

CONSENT CALENDAR

May 24th, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Terry Taplin (Author), Councilmember Susan Wengraf (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Sophie Hahn (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Rigel Robinson (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Urge the AC Transit Board of Directors to Restore and Expand on Pre-Pandemic Transbay Bus Service and Bus Service to the Berkeley Hills

RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to the AC Transit Board of Directors urging the restoration and expansion of transbay and Berkeley Hills bus service.

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically disrupted regular life in the Bay Area and the rest of the world. Suddenly, highways, buses, trains, and offices were found empty and millions of people were staying indoors to avoid contracting the coronavirus. This halt in social and economic life had immediate, wide-reaching ramifications. AC Transit was impacted immediately by a 71% decline in ridership and a monthly loss of \$5 million in the first few months of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> In response to this, AC Transit began temporarily terminating some bus lines and considering the permanent cut of 15 to 30% of total services.<sup>2</sup>

In the more than two years that have followed, AC Transit has slowly recovered financially and begun the process of restoring its bus services to pre-pandemic levels. Despite financial recoveries, more comprehensive service restoration hinges on the hiring, training, and retention of bus operators. AC Transit must do everything in its power to grow its number of bus drivers so that the East Bay's public transportation system can finally move past the COVID-19 era and even begin to grow its service levels above that which existed on the eve of the pandemic.

Of particular importance for prioritized service expansion are lines 65 and 67, which serve the Berkeley Hills, and transbay bus services which offer a non-car option for those commuting to and visiting San Francisco. Both lines 65 and 67 currently operate exclusively on weekdays, leaving hills residents reliant their personal automobiles for

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.berkeleyside.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/STAFF-REPORT.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.berkeleyside.com/2020/07/08/ac-transit-bus-service-cuts-berkeley-ca-coronavirus-transbay>

weekend recreation, employment, and other local travel needs. As long as residents of the Berkeley Hills have high rates of car ownership, their neighborhoods should be targeted for improved public transportation accessibility. Similarly, AC Transit's transbay service is limited to weekdays. AC Transit must strive to offer public transportation that is more than just an option for people commuting to their jobs during the week.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The City estimates that transportation-related emissions accounts for approximately 60% of our community's total annual greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>3</sup> The restoration of AC Transit's 65, 67, and transbay bus lines will strengthen alternatives to car transportation and lower the emissions of our community's dominant source of carbon pollution.

#### CONTACT

Terry Taplin, Councilmember, District 2, (510) 981-7120

#### ATTACHMENTS

1. Letter

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<sup>3</sup><https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Berkeley-Climate-Action-Plan.pdf>

Board of Directors  
Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District  
1600 Franklin Street, 10th Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612

**Re: Restoration of Berkeley Hills and Transbay Bus Service**

Dear President Ortiz, Vice-President Young, and Directors,

The Bay Area's post-covid transportation network must be one that offers widespread access at as many hours as possible so that residents can choose to travel by bus instead of car without sacrificing speed and accessibility. With this in mind, the Berkeley City Council urges that bus lines to the Berkeley Hills, as well as transbay service to San Francisco, be restored and expanded to include weekend service.

Reducing our residents' reliance on their personal automobiles for professional and recreational travel is an essential task in the pursuit of our City's climate and safety goals. It must follow, then, that the communities in Berkeley with the highest rates of car ownership be encouraged to take public transportation through the expansion of bus service into their neighborhoods. What this means for Berkeley is an increase in bus service to the Berkeley Hills at all times. Currently, AC Transit's Line 65 and Line 67 are routed through the Berkeley Hills but only on weekdays. This configuration works well for residents who choose to take the bus to their jobs, but does nothing to encourage residents to also choose the bus on the weekends when they are traveling throughout the rest of the Bay Area for recreation, personal errands, and shopping. Another area of your network we would like to see expanded is your transbay lines which are even more prioritized for commuters. The availability of BART for transbay public transportation is beneficial to all, but BART's limited reach beyond its three Berkeley stations can leave residents of West Berkeley and the Berkeley Hills wishing they had a public transportation option that could place them in San Francisco without making multiple transfers, and thus paying multiple fares, along the way to their destination.

Understanding that you have many conflicting priorities for restoring bus services, we ask that you take special consideration for a growth in service to the Berkeley Hills and on your transbay lines.

Furthermore, we encourage AC Transit to exhaust all financial and logistical options at your disposal as you attempt to grow your number of bus operators. As long as the population of trained and employed bus drivers remains an impediment to service restoration and growth, your methods for onboarding new operators must be creative and with the practical needs of potential drivers in mind.

Sincerely,

The Council of the City of Berkeley

CC: Elsa Ortiz, President

Joel B. Young, Vice-President

Murphy McCalley, Director

Diane Shaw, Director

H.E. Christian Peeples, Director

Jovanka Beckles, Director

Jean Walsh, Director