

7 BEST PRACTICES

Local Government Standards for Transit Agencies

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

WHAT IS IT?

While most everyone agrees that quality transit service is a critical element to a world-class city, often the city itself is not responsible for the implementation of transit service. Some cities have relatively little input into transit operations within their borders, as the transit operator responds to a broader constituency. An explicit set of city standards for local transit service is one tool that can help to ensure that local transit is provided in a manner that is consistent with a city's overall mobility goals.

The City of Seattle has UVTN performance measures (see section 4 of this briefing book) that evaluate the quality of transit service from the perspective of a transit rider, e.g., service frequency and reliability, and passenger load. These indicators contrast with traditional measures from the perspective of a transit agency, such as riders per hour.

WHY DO IT?

While transit agency staff and board members should ideally work in close cooperation with representatives of the local jurisdictions they serve, the reality is often different. While the worst-case scenario is an adversarial relationship, the more common circumstance is a simple lack of coordination. Policy guidelines can clarify a city's positions on transit service and serve as a tool for reference in policy making and project design as well as provide leverage in negotiations.



HOW WELL DOES IT WORK?

Transit service in Oakland, California, is primarily provided by the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District, or AC Transit. AC Transit is a regional district with an elected board. Meanwhile, Oakland, with approximately 400,000 residents, is the largest city served by AC Transit but has no direct representation within AC Transit.

Since 1993, AC Transit has been planning a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line that would operate within the cities of Oakland, Berkeley, and San Leandro and entail major reconfigurations of arterial streets and transit service within the corridor, culminating in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Report (DEIS/R)

released in 2007. The three cities are currently developing a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) to be studied in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

In developing its LPA, City of Oakland staff drafted a policy framework addressing design and operational elements of the project within Oakland. The hope is that these policies will provide design standards for the AC Transit BRT project and maximize the benefit of the project to the city. The policies are the beginning of a multimodal performance management system that can be used to evaluate all projects, transit and other modes.

These guidelines are still under development, and in many ways are directly related to the BRT project. However, they provide an example of a set of policies that can be enforced by a city to influence mobility for all types of travel within its boundaries. Oakland's draft policies are included below:

Transit

- Transit-only lanes located in centers of roadways should be physically separated from mixed-flow lanes, using barriers such as mountable curbs, medians, or other positive separations to reduce violation rates.
- Stops should be located based on maximizing transit connectivity and direct access to major transit trip generators. Where it is necessary to shift the locations of stops from their “optimal” locations, they should not be located more than 500 feet away.
- All BRT stops should feature raised platform areas enabling level boarding of buses, regardless of whether a transit lane is provided.
- All BRT stops also used by other transit services should be at least 120 feet in length.
- All BRT stops should be equipped, at minimum, with a “baseline” package of amenities including no less than two shelters, with benches; digital displays of real-time arrival information; fare machines; route and system maps; garbage bins; ADA-standard wheelchair ramps and truncated domes along edges of platforms; and signage, clearly visible to riders aboard buses, identifying the stop location. In addition, stops located in medians should feature fences and platform “taper” areas designed to discourage jaywalking.
- Stops should be located on the far sides of intersections.

- Sidewalk stops should be located on “bulb-out” extensions, allowing buses to stop directly in their path of travel. This policy should be applied regardless of whether a dedicated lane is provided.
- BRT stops, when combined with local service, should be located no less than 1,000 feet and no more than 2,000 feet apart.
- Any restrictions on vehicle circulation should not require realignment of transit routes.
- Where stops in one direction are not visible from the nearest stop in the opposite direction, clear and prominent signage should be displayed along a high-quality pedestrian path between the stops.
- To the extent possible given design specifications (e.g., 13-inch-high platforms), median transitways should be designed to accommodate other transit services, including paratransit services. In some locations, it may be desirable to allow taxis to use transitways for travel but not for stops. Curbside transitways in neighborhood commercial districts must accommodate delivery vehicle access to sidewalk “cutout” loading spaces.
- The following hierarchy of transit rights-of-way should be applied (starting with the most desirable basic configuration): transit-only lanes in the center of the roadway that are physically separated from traffic; center lanes separated from traffic by pavement treatments; outside lanes adjacent to curbs; outside lanes between travel and parking lanes; mixed-flow lanes.
- Where it is not possible to provide dedicated rights-of-way for transit, or where needed for additional speed and reliability improvements, alternative treatments designed to reduce delay

should be strongly considered. These include “queue jumps” consisting of transit-only lanes for a short distance in advance of intersections, as well as transit-only signal phases; consolidation of BRT stops; alternative alignments; and improved signal priority.

Pedestrians

- Within reason, stops should be easily accessible to pedestrians approaching from all directions. In some cases, this may mean extending a platform to a point adjacent to a nearby corner in order to provide direct pedestrian access from the “far end” of the platform.
- Where transit or private vehicles would operate in the curbside lane, and where parked cars would not provide a “buffer” protecting pedestrians on the sidewalk, lanes should be at least 14 feet wide and trees, planted strips, street furniture, or bollards should be located along the curb.
- Where existing crosswalks must be removed in order to ensure safety or reduce transit delay, a marked crossing of the street must be provided no more than one block away. If this crossing bisects a raised median, a level “cut” should be made in the median in order to allow wheelchairs and bicycles to cross at grade. (Note that this policy may be adjusted based on provisions of the City of Oakland Pedestrian Master Plan.)
- Where existing sidewalks must be narrowed, a clear space for pedestrians outside the “door zones” of adjacent buildings and parked cars must be provided no less than three feet wide. This space must also be free of street furniture. Effectively, sidewalks should be no less than nine feet wide from inside edge to curb.

- If possible, universal design principles of accessibility should be applied. Americans With Disabilities Act requirements should not be viewed as optimal design but as baselines.
- All crosswalks should be as visible to motorists as is reasonably possible, featuring at minimum white “ladder” or “zebra” markings.

Cyclists

- In order to reduce the potential for conflicts between bicyclists and motorists where Class II bicycle lanes end and cyclists are forced to merge into traffic, City of Oakland staff should, based on further discussion and consultation, develop a minimum length for Class II on-street lanes. Where this length cannot reasonably be achieved, it might be preferable to provide an extra-wide (14-foot or more) travel lane instead.
- Where Class II bicycle lanes cannot be provided, alternative design solutions such as bicycle boxes or alternative routes should be strongly considered.
- Bicyclists should be legally allowed in outside transit lanes and, in order to safely accommodate them, lanes should be at least 14 feet wide.

Autos

- Where significant reductions in parking supply are necessary—particularly in neighborhood commercial areas—parking demand management strategies should be considered in addition to more limited mitigation measures such as replacement parking and conversion of un-metered spaces to metered use. A broad range of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures is available.

EXISTING



PROPOSED



Illustration of existing conditions (top) and proposed BRT operations (bottom) at the location of proposed Temescal Station (49th St. at Telegraph Ave.).

Source: FMG Architects and Cambridge Systematics

- Wherever possible, existing options for vehicular circulation should be maintained.
- Where significant amounts of traffic might be diverted into residential neighborhoods, measures to calm traffic should be considered.
- Where transit lanes would be located along the outside of roadways in neighborhood commercial areas or other locations where double-parking is prevalent, design measures to discourage double-parking, such as colored treatment of transit lanes, should be considered.
- Emergency vehicle access to transit lanes should be a design priority.

Multimodal

- Mobility should be measured in terms of “aggregate delay”—the total difference between travel time in freely-flowing, uncongested traffic and actual travel time including both motorists and transit users—and not simply in terms of vehicular level of service, which does not distinguish between a single-occupant car and a full bus.
- Capacity should be measured in terms of “person throughput”—the number of people that a particular road segment carries over a specified period of time—and not just vehicle throughput.
- Benefits and impacts related to emissions reduction, land use, and other elements of sustainability and safety should, to the extent possible, be quantified and taken into account in design development.

Urban Design

- To the extent that they would not interfere with transit operations, taxis should be allowed access to transit lanes.
- In neighborhood commercial corridors where transit lanes would be located adjacent to the curb and where there would be no curbside parking, it might be necessary to provide “cutout” loading bays and to allow delivery vehicles access to transit lanes in order to reach loading spaces.
- While the BRT project is primarily a transit project, and budgetary concerns may prevent extensive reconstruction, redesign of rights-of-way presents opportunities to address “building face-to-building face” landscaping and other issues.
- Any landscaping removed by the project should be replaced in some form, preferably within the immediate area. Sidewalk elements may be substituted for lost landscaping located in medians.
- In addressing access to neighborhood businesses, it is important to bear in mind that reductions in parking supply may be offset or negated by increased availability of transit.

These policies are intended as guidelines that would still allow for negotiation to occur when it is not possible to meet all of the thresholds for all modes. By providing these policies to the transit agency, the City of Oakland is able to point to something concrete that will be adopted by the City Council to guide AC Transit in the final design. The policies, which will be publicly vetted, also provide assurance to residents and businesses that the city has considered Oakland’s overall mobility and other needs in its work with AC Transit.