

CONSENT CALENDAR

April 20, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmembers Terry Taplin (Author), Ben Bartlett, and Kate Harrison (Co-Sponsors)

Subject: Urge the AC Transit Board of Directors to Restore the 80-Ashby/Sixth Street Bus Line

RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to the AC Transit Board of Directors urging the restoration of the 80-Ashby/Sixth Street bus line to its pre-pandemic level of service.

BACKGROUND

The sudden halting of normal life in the Bay Area when the quick rise of the COVID-19 pandemic initiated a statewide stay-at-home order in March of 2020 disrupted much of the Bay Area's economy and daily life. The health of our community and our economy were quickly threatened by the pandemic and business closures in a manner that allowed for very little planning and a great deal of turbulence. In response to the sudden economic recession and the need for socially distanced travel, AC Transit made ridership free of charge. This change, while a good one, as well as the overall decline in demand for buses during the stay-at-home order, resulted in a 71% decline in ridership and a monthly loss of \$5 million as of July 2020.¹ In response to this, AC Transit began temporarily terminating some bus lines and considering the permanent cut of 15 to 30% of total services.²

Among those considered for permanent termination, the 80-Ashby/Sixth Street bus line is one which would be an incredible loss should it not return from its current temporary closure. The 80 line, which runs down Ashby Avenue from The Claremont then north along Sixth Street and through Albany to end in El Cerrito, offers a transportation method along a corridor of the East Bay that is sparsely accessible by BART and other AC Transit lines. The permanent closure of this line, which connects the South Berkeley Senior Center and the Berkeley Pines Care Center to Ashby BART and Alta Bates Medical Center, would be a particularly detrimental loss for the East Bay's senior community, as many have relied on it for their independence and medical care access for years.

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

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

Furthermore, due to its unique route, the closure of the 80 line would only result in more East Bay residents turning to cars for their transportation needs. This would hamper the progress Berkeley has made towards reducing its carbon emissions at a time when a drastic shift in our mobility away from cars and towards low-carbon public transit is more important than ever. Berkeley's own Climate Action Plan points to the expanded use and accessibility of public transportation such as the 80 line as a key ingredient towards our emission reduction and climate action goals.³ Every lost bus line is a defeat for our environment and our community, but the loss of the 80 line would be especially damaging.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The City estimates that transportation-related emissions accounts for approximately 60% of our community's total annual greenhouse gas emissions.⁴ The restoration of AC Transit's 80-Ashby/Sixth Street bus line 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

³https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_and_Development/Level_3_-_Energy_and_Sustainable_Development/Berkeley%20Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf

⁴https://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City_Council/2018/12_Dec/Documents/2018-12-06_WS_Item_01_Climate_Action_Plan_Update_pdf.aspx

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

Re: Restoration of the 80-Ashby/Sixth Street Bus Line

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

The Berkeley City Council urges that the 80-Ashby/Sixth Street AC Transit bus line be restored to its pre-pandemic level of service. This bus line, which serves much of Berkeley, Albany, and El Cerrito, is a critical community transportation service that allows residents to travel car-free through a long stretch of the East Bay which is not accessible on BART and provides a unique route compared with other AC Transit lines.

The full termination of the 80 line, as is currently under consideration, would represent a resounding defeat for Berkeley and the broader Bay Area's pursuit of more widely accessible public transportation and a car-free transportation sector. While we understand that the decline in ridership during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order has taken a serious toll on AC Transit's revenue, the steady shift out of the pandemic that we are seeing as vaccinations become more widespread should result in the return of riders within months.

As a connecting line between the Ashby BART station, Alta Bates Medical Center, the South Berkeley Senior Center, and the Berkeley Pines Care Center, the loss of the 80 line would permanently deprive many Berkeley seniors of a method of transportation that they have relied on in the past. Those left with no transportation alternatives will likely turn to car travel, be it with personal automobiles or through ride-hailing mobile apps, which will only increase local fossil fuel emissions and air pollution while decreasing street safety. Our community's senior accessibility needs, climate change mandate to lower emissions, and desire to make our streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists, all necessitate the restoration of the 80 line as soon as possible. All of our bus lines are precious and important, but in the face of financial cuts, the 80 line must not be on the chopping block.

Sincerely,

The Council of the City of Berkeley

CC: Elsa Ortiz, President

Joel B. Young, Vice-President

Mark Williams, Director

Diane Shaw, Director

H.E. Christian Peeples, Director

Jovanka Beckles, Director

Jean Walsh, Director