growing Transbay ridership, improve the efficiency and appeal of Transbay public transit, and reduce automobile congestion, Caltrans should explore reimplementing a dedicated bus lane on the Bay Bridge. If California is committed to meeting its statewide climate goals by incentivizing commuters to choose public transit over cars, Caltrans must provide the infrastructure needed to make buses the more efficient and reliable option.

Sincerely,

The Berkeley City Council

Several suggestions have

Fast **Bus Lane** On Bay Bridge Ups Ticket Sales

Ticket sales to transbay bus commuters jumped 12.8 per cent in January over the same month a year ago, the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District announced yesterday.

This was the first indication of the effectiveness of the new exclusive **bus lane** on the Bay Bridge, district officials said.

The **bus lane** was established on January 15 by the State to take some of the pressure off rush hour congestion. Buses can make the bridge crossing in about 12 or 13 minutes, or about twice as fast as autos in rush hour traffic.

As a result, district officials said, to commute book sales for last month totaled \$153,912, an increase of \$19,213 over January, 1961.

Source: <https://twitter.com/chrisarvinsf/status/1182490535778340865>

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Commuter Slowdown

Bridge Buses to Lose Special Lane

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Our Correspondent

Buses will lose their exclusive right to a single express lane on the lower deck of the Bay Bridge tomorrow, it was learned last night.

Directors of the San Francisco Division of Bay Toll Crossing rescinded the bus express lane yesterday. It has been in operation for a year.

Norman C. Raab, chief engineer on the bridge reconstruction project, said the bus lane will be needed for general auto traffic because the upper deck of the bridge is going to be repaved.

Raab said the bus lane was only a temporary measure anyway.

Alameda-Contra Costa Transit system directors, obviously dismayed at the loss of the lane, notified commuters that the bridge crossing will take a little longer now.

Raab said the repaving project is scheduled for April. He said engineering studies will have to be made before the project begins, and he did not know how

long the repaving project would take.

"The upper deck of the bridge hasn't been paved since it was built 25 years ago," Raab said, "and it needs it."

He said motorists would suffer no inconvenience. The upper deck will be paved one lane at a time and its use by motorists will be replaced by the lower deck lane formerly reserved for buses.

Alameda-Contra Costa transit directors, however, expected bus commuters would be sorely inconvenienced. Travel time across the bridge for buses was reduced from 25 minutes to 13 minutes by the express lane.

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