



CITY COUNCILMEMBER
RIGEL ROBINSON
 DISTRICT 7

CONSENT CALENDAR
 April 20, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Rigel Robinson (Author), Councilmember Kesarwani (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Support for AB 455: Bay Bridge Transit-Only Lane

RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to Assemblymember Rob Bonta, Senator Nancy Skinner, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks in support of Assembly Bill 455, which would authorize the Bay Area Toll Authority, in consultation with the Department of Transportation, to designate transit-only traffic lanes on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.

BACKGROUND

AB 455, introduced by Assemblymember Bonta, would authorize the Bay Area Toll Authority, in consultation with the Department of Transportation, to designate transit-only traffic lanes on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. It would also state the intent of the legislature to establish tolls, vehicle occupancy requirements, incident response procedures, other operational improvements, and capital investment priorities in order to achieve fast and reliable bus transit within the corridor. This goal would be defined as buses that average at least 45 miles per hour in both directions along the Bay Bridge Corridor no less than 90 percent of weekdays each month.

As defined in the bill, a transit-only traffic lane is a lane restricted to mass transit vehicles and possibly other vehicles such as taxis, high-occupancy vehicles, and vanpools. This would not be an unprecedented move — the Bay Bridge had a bus-only lane from January 1961 to January 1963. During this time, bus efficiency across the bridge became twice as fast as the average automobile, and Transbay ticket sales increased by 12.8 percent in just one year.¹

Currently, the Bay Bridge has a short bus lane to bypass toll lines. However, the majority of the bridge requires buses to share lanes with regular automobiles. 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 2010.² This has created a situation in which buses are frequently stuck in traffic, causing slow, costly, and unreliable bus service.

¹ San Francisco Chronicle: Thursday, February 8, 1962

² <https://mtc.ca.gov/whats-happening/news/bay-area-vital-signs-freeway-congestion-hits-new-record-0>

The Bay Bridge is an excellent candidate for a transit-only lane, as a commuter corridor where transit speeds and headway reliability are of concern.³ According to a 2019 study by the UCLA Institute of Transportation, transit-only lanes increase bus ridership by “speeding up travel times, improving [the] passenger experience and enhancing overall perceptions of riding the bus.”⁴ A transit-only lane would make Transbay buses a reliable and fast choice, encouraging public transportation use and alleviating traffic. 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.⁵

In 2020, the Cities of Berkeley⁶ and Oakland,⁷ as well as the BART Board⁸ and the AC Transit Board,⁹ expressed our joint support for the designation of a bus-only lane on the Bay Bridge in an effort to expand the reliability and efficiency of public transportation.

The City of Berkeley should reaffirm our support for sustainable, reliable bus service on the Bay Bridge by endorsing AB 455 and sending a letter of support to Assemblymember Rob Bonta, Senator Nancy Skinner, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Making it easier for Berkeley residents to commute or travel to San Francisco by public transit is consistent with the City of Berkeley Climate Action Plan, which calls for dramatic reductions in all emissions, especially related to transit. Transportation is Berkeley’s largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, making up 59 percent.¹⁰

³ <https://www.its.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2019/02/Best-Practices-in-Implementing-Tactical-Transit-Lanes-1.pdf>

⁴ <http://transitcenter.org/2016/12/19/why-tactical-transit-is-the-next-big-thing/>

⁵ <https://www.its.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2019/02/Best-Practices-in-Implementing-Tactical-Transit-Lanes-1.pdf>

⁶ https://www.cityofberkeley.info/Clerk/City_Council/2020/01_Jan/Documents/2020-01-28_Supp_2_Reports_Item_11_Rev_Robinson_pdf.aspx

⁷ <https://oakland.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=8017210&GUID=9090AC3B-8EB9-4977-B626-C2C490484ED7>

⁸ https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/551291/Attachment_D_-_Berkeley_Resolution_in_Support_of_a_Bus-Only_Lane.pdf

⁹ <https://actransit.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4309704&GUID=30C29C36-B0C0-47D7-A63E-A5194331244E&Options=&Search=&FullText=1>

¹⁰ <https://www.cityofberkeley.info/climate/>

CONTACT PERSON

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Arev Walker, Intern

Attachments:

- 1: Letter of support
- 2: Bill text

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB455

April 20, 2021

The Honorable Rob Bonta
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 2148
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for AB 455 - Bay Bridge Transit-Only Lane

Dear Assemblymember Bonta,

The Berkeley City Council would like to convey its full support for AB 455, which would alleviate Bay Bridge congestion and bring much-needed improvements to the reliability, efficiency, and convenience of Transbay bus service.

The current situation on the Bay Bridge is unworkable for drivers and bus passengers alike, as one of the most congested commuter corridors in the Bay Area. A transit-only lane would massively improve bus service and encourage many people to reconsider driving individual cars across the bridge, reducing transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. Having a reliable and fast public transit option on the Bay Bridge would also greatly improve access to and from San Francisco for communities in the East Bay.

In 2020, the City of Berkeley expressed our support for the designation of a transit-only lane on the Bay Bridge. We affirm that support today, as the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on transit agencies has made the need to boost public transit ridership ever more clear. AB 455 is an essential step along the way to improving congestion along the Bay Bridge corridor, and we thank you for introducing this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

The Berkeley City Council