



June 22, 2021

City of Oakland (submitted electronically)
1 Frank H Ogawa Plaza
Oakland, CA 94612

Re: Telegraph Avenue Corridor Comment on Proposed Roadway Modifications

Oakland City Council Members:

Thank you for providing the public and Telegraph Avenue corridor stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the proposed roadway modifications between 20th and 29th streets. The Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District's (AC Transit or the District) comments on the City's proposal are in response to the version of the staff report released on June 6, 2021. AC Transit opposes the City of Oakland's Department of Transportation's (OakDOT) recommendation to replace the existing parking-protected bicycle lanes with buffered bicycle lanes and supports converting the existing configuration into permanent parking-protected bicycle lanes.

Background

Telegraph Avenue is a key transit corridor for AC Transit. We currently operate two routes along the corridor – Line 6 at 10-12-minute frequency and Line 800 at 30-60-minute frequency at night. Pre-pandemic, AC Transit carried 5,600 daily riders along the corridor between Downtown Oakland and Downtown Berkeley.

AC Transit's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Major Investment Study was the District's effort to identify the appropriate corridor alignment for the eventual implementation of its first BRT line. The study concluded that the optimal alignment to benefit the most riders was along: E.14th Street between the Bay Fair BART Station and the Oakland border, International Boulevard between the Oakland border and Downtown Oakland, and Telegraph Avenue between Downtown Oakland and Downtown Berkeley. AC Transit analyzed this alignment through the Environmental Review process and brought the project alignment to the cities of Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro in 2010 for approval. While Oakland supported the project, San Leandro approved a truncated project that terminated at the San Leandro BART Station and Berkeley rejected the project altogether; the Berkeley City Council voted down the project by a one vote margin. As a result, though Telegraph Avenue could accommodate BRT, the final project alignment was from Downtown Oakland to the San Leandro BART Station, which is the BRT route in place today.

With BRT no longer proposed for Telegraph Avenue by a narrow-margin vote, The City of Oakland proposed a road diet along the corridor in 2014 that would remove a vehicle travel lane and install a combination of parking-protected and buffered bicycle lanes along the corridor. This effort would all but preclude any possibility of BRT along the corridor in the future. With concerns over transit performance along a planned slower street, AC Transit proposed that the City's road diet project not preclude future

consideration of BRT and that the interim project must include bus boarding islands to mitigate any delays to transit as a result of increased traffic created by the project. At the time of project approval, the Oakland City Council acknowledged AC Transit's comments. In 2016, the City implemented the road diet project with pressure from AC Transit to include the modular bus boarding islands.

While Telegraph is a slower street as a result of the City's road diet project, AC Transit's buses can safely move along the segment between 20th and 29th streets because the parking-protected bicycle lanes completely separate cyclists from buses along the entire segment including at the bus stops. To improve speed and reliability, AC Transit is piloting all-door boarding for riders along the corridor, upgrading the Transit Signal Priority (TSP), and optimizing bus stop locations, though all are less effective than dedicated transit lanes and full BRT treatment.

OakDOT Recommendation

As indicated in the City's June 6, 2021 Agenda Report, City staff is recommending to replace the parking-protected bicycle lanes on Telegraph Avenue with buffered bicycle lanes because it believes buffered lanes are safer for all users of the road, more compatible with special events and require less maintenance. While AC Transit appreciates staff's analysis that led to the recommendation, we have a number of concerns with the City's planning and outreach process, as well as the recommended option:

- 1. There has been no consultation or outreach to AC Transit staff or elected officials since 2017.** Given the impacts of any of the design options to AC Transit's operations, we are concerned that City staff did not include AC Transit in the development of alternatives, the alternatives analysis or the recommendation. The alternatives analysis identifies safety impacts to transit for each option, but the transit analysis is insufficient and does not directly investigate the impact of the various options on transit performance. Had AC Transit been involved in the planning process as a key stakeholder, we would have been able to provide valuable insight on each option's true impact to our service and operations. Our initial knowledge of this project was through the media and our first discussion with staff was on June 14, 2021 after AC Transit reached out to OakDOT to have a meeting on this subject. We understand there are many stakeholders involved in this complex project and AC Transit should have been a key one to include early, especially if the City has a vision for making Telegraph Avenue a true multimodal corridor.
- 2. City staff did not consider dedicated transit lanes or BRT as an option in the alternatives analysis.** If the opportunity arises, AC Transit remains committed to a future with BRT on the corridor and these projects that take a lane of traffic for parking and/or cycling infrastructure without space for a transit lane threaten that future. With changes in Berkeley City Council's composition, AC Transit believes there may be more support for BRT today than when the project was shortened in 2010. As previously stated, AC Transit requested to ensure that the possibility for BRT was never precluded when the City first introduced the road diet concept. However, with the development of the recent analysis by the City, any chance for a dedicated transit facility along Telegraph is minimized.
- 3. Parking-protected bicycle lanes are safer for transit operations than buffered bicycle lanes.** Parking-protected lanes completely separate bikes and buses throughout entire length of the



corridor from 20th to 29th streets and not only at bus stops as analyzed by City staff. AC Transit's experience with buffered bike lanes is that they allow for double-parking and other obstacles in the lane that require cyclists to swerve into traffic, and thus the path of the bus. Because of their respective speeds, buses and cyclists could have multiple points of interaction along a corridor creating more points for potential conflicts.

From a transit safety perspective, AC Transit believes protected bike lanes should be scored higher than buffered lanes in the alternatives analysis. Buffered bicycle lanes also create a weave around the transit boarding islands leaving the perception of cyclists traveling toward the vehicle lane after a bus stop; this is compared to the straight path of travel experienced by cyclists in parking-protected lanes. If the solution to maintain parking-protected bicycle lanes is to install more traffic signals or prohibit turning movements at unprotected intersections, AC Transit's preference is the latter since it will not negatively impact transit performance.

With regard to the modular boarding islands included in the current interim project, AC Transit expects the future project to include concrete boarding islands as promised by the City. The modular boarding islands hardly work as an interim condition, are difficult to see, especially at night and don't permit the installation amenities typically found on transit islands such as seating, shelter or wayfinding signage.

AC Transit respectfully requests the City Council approve the option that maintains parking-protected bicycle lanes along Telegraph Avenue, including the installation of permanent concrete bus boarding islands to improve the customer experience for riding transit along the corridor. In addition, we hope to continue to work with OakDOT staff on the vision for Telegraph as a multimodal corridor, including the potential for the implementation of BRT or dedicated transit lanes.

Please contact AC Transit's Director of Service Development and Planning – Robert del Rosario at 510.891.4734 or via email at rdelrosa@actransit.org for further coordination on this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael A. Hursh'.

Michael A. Hursh
General Manager