

# Bus Rapid Transit: The Next Step

By Friends of BRT

Now that BRT is going to the Planning Commission, it is important that we understand the EIR process.

The Draft EIR (released by AC Transit in 2007), as its name implies, is just a first draft, and it is used to get public comments about issues that should be analyzed in the Final EIR (FEIR). The mitigations in the FEIR will depend on the input that AC Transit gets from the Planning Commission and the City Council.

In our opinion, the city should ask for the following mitigations:

- **Parking:** In any location where there is a shortage of parking, there should be no net loss of customer or resident parking. Any parking displaced by BRT should be replaced.
- **Traffic flow:** There should be smooth traffic flow, with no significant degradation of level of service at any intersection.
- **Spillover traffic in neighborhoods:** Where BRT might increase spillover traffic, neighborhood streets should be protected so they are safer than they were before BRT.
- **Automobile access to businesses:** There should be convenient automobile access to businesses on Telegraph Ave. between Dwight and Bancroft.

To make it possible for AC Transit to design these mitigations, the Planning Commission and City Council must choose a preferred alternative for the three corridors where the DEIR provides multiple alternatives:

- The Telegraph/Dana corridor
- The Bancroft/Durant corridor
- The Downtown Shattuck/Oxford corridor

When Berkeley decides on its preferred alternative for each of these three corridors, AC Transit will identify the exact locations where BRT would impact parking, intersections, and neighborhood streets, so it will be able to design the mitigations for these impacts.

Unfortunately, some BRT opponents do not want the city to choose alternatives for these corridors. They want the city to choose No Build now, without even choosing preferred alternatives so their impacts can be analyzed in the FEIR.

For example, a number of people have written letters to local newspapers saying that AC Transit will not replace parking lost to BRT, and quoting the DEIR to prove they will not replace lost parking. We contacted AC staff about this, and Jim Cunradi, their lead BRT planner, said: "In locations where BRT creates a deficit so that demand exceeds supply, we will replace lost parking."

Apparently, AC Transit saw all the comments on the Draft EIR about loss of parking, and these comments convinced them that they should replace lost parking. They should also be responsive to comments about other needed mitigations: that is the purpose of getting comments on the Draft EIR before doing the Final EIR.

The EIR process is going smoothly in Oakland and San Leandro, where AC Transit is getting comments and resolving problems. It is only in Berkeley that some people are trying to kill BRT based on the Draft EIR and to prevent an adequate FEIR from being written.

BRT is supported by the Sierra Club, the Transportation and Land Use Coalition (TALC), and other environmental groups, a sign that it is good for the global environment and for regional transportation.

BRT is opposed by some residents and merchants who are concerned about local impacts on parking, traffic, and neighborhood safety. As the Planning Commission considers BRT, these people should ask AC Transit to mitigate these problems.

We are convinced that all of these potential problems can be fully mitigated. Once we have the FEIR, we will see that they are not really problems - that parking will be replaced, traffic will flow smoothly, and neighborhood streets will be protected - and as a result, this opposition to BRT will evaporate.

Finally, BRT is opposed by a small, vocal faction that wants the Planning Commission to kill the project immediately, without even choosing a preferred alternative for AC Transit to analyze in the FEIR. They want Berkeley to make the decision about BRT before we have the facts about its impacts.

The Planning Commission and City Council should provide AC Transit with a preferred build alternative to analyze in the FEIR, so the city will have the facts needed to make an informed decision about whether or not to build BRT.