BERKELEY CITY COUNCILMEMBER
TERRY TAPLIN
DISTRICT 2

CONSENT CALENDAR
December 13, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Terry Taplin (Author)

Subject: University-Downtown ~~Avenue~~ Bus Rapid Transit

RECOMMENDATION

(1) Refer to the City Manager and the Department of Public Works the initiation of a ~~University Avenue~~ Multimodal Corridor Project that centers the creation of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor along University Avenue, Shattuck Avenue, and Telegraph Avenue with dedicated lanes and elevated platforms.
(2) Refer $300,000 to the budget process to be alloted to the Department of Public Works~~engage a consultant~~ for the study, community feedback process, and design of the project.
(3) Refer $30,000 to the budget process for the construction of elevated bus stop platforms for the purposes of bringing BRT~~elevated~~ platforms to University Avenue on a pilot basis while the wider project is in development.

FISCAL IMPACTS

~~Staff costs.~~ An estimated $300,000 for the staff costs of ~~engaging a consultant for~~ the Multimodal Corridor Project. An estimated $30,000 for two elevated platforms, or "bus bulbs", at an estimated cost of $15,000 per platform.[1]

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

University Avenue

Berkeley's University Avenue runs West to East from the Berkeley Marina and I-80 Freeway to its termination at the Crescent Lawn of the UC Berkeley campus. University Ave is dubbed the "Gateway to Berkeley" due to the location of the city's lone Amtrak Station at University & Fourth Street, the avenue's proximity to both the North Berkeley and Downtown Berkeley BART stations, the regularly congested I-80 exit onto the avenue, and the service of AC Transit's 51B, 52, 88, 802, and FS lines. The central location of University Avenue and the variety of communities it connects makes this corridor an incredibly important focus for the City's housing and transportation planning for the coming decades. With University Avenue likely seeing a growth in new housing development under the forthcoming Housing Element, it is important for Berkeley's

[1] https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2020%20Pedestrian%20Plan%20Appendix%20E%20%28adopted%29.pdf

transportation infrastucture to keep up with the changing needs of its old and new residents. On top of the expected growth in Berkeley's population and thus its transportation needs, climate change and the urgency of pedestrian and cyclist safety require that the transportation system of the City's future be one that prioritizes public transit and bicycle travel over the use personal automobiles. With this in mind, the 2017 Bicycle Plan recommends a Complete Streets Corridor Study for University Avenue.[2]

Shattuck & Telegraph Avenues
Any successful transportation project that seeks to increase the speed and reliability of AC Transit service in Berkeley will have to apply to more than just one major roadway. Telegraph Avenue, running from the Oakland border in South-East Berkeley up through downtown to UC Berkeley, is in the midst of its own multimodal corridor project at this time that may result in rapid transit infrastucture on the avenue in the coming years.[3] Should the Telegraph Avenue Multimodal Project be completed or significantly underway at the time of the development of BRT plans for University Avenue and Shattuck Avenue, close attention should be paid to initiatial impacts, successes, and failures of the Telegraph project so that application of rapid transit infrastructure on University and Shattuck is done that builds on the lessons of Telegraph.

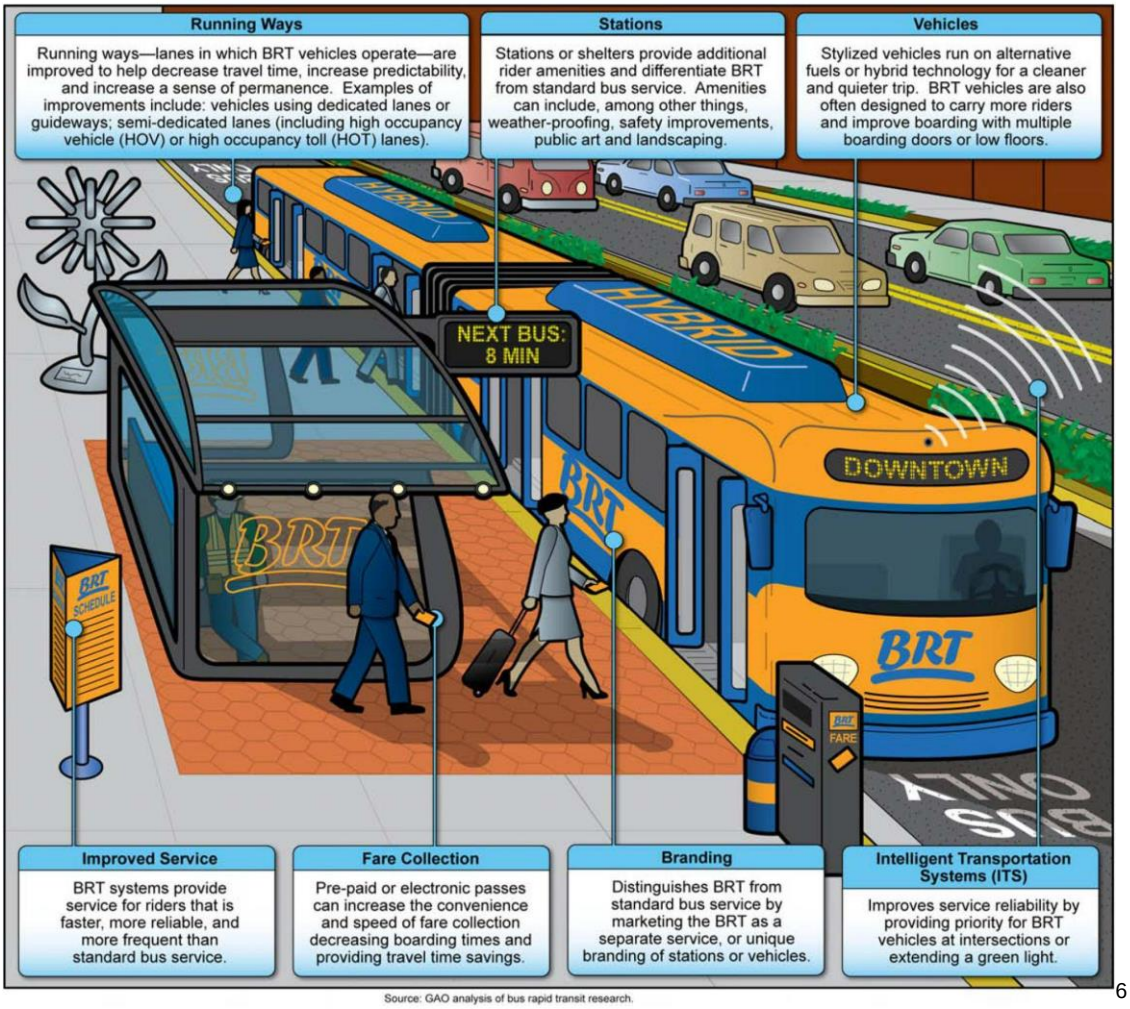
Furthermore, these three avenues are each unique and each present their own problems when considering the addition of BRT. The application of BRT on the downtown stretch of Shattuck Avenue, which could improve the service of AC Transit's 18 and various other lines which briefly serve Shattuck at the start/end of their routes, will require careful consideration of the already congested conditions of the street. The construction of elevated platforms on University Avenue as a pilot for BRT while completion of Telegraph Avenue's project is underway and Shattuck Avenue rapid transit is being considered will allow for some near-term service improvements while giving staff the time necessary to study how to bring multimodal improvements to the rest of the corridors as fastidiously as possible.

Bus Rapid Transit
While diverse in their application around the world, Bus Rapid Transit is typically a transportation corridor that prioritizes fast and efficient bus service that may include dedicated bus lanes, traffic signal priority, elevated platforms, and off-board fare collection.[4] There is no one-size-fits-all approach to BRT and a University Avenue BRT is sure to look different than it might on Telegraph Avenue or International Boulevard in Oakland, but pursuit of a quicker and more efficient bus corridor along University should result in dedicated bus lane and elevated platforms at existing AC Transit stops. Relative to other rapid transit improvements such as light rail, BRT's advantages include

[2] https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Berkeley-Bicycle-Plan-2017_AppendixH_Complete%20Streets%20Corridors.pdf
[3] https://berkeleyca.gov/your-government/our-work/capital-projects/telegraph-avenue-multimodal-corridor-project#:~:text=The%20Telegraph%20Avenue%20Multimodal%20Corridor,bike%20lanes%2C%20and%20transit%20improvements.
[4] https://www.transit.dot.gov/research-innovation/bus-rapid-transit

lower upfront capital requirements, a higher degree of flexibility in their application, and a mucher quicker be implementation timeline.[5]

Figure 1: Characteristics of Bus Rapid Transit



Source: GAO analysis of bus rapid transit research.[6]

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The City estimates that transportation-related emissions accounts for approximately 60% of our community's total annual greenhouse gas emissions.[7] By encouraging alternatives to car transportation by making public transportation options quicker and more appealing, policy stands to lower the emissions from our community's dominant source of carbon emissions.

The goal of any new public transportation initiative must be to increase the local modeshare of residents choosing public transportation over personal automobiles. BRT

[5] https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=jpt

[6] https://www.gao.gov/blog/2016/04/13/rapid-buses-for-rapid-transit

[7] https://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City_Council/2018/12_Dec/Documents/2018-12-06_WS_Item_01_Climate_Action_Plan_Update_pdf.aspx

offers many advantages for this pursuit. The U.S. Government Accountability Office reviewed implemented BRT projects in 2012 and found that "13 of the 15 project sponsors…reported increases in ridership after 1 year of service and reduced average travel times of 10 to 35 percent over previous bus services."[8] Paired with the multimodal project along Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley has the potential for a large increase in transit ridership and thus a decline in greenhouse gas emissions if the City follows through on BRT in the coming years.

CONTACT
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ATTACHMENTS
1. AC Transit Multimodal Corridor Guidelines

[8] https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-12-811