

**BERKELEY-OAKLAND-SAN LEANDRO  
BUS RAPID TRANSIT  
POLICY STEERING COMMITTEE (PSC)**

**AC TRANSIT  
1600 FRANKLIN STREET  
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA**

**MEETING SUMMARY**

**February 19, 2010, 3:00 PM**

**ROLL CALL:** At 3:07 PM, Executive Administrative Assistant Kim Vazquez called the roll.

**PSC MEMBERS PRESENT:** AC Transit Director Elsa Ortiz; AC Transit Director and Acting PSC Chair Greg Harper; Berkeley Councilmember Kriss Worthington; Oakland Councilmember Rebecca Kaplan; San Leandro Councilmember Michael Gregory; San Leandro Councilmember Joyce Starosciak; Caltrans District 4 Director (Caltrans Ex Officio) Bijan Sartipi; Berkeley Mayor and MTC Commissioner Tom Bates

**PSC MEMBERS ABSENT:** Alameda County Supervisor Nate Miley; Oakland Councilmember Larry Reid

**AC TRANSIT STAFF:** Deputy General Manager for Service Development Nancy Skowbo; BRT Project Manager Jim Cunradi; Transportation Planning Manager, Cory LaVigne; Capital Development, Legislation & Grants Manager Kate Miller; Long Range Planning Manager Tina Spencer; Executive Administrative Assistant Kim Vazquez.

<b>ITEM 1: GREETINGS AND INTRODUCTIONS</b>
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None

<b>ITEM 2: PUBLIC COMMENT</b>
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Comments of the public contained in the minutes are the opinion of the speakers, and there is no guarantee of their accuracy.
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**Berkeley Resident Christopher Lien** notified the committee that on December 16, 2009, he had filed a complaint with the Civil Grand Jury, the subject of which is confidential. He is making the fact of his filing the complaint public in order to obtain help from others in producing and arranging the facts that he will present. He said that in 1988-89 the Grand Jury investigated AC Transit for approximately 2 years, and at the end of that time it recommended the immediate resignation of all of the AC Transit Board Members because of fiscal mismanagement. Mr. Lien's current complaint is concerned not only with fiscal mismanagement but with contracts the District had with Van Hool and the procurement process. In addition, the complaint concerns the removal of local stops in Berkeley and the BRT process. He commented that at three different community meetings, the opposition to BRT was 100%. At a meeting of the Telegraph Avenue Business merchants Business Improvement District (TBID), attended by 40 to 50 people including Councilmember Worthington and a Berkeley commissioner, the TBID stated that they not only opposed BRT, but asked that the EIR be terminated immediately. Mr. Lien would like to see BRT terminated immediately.

**On Behalf of Standing Together for Acceptable Neighborhood Development (STAND), John Wagers** commented that STAND is particularly concerned with the Telegraph Avenue portion of the BRT. He also said that STAND has voted to support Mr. Lien in his complaint to the Civil Grand Jury regarding the fiscal management of AC Transit public funds.

**Merrillie Mitchell** said that in order to have good transit, we need to maintain local buses, and that good service is diminished every time AC Transit cuts service. She stated that with the service cuts in March that AC Transit is carving out BRT routes. She said that voting to bring in BRT will eliminate the local service, which is what citizens really need. Although she isn't opposed to BRT in Oakland, she is opposed to it in Berkeley because of the narrow streets. She said she is opposed to having BRT pushed on people by politicians, she just wants to have good transit. She also expressed concern about the purchase of 12 new Van Hool buses because she understood the Board voted not to obtain any more Van Hool buses.

**Gale Garcia** is concerned that the videos of Cleveland's BRT that the committee viewed at the January 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting, didn't give an accurate representation of the system. She has been studying Cleveland's BRT for the last 6 months and she handed out four articles she wrote, and a fifth written by a young man in Cleveland who has used the system (all attached as Appendix 1 to these minutes). She quoted the young man as saying that the Cleveland Health Line was "really painfully slow". She urged the committee not to rely on comments from Cleveland BRT spokespersons only, but to read the articles which represent real people in order to see the actual impacts of transit projects on the local community.

<b>ITEM 3: ADOPTION OF MINUTES FOR THE JANUARY 22, 2010 MEETING</b>
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**Councilmember Worthington** thanked staff for researching the minutes which showed that statements he made requesting a budget report of costs for the various project components were documented in October 16, 2009 minutes and not in the November 20th meeting thus eliminating the need to amend the November(?) minutes.

**Motion** to accept the January 22, 2010 Minutes, moved by Worthington, seconded by Ortiz; passed unanimously (Fernandez, Miley and Reid not present)

<b>ITEM 4: CHAIR'S REPORT: ITEM 5: PERTINENT ACTIONS OF THE AC TRANSIT BOARD – STANDING ITEM - COMBINED</b>
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**Chair Fernandez** did not have a Chair's Report prepared for the meeting as he was asked to chair on short notice.

**DGM Nancy Skowbo** said that the only pertinent action of the AC Transit Board was that the Planning Committee considered a GM Memo about the project labor agreements with trade unions at the February 10, 2010 Operations Committee meeting, which will be heard by the Board on February 24<sup>th</sup>. Copies of the memo were sent to the PSC.

**ITEM 6: BRT FUNDING UPDATE**

**Planning Manager Tina Spencer** spoke on behalf of Kate Miller who was out of town and unable to attend the PSC meeting. She said that staff is happy to report that \$15 million has been put into the President' budget for the BRT Small Starts project.

**ITEM 7: BRT CAPITAL COST SUMMARY**

**BRT Project Manager Jim Cunradi** presented a memo which provided a summary of the capital costs which were calculated for the Small Starts Application for the BRT project. The summary uses cost estimate methodologies that are approved by the FTA. Following are the key points derived from a lengthy discussion by the committee and staff:

1. The capital costs were calculated for the Small Starts Application which was submitted to the FTA after completing the draft EIS BRT project, and are based on the best information available at the time it was submitted.
2. The costs only change as the project is further defined, i.e. after the LPA is selected and during the design phase.
3. Each item in the summary has a contingency amount built into its cost which is based on the risk of the item in construction.
4. The project has a total contingency of approximately 39% of the project built in, which FTA engineers have deemed appropriate.
5. There is a separate Unallocated Cost Contingency which is approximately 4% of the project total and is for other miscellaneous things.
6. In order to be recommended in the Small Starts Program, the FTA requires a minimum of 50% dedicated lanes; the original Small Starts Application included a proposal for 85% dedicated lanes.
7. The cost for the bus lanes currently includes the soft cost of pre-construction design and surveying the lanes as well as the cost to repave the majority of the lanes by grinding up the old asphalt, and then laying down the recycled, standard asphalt, suitable for heavy duty vehicles.
8. In addition to the bus lanes, the current plan is to only repave those areas of the street, particularly at the stations, where lanes transition and the surface needs to be more robust such as left turn lanes, and intersections. This cost is included in the Site Work item.
9. The intent of the project, with regard to the lanes, is to use the basic asphalt that is already in place but make it smoother, not to create a different street structure.
10. There are synergies between the cost components which, when bundled together, can have a positive impact on passengers. For example, the synergy between Traffic Signal Priority (TSP) and bus lanes. Travel times for mixed flow lanes which have TSP are less predictable than TSP combined with a dedicated bus lane.
11. The cap on the Small Starts Program is \$250 million.

**AC Transit Board Director Ortiz** asked if the affect of the final percentage of dedicated bus lanes on the operating cost of the project would have an affect on the project's ranking.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** said that the two things that impact the project ranking with regard to dedicated bus lanes are where the lanes are removed and the effect of their removal on operations, and the total percentage of lanes left in the project.

**Councilmember Worthington** commented that the cost associated with the "Bus Lanes" item was a combination of the 85% dedicated bus lanes, and the remaining 15% mixed flow lanes. He requested that staff break down the cost of each type of lane. He specifically requested the cost per block differential, or "the cost per difference differential between the two". He also requested a more detailed breakdown of project costs, than that contained in the chart provided.

**Planning Manager Spencer** said that the information councilmember Worthington requested is contained in the Small Starts Application binder, or possibly disk, which was provided to the members of the committee at the outset of the project.

There was discussion about whether or not the committee members actually received the binder or disk. Councilmember Worthington said he never received a binder or disk. Consequently, staff agreed to resend the information to those committee members who want it.

**Councilmember Gregory** commented that he felt the Capital Cost Summary would be very helpful to him when working with his constituents. He felt that it was important to maintain the project synergies even though explaining their benefits may be difficult.

**Councilmember Kaplan** expressed concern about the repaving of the roads affected by the project construction. Her first concern is that any road construction for the BRT project be coordinated with the cities' general repaving plans so that there is minimal disruption to citizens. Her second concern is that the current plan is to repave only those areas of the corridor directly affected by the construction of the stations. She said if we were to repave the entire corridor it could help non-BRT riders feel better about the project.

**AC Transit Director Ortiz** asked if the project was going to pay for the entire corridor to be repaved?

**Councilmember Kaplan** said that that is the information she is trying to obtain. What is the scope of the budget, and will this work be coordinated with the cities general paving plan.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** assured the committee that part of the construction plan is to coordinate work with the cities' paving plans as well as the utilities.

**Councilmember Starosciak** questioned that three Cost Summary Items that had zero dollars, Support Facilities, Vehicles and Financing.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** began by explaining that staff performed value engineering on the project designs to see if they were cost effective. What they discovered is that the project calls for approximately the same number of buses that the 1 and 1R have today, and consequently we will not need new facilities. The District

already has facilities in place today to provide a central control location for the buses. These facilities have sophisticated equipment and room to build upon. There will be a cost for systems, but there is a separate cost item for that.

There is a zero cost for vehicles, not because we will not be getting new buses for BRT, but because we will use buses we already have, and new buses will be funded as part of AC Transit's regular vehicle replacement plan which as **Planning Manager Spencer** stated later in the conversation would have the vehicles being replaced in 2015 in time for opening day.

The final "zero cost" item is financing, and staff has made an assumption that funding will be available at approximately the time that we need it so we won't need to borrow funds that have a long stream or are far in the future. Of all of the "zero cost" assumption, staff understands this might be the riskiest one.

**Councilmember Starosciak** questioned the impact of the possible dual side door buses on the vehicle cost line item.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** said that the timing of the decision about dual side door buses may have an impact on the vehicle line item.

**Councilmember Starosciak** expressed concern about the funding line item and felt there should be some contingency funds available it. She said it is rare to fully fund a project with cash without some sort of borrowing.

**Mayor Bates** said he understood that the cost to pave one mile is about \$1 million. So, even if we were paving the entire 17 mile corridor it would cost less than is allocated for lanes in the cost summary. He allowed for the fact that the mile may be a "lane mile" not the entire roadway, but even so, the amount allocated for lanes seems a bit high.

**District Director Sartipi** said although Caltrans doesn't have a standard cost per mile for paving, \$1 million per "lane mile" is about right depending on the extent of the work; i.e. reconstruction, rehab or simply resurfacing. He agreed with Councilmember Kaplan that the work should not be a "patchwork." He also agreed that the BRT work should be carefully coordinated with the cities' paving and utilities projects, and added that using a single contractor would probably end up being cheaper.

**Mayor Bates** requested that staff provide an estimate to repave the entire 17 mile corridor because of the good will it would garner from motorists who don't necessarily ride the BRT.

**Councilmember Kaplan** asked if the number of stations (47) in the cost summary represented the stations that would be constructed if we were to use single side door buses, i.e. two stations for each location, one on each side of the street and opposing corners in some cases?

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** said yes, but they are treated as one station for cost purposes because the intersection is what is important. That comes to \$1.2 million per pair of platforms.

**Councilmember Kaplan** asked if we decide to utilize dual side door buses, then would we build one single structure rather than two, and that would reduce the cost of the stations.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi and Planning Manager Spencer** agreed that costs would be reduced at stations where the current design has dual platforms .

**Councilmember Kaplan** commented that she appreciated the allocated and unallocated contingencies included in the summary. She also said the cost effectiveness of the plan is very strong as is the travel time savings, especially with the combination of dedicated bus lanes and signal preemption.

**Councilmember Gregory** asked District Director Sartipi if he has noticed that in light of the current economy cost estimates seem to have come down. He also asked if he felt it might last for another 15 to 18 months, and how much savings we might see.

**District Director Sartipi** agreed that Caltrans has seen a 30-40% reduction in or savings on bids and as long as the market stays as bad as it is, costs will go down. He has no idea how long it will last and just how much the savings will be.

**AC Transit Board Director Harper** asked BRT Project Manager Cunradi to explain what is meant by "Right of Way Land and Existing Improvements."

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** explained that this line item is a pure guess. It is money primarily for parking mitigations such as parking lots and garages. It would also be used for small right of way takes such as widening the road, or the purchase of property.

**Councilmember Worthington** asked, taking into account that 47 stations was an estimate for the Small Starts Application, what is the actual number of stations staff expects for the project?

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** said that in addition to the 47 stations in the cost summary, there are two more stations already built in uptown, and as a result of working with the cities, the total number of stations has increased to 54.

**Planning Manager Spencer** clarified that even though the AC Transit Board adopted the operating plan for the BRT project, which included 47 stations, they recognized that through the process of defining the LPA for each city, that number would change, and so would the budget.

#### **ITEM 8: DECISION MAKING REGARDING DUAL SIDE DOOR BUSES**

Planning Manager Spencer spoke about the decisions that will need to be made by the committee throughout the duration of the BRT project, as well as where in the process decisions about dual side door buses will be made. Following are key points derived there from:

1. The committee and the cities will be making many decisions during the course of the 3-4 year BRT project that will have an impact on the project.

2. The LPA, defining what each city wants BRT to look like for them, is the first of many decisions the cities will be making.
3. Staff will be looking at creating some sort of master Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), similar to the Smart Corridors Agreement, so there is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities as well as conditions that the cities may want in place in order to move forward.
4. The design phase follows the LPA and record of decision.
5. Consultation with the cities during the design phase, and is required by the FTA.
6. Decisions about proceeding with projects such as dual side door buses as well as any other innovative technologies are made during the design phase so that they may be integrated into the preliminary engineering and final design.
7. The opportunity for funding caused staff to begin considering dual side door buses, however, this should not stop the decision making process currently underway as the technology is uncertain.
8. The cities must continue the process of defining their LPAs so that the project can move on to finalizing the environmental document.
9. As the project moves into the design phase, there will need to be a shared use agreement between AC Transit and the jurisdictions so that things that are important to the cities such as maintenance of the roadway, recapitalization of the roadways in the long range plans are discussed and planned for.
10. Construction phasing plans will need to be laid out in order to effectively coordinate all of the construction going on in the cities so that it has the least negative impact on residents. This plan will also allow for the definition of very discreet roles and responsibilities and conditions for how and when construction is done.
11. During the construction phase, cities will be called upon to provide construction permits, and be available for consultation so that when questions come up they can be quickly answered so delays can be avoided.

**Councilmember Kaplan** commented that although this was an explanation, it contradicts what the committee has been told for the last two years about the purpose of the LPA which is that the LPA would identify the specific station locations. The decision about dual side door buses impacts whether dual use mid section platforms or two platforms are used. Therefore, the LPA can't be finalized.

**Planning Manager Spencer** reiterated that we aren't sure we will get funding for the dual side door buses, nor are we sure whether we can time the replacement of existing buses with the dual side door buses, or if there is enough funding to accommodate all of the vehicles that need replacing in time for opening day. There are just too many uncertainties at this point.

**Councilmember Kaplan** asked if dual side door buses cost more than other buses, and if so how much more?

**Planning Manager Spencer** said that the dual side door buses do cost more than other buses, but that she doesn't have the exact number. In addition, because of the grant stipulation that the buses be not only dual door, but alternative propulsion, there is concern that we won't be able to deliver the technology. It is a project that is important, and if staff gets notification that it can be done, we will move forward on it during the design phase. For now we need to continue to move forward with defining the LPA which has the most impact.

**Councilmember Kaplan** reiterated her concern about finalizing an LPA that has the most impact because it causes city staff and electeds to have to fight battles over parking mitigations, and get buy in from citizens on a less optimal project that will then be changed, all of which will impact political support for the project.

**Planning Manager Spencer** challenged that AC Transit has never said they wanted the cities to define an LPA that has the most impacts. Staff wants, and for FTA requires, us to have an LPA that is the most likely to be built. If we don't have decisions made about dual side door buses, it can't be part of an LPA that can be built. In addition, the timing of the funding is undetermined. It is a grant that was unallocated and is therefore being fought over by several agencies. It may come in a month or two or maybe a year. Regarding the LPA, one of the reasons this project got \$15 million in the President's budget is because the project is so close to finalizing its environmental document. We don't want anything to get in the way of that.

**Councilmember Kaplan** said she didn't want to undermine that, and moved on to a question about docking. She said that at the last meeting the committee requested more information about the type of docking that was shown in the Cleveland video rather than just electronic guidance because of the impact that type of docking has on improving route efficiency by allowing passengers in wheelchairs to roll straight onto the bus without the driver having to take time to deploy a ramp. She asked what staff can tell the committee about it.

**Planning Manager Spencer** said that decisions about docking, electronic guidance, ticketing, and all technologies that impact the design of the station will occur during preliminary engineering. The technologies selected for this project will be determined by what is available on the market at that time. If that type of docking is available on the market when we are in the preliminary engineering phase, then we may use it. Staff could provide a comprehensive view of what is available now, however it may change significantly in the next couple of years.

**Councilmember Kaplan** moved on to say that at the outset of the project there was funding put aside for the work the cities would be doing in defining their LPA. However, now that it seems there will be a vast amount of work on the part of the cities that takes place after the LPA, will there be money in the budget for that?

**Planning Manager Spencer** said it has not been specified yet. There are contingency funds that are part of the soft costs of design engineering and design review. As the project gets closer to the design phase, staff will rough out the soft costs and associated administrative costs.



**Councilmember Kaplan** stated that this should be a future agenda item.

**District Director Sartipi** commented that the schedule is very ambitious, and that an important element, getting the non-standard fact sheets and what goes into the Project Study Report (PSR) to Caltrans in a complete and timely manner so that Caltrans doesn't become the barrier to moving the project forward. He wants to make sure that Caltrans gets everything they need by April 1<sup>st</sup> otherwise it will have a negative impact on everything after it. In addition, if the project is the "worst case scenario" typically it will have the least non-standard features. When it comes time to push the limits of the project back in it will be come more non-standard which will require approval and will take time.

BRT Project Manager Cunradi acknowledged that Caltrans is very squeezed on the schedule so staff is going to get the PSR to Caltrans in April before sending the administrative draft to the FTA.

**District Director Sartipi** also asked what the status of the cooperative agreement was.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** said that AC Transit legal is done reviewing the document and he sent a copy earlier in the day to the Caltrans Project Manager Howard Reynolds and to the cooperative agreements people. There was only one language change.

**District Director Sartipi** also mentioned that it was his understanding that there was an assumption that the bus lanes would be only 10 feet wide which would be a challenge.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** assured him that it is physically not possible to do that, and the minimum bus lane width is 11 feet.

**Councilmember Worthington** asked if staff had the language of the Berkeley Planning Commission vote two weeks ago. He wondered if it had any reference to dual side door buses.

**Planning Manager LaVigne** said he and city staff liaison Beth Greene have been working together to determine what the requests of the planning commission as are going to be transmitted to the city council and an appropriate way to respond to them and provide support. He did not recall dual side door buses being a part of the discussion, but he hadn't read the material from the meeting yet. He and Beth said they would meet after the PSC meeting to talk about it.

**Mayor Bates** said he would like to have an idea of what the impacts would be if we did indeed go with dual side door buses even if it is a prospect we can't count on. He is sure it will have an impact on the number of parking spaces we might need to take and that could be a very big deal for a lot of people.

**ITEM 9: LOCALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE (LPA) ADOPTION and FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT/REPORT (FEIS/R) SCHEDULE**

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** explained that staff's intent is to keep this running schedule and provide updates to the PSC when things change. He pointed out a couple of things worth noting to the committee. 1) Getting materials to Caltrans in a complete and timely manner. He said the schedule will probably change next month to reflect the actual dates the materials will be delivered to Caltrans. 2) The City of Oakland Council LPA selection is actually two weeks later than is shown on the current schedule. It will occur in the third week of April.

**Councilmember Worthington** expressed concern that the Berkeley Planning Commission is voting to study the maximum possibilities for their LPA and explicitly said that they were in no way recommending that these maximum possibilities are what they want to see happen. He feels this is counter to what staff has been asking for from the cities, which is for them to provide a range of viable possibilities. He asked if the other cities were being more specific about what they wanted in their LPAs or were their commissions and councils also recommending a very broad range of possibilities be studied.

**Planning Manager LaVigne** explained that each of the cities have different processes and ways of thinking about things, and that each city's commission and has the proclivity to request what they want. He confirmed that in general, the ideal would be for the cities to provide staff with as close to what they feel would be practical to build rather than a wide scope of possibilities as the latter will add cost to the environmental aspect of the project as alignments that will probably never be implemented will have to be studied. In the end, each cities' council can either accept the commissions recommendation as is, or go its own direction.

As far as the Berkeley Planning Commission is concerned however, staff will be going over its recommendations to see what makes sense and what doesn't from the AC Transit perspective. Staff will then submit a response to the recommendation.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** said that the process works, and decisions are made from a very broad study down to very specific things that happen in design. Oakland's design emphasizes transit, walking, cycling and a lot of other things as a complete street, however, it does create more impacts and may not be what actually gets built. San Leandro's design has a tight focus on what they would like to see within their boundaries.

**Councilmember Worthington** requested copies of the San Leandro and Oakland designs so he can show them to his council members as an example.

**BRT Project Manager Cunradi** agreed to email the proposals to councilmember Worthington.

**Councilmember Gregory** said that although it's early to begin talking about marketing the project, we should focus on how the BRT projects ties into the Green Corridor and

Smart Corridors and Complete Streets. The project is very green and it should be a focus when we market to the respective cities.

In addition, he commented that although San Leandro does “have its ducks in a row” with regard to being on schedule, he cautioned that there has been no agreement within the community as to the LPA.

**Councilmember Starosciak** agreed and said that the process of defining the LPA is further behind the other cities because of a lack of community turnout. There are still a lot of conversations that must happen. San Leandro’s Planning Commission reviewed the proposal in December and there are minutes from that meeting. That is probably the only document that would be available to send to Councilmember Worthington. There will be one more Planning Commission meeting, and both she and Councilmember Gregory feel there needs to be a City Council work session to attract comments about the plan.

**Oakland Resident Jane Kramer** commented on Councilmember Worthington’s earlier question about whether or not the Berkeley Planning Commission’s vote two weeks ago had any reference to dual side door buses. She said that she was at the meeting and that there was no vote. The members of the commission who were present simply gave their own personal comments. She asked, after the meeting, why the commission didn’t vote and she was told that the meeting was held just for information.

<b>ITEM 10: COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS</b>
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Councilmember Worthington commented that the consideration of project labor agreements is not a political consideration, but one of good government. Having project labor agreements which provide very clear comprehensible and obvious public benefits ensures that employees are going to be treated better, and the community is going to know what it’s getting.

Councilmember Kaplan thanked staff for their work on the project, and said that she feels this the project is truly wonderful and that it will attract new riders to transit, speed up the route and improve service for existing riders. She is hopeful about the technology options we continue to consider.

<b>ITEM 11: FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS</b>
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Guidance systems/docking  
Local hire policy/impact area hiring/project labor agreements  
Funding support for future city work that will be needed during engineering

Next meeting dates: March 19, 2010 and April 16, 2010

**The meeting adjourned at 4:46 PM.**

**KV**



# COMMENTARY

Opinions expressed in Daily Planet commentary and letters to the editor are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Daily Planet or its staff.

## BRT Alert: Look (to Cleveland) Before You Leap

By GALE GARCIA

Several months ago, I heard that the only Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in the United States that took two lanes from a four-lane road for dedicated bus lanes was in Cleveland, Ohio. This is exactly what AC Transit is planning for Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro, so I began to investigate Cleveland's BRT through newspaper articles, blogs, newsletters and any other source I could find.

The Cleveland Greater Regional Transit Authority (RTA) built a BRT on a 6.7-mile stretch of the Euclid Avenue corridor, from Public Square in the downtown to Stokes Windermere in East Cleveland. More than half of the route has dedicated bus lanes and stations in the middle of the road, just as AC Transit is planning for Telegraph Avenue here. The project opened in October 2008 and was named the Healthline.

Unlike our Telegraph Avenue, Cleveland's Euclid Avenue is not the only arterial street available in the immediate area. The closest parallel streets on either side of Euclid Ave. are also arterials—each appears to be a four-lane or six-lane street, providing ample space for the traffic overflow from Euclid Avenue. When the Healthline route reaches a point where the parallel arterials end, the buses no longer have dedicated lanes. RTA Media Relations Manager Jerry Masek explained on a forum at [www.Urbanohio.com](http://www.Urbanohio.com): "East of

East 107th Street, we need more road capacity to carry the traffic, because we no longer have the parallel streets of Chester and Carnegie. There is no room for a bus-only lane." (How sensible!)

Telegraph Avenue has no similar parallel arterials to absorb the displaced traffic. Shattuck and College Aves. are 3-4 blocks away, and are themselves extremely congested. It's hard to imagine that AC Transit officials really believe this will work.

The Cleveland project is more resident-friendly than the proposal threatening us in another manner—the RTA retained local bus service on Euclid Avenue. On July 29, the AC Transit Board voted to eliminate local bus service on Telegraph Avenue if it is allowed to implement BRT, casually dismissing the concerns of riders who will lose their closest stop.

One major concern Berkeley and Oakland residents have about the local plan is potential negative impacts to the Telegraph Avenue merchants. This concern is very well-founded. In Cleveland, great detriments occurred to small businesses along the route during construction of the Healthline.

There were many articles in Cleveland newspapers about the protracted construction havoc. My favorite was a December 12, 2007 piece in the Plain Dealer entitled, "Euclid Corridor project becomes a route to lost business for many on the avenue." It reported about city sponsored loans to assist the distressed businesses. One merchant responded to the loan offer with,

"I'm not looking to get further in debt. I'm looking for people to buy stuff." A restaurant owner complained, "Breakfast is dead. Dinner is dead. People can't cross the street."

Perhaps a couple of years of construction hell and the loss of many businesses would be acceptable to vastly improve the lives of the bus riding public. But I find no evidence that this has occurred in Cleveland. After several months of reading every single comment I could find in blogs, newsletters and on-line responses to newspaper articles, Clevelanders seem split about 50-50 on whether the project is even an improvement over the #6 bus that it replaced.

The terms "scam," "hype" and "boondoggle" come up frequently among those who are unimpressed with the Healthline. One commenter who was initially excited about the new buses decided the project was a waste of money after riding it, and wanted the #6 bus back. Another commenter suggested that "This whole project could be a feature story in Reader's Digest monthly feature, 'That's Outrageous' which details government and public funding waste."

Bus bunching is an enormous problem on the Healthline. In June, one contributor to [www.Urbanohio.com](http://www.Urbanohio.com) reported seeing four buses in a row, while another countered that he/she had seen six buses queued up at the East 14th stop. The first writer later stated: "The bigger problem with the bunching of multiple buses (i.e. more than two) is that there's always a huge gap either

before or after the bunch. Wait times for buses that come every five minutes can near twenty minutes." Even when bunching does not occur, the Healthline appears to be completely unreliable. In January, a writer complained, "it needs to be faster. To my horror, I watched a trolley beat the BRT I was on from Public Square to E.22 the other day." In June, a writer complained of a mid-day Healthline ride, "there was no bunching, but the trip took 33 minutes for what should be a 20 to 22 minute ride—we sat at nearly every light along the corridor."

Based upon years of studying AC Transit's proposal and months of studying its prototype in Cleveland, I think AC Transit's BRT proposal has exactly zero chance of being a success. I believe several of the agency's board members are aware of this. But they don't care. They cannot care. They've squandered money on the VanHool bus deals, and are desperate for the federal funds that are available if our city councils are willing to give away lanes of our streets.

Berkeley and Oakland will soon hold public meetings about BRT. Now is the time to let your council members know that you don't want your city sacrificed for AC Transit. Please do not wait for the bulldozers to show up, because if you wait, the bulldozers definitely will show up, and your city will be altered forever.

*Gale Garcia is a Berkeley resident.*



Planet, 12/3/09

Cleveland



### BRT IN NEVERLAND

Editors, Daily Planet:

It must be fun to live in Neverland, where just wishing something is true will make it so.

Steve Geller, in his latest letter to the Planet, asserts that "BRT will definitely reduce greenhouse gas emissions." While this may be literally true, Mr. Geller for some reason ignores the fact that the projected "reduction" is vanishingly small. BRT is projected to reduce a mix of six air pollutants by 0.03 percent. That's not 3 percent; it's three-hundredths of one percent.

The reason the projected reduction in pollutants is so minuscule is because BRT is projected to attract so few additional transit riders. The BRT draft EIR—and AC Transit's subsequent studies for the federal Small Starts application—project approximately 9,000 new transit boardings per day if BRT is built. 9,000 sounds like a large number until you know that even without BRT, transit boardings in 2015 are projected to be 585,000. In other words, even the most successful of the BRT alternatives that were studied would increase East Bay transit ridership by only 1.5 percent.

Mr. Geller also states that "No riders will be poached from BART." Once again, I don't know where Mr. Geller is getting his information. In the studies that were done for the draft EIR, the most successful BRT alternative is projected to reduce BART ridership by 6,000 board-

ings per day—a reduction of about 1.5 percent.

BRT proponents like to pretend that BRT opponents are anti-bus or anti-public transit. Nothing could be further from the truth. Everyone I know who opposes the current BRT proposal is an environmentalist, a transit user, or both. We also, however, have our feet firmly planted in reality, not in Neverland. I don't oppose spending \$250,000,000 on public transit. I just want some meaningful results for this huge investment. Both the BRT draft EIR and AC Transit's federal Small Starts application document a project which is long on good intentions and very short on actual results. Can Mr. Geller, or anyone else, point me toward a study of this particular BRT project which paints a different picture?

Jim Bullock

### FUDGING BRT DATA

Editors, Daily Planet:

At the Transportation Commission meeting of Nov. 19 on Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Commissioner Seth Goddard submitted an October 2009 article from Metro Magazine, "Cleveland's BRT hits one-year anniversary," with glowing claims of improved service on the route. Cleveland's BRT, very similar to the local BRT proposal, opened Oct. 24, 2008 as the "HealthLine," replacing the No. 6 bus on Euclid Avenue.

Apparently quoting the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA)

deputy general manager, the article claims that ridership on the HealthLine has vastly increased compared to the same months in 2008: "In March [2009] for example, HealthLine ridership topped 335,000—a 75 percent increase over the 228,000 riders on the No. 6 bus the previous year."

Having studied Cleveland's Euclid corridor bus service, I have some statistics about the No. 6 bus. On July 18, 2008, Jerry Masek, Media Relations Manager for the RTA wrote: "The HealthLine will replace the No. 6 route, which serves more than 11,000 riders a day."

So the No. 6 bus had more than 11,000 riders per day in 2008. March has 31 days. Unless March was an anomaly in that particular year, the No. 6 bus would have had approximately 341,000 riders in that month. Where did the claim of 228,000 riders come from? My guess is that, like many claims from transit agency spokespersons, it came out of thin air.

Even if the figures of 335,000 riders for the HealthLine versus 228,000 for the No. 6 bus one year earlier were true, that would be far from a 75 percent increase—it would be less than a 50 percent increase. This would appear to be a gratuitous exaggeration on top of a deliberate untruth.

After years of studying the local BRT proposal, and months of studying Cleveland's HealthLine BRT, I have come to the conclusion that transit spokespersons are employed as paid prevaricators.

AC Transit really is planning to take

over two lanes of traffic on Telegraph Avenue, and most of the parking, while eliminating the local bus service. If this doesn't sound like a good idea, attend the Planning Commission meeting on Dec. 9 at 7 p.m., at the North Berkeley Senior Center—and voice your opinion.

Gale Garcia

### ACCURATE BRT MAPS?

Editors, Daily Planet:

During the meetings called for by city staff to promote the BRT, Berkeley city staff showed a plan map of the BRT. The plan showed three lanes of traffic with one lane as the dedicated bus lane. At the start of the meetings, city staff stated that this plan would not eliminate vending spaces or loading zones on Telegraph between Dwight and Bancroft. The city staff bothered to draw a fraudulent map showing the three lanes of traffic not eliminating vending spaces, loading zones and the trees. This map is a fraud. There cannot be three lanes of traffic on Telegraph which must by interstate commerce law take up 14 feet each for a total of 42 feet of space and keep street vending space, loading zones, and the trees that line the avenue. There is only 28 feet of space in the two lanes that occupy Telegraph now. Either city staff is lying or they are incompetent to draw an accurate map of their plan. These people should be fired immediately and people hired that can draw an accurate map or not out and out lie.

Russell Andavall



# BRT Boondoggle – Cleveland Tried it; We Don't Have to

- Gale Garcia

Le Conte Neighborhood Association

Several months ago, I heard that the only Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in the United States with dedicated bus lanes inserted into an existing four-lane road was in Cleveland, Ohio. This is exactly what AC Transit is proposing for Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley and Oakland, so I began to investigate Cleveland's BRT through newspaper articles, blogs, newsletters, and any other source I could find.

Some questions I had about the Cleveland project were:

- Did the construction phase kill local businesses?
- What have been the impacts on traffic on the BRT corridor?
- What about pedestrian safety with the bus stops in the center of the street?
- Is the project providing fast, reliable bus service?

Before I address these questions, I will explain how Cleveland received extraneous benefits because of the project, while we would lose resources.

## Clevelanders Got Perks; We'll Get...Nothin'

The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) received state and federal funds to build a BRT on 6.7 miles of Cleveland's Euclid Avenue corridor. Construction began in 2005 and was completed in October 2008, when the project was named the Healthline. Several benefits to the community were

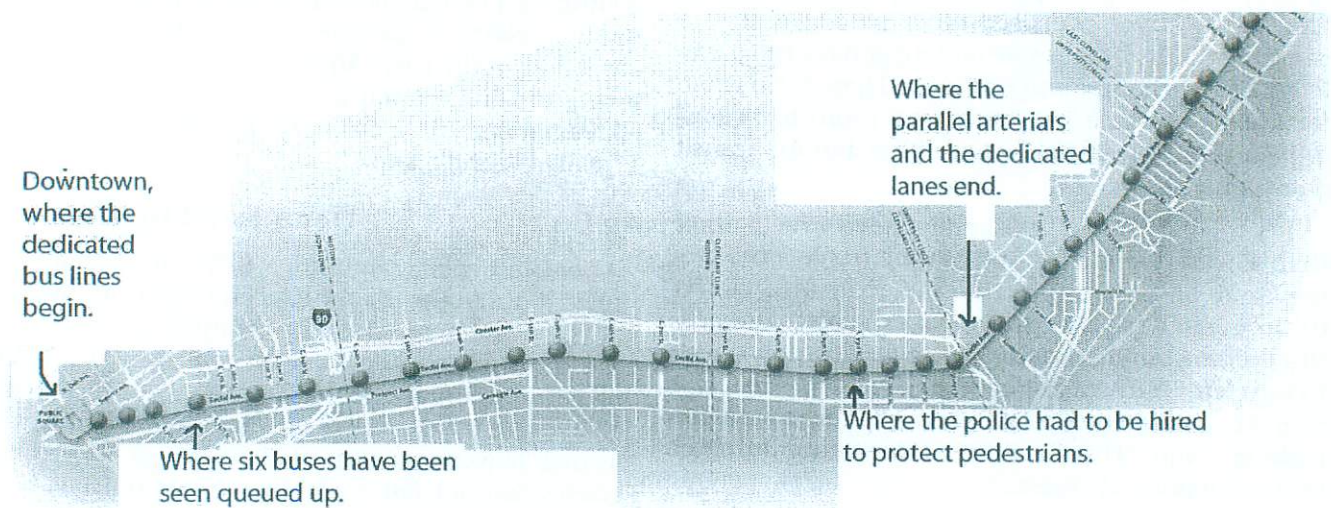
thrown in, such as renovation of the sewer system, undergrounding telephone wires, planting of 1,500 trees on the route, and miles of new roadbeds and sidewalks – almost all on the state and federal dime.

By contrast, AC Transit's proposal involves no perquisites to the community at all – nothing, only losses. AC Transit's proposal would take the two center lanes from Telegraph Avenue, shunting all other traffic into one lane each way, and give absolutely nothing in return. Furthermore, the agency has already voted to eliminate local bus service on Telegraph Avenue if it scores the BRT, showing no concern whatsoever for its current riders.

## Local Businesses Bit the Dust

During the construction phase of Cleveland's BRT, there were frequent news reports about the detrimental impacts to local businesses. A story on NewsNet5 entitled, "Cafe Owner Fed Up With Construction Arrested", reported on May 24th, 2007, that a café proprietor had been arrested while trying to get workers to reopen the sidewalk in front of her establishment. Her business partner claimed that ten establishments had closed due to the Euclid Corridor construction – and he was not going to be number eleven.

An article in the Plain Dealer of December 12th, 2007, "Euclid Corridor project becomes a route to



Cleveland's BRT route, named the "Healthline."

continued on page 5



## BRT Boondoggle... (continued)

*continued from page 4*

lost business for many on the avenue", reported that the City of Cleveland arranged for loans to the businesses harmed by the construction. One merchant's response to the loan offer was, "I'm not looking to get further in debt. I'm looking for people to buy stuff." A restaurant owner complained, "Breakfast is dead. Dinner is dead. People can't cross the street."

An article of April 28th, 2008 in Crain's Cleveland Business reported about the historic Old Arcade at 401 Euclid Avenue – a card shop and a martial arts shop were closing, while four food outlets were already vacant. Yet the Arcade managers were optimistic about the completion of the Healthline. Time will tell, but the Healthline does not seem to be invigorating the local economy, as was promised during construction.

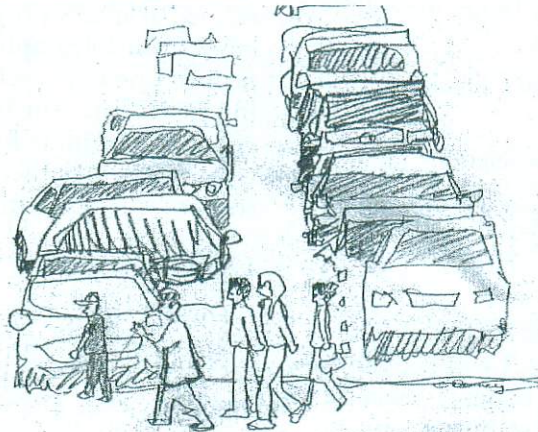
### Havoc for Drivers

Cleveland's Euclid Avenue has parallel arterials for the portion of the route with dedicated bus lanes, approximately 4.2 miles. Where Euclid Avenue becomes the only arterial, buses share the road. According to RTA spokesperson, Jerry Masek, "East of East 107th Street, we need more road capacity to carry the traffic, because we no longer have the parallel streets of Chester and Carnegie. There is no room for a bus-only lane." (There is no room for a bus-only lane on Telegraph Avenue either, but AC Transit doesn't care.)

It's a good thing Clevelanders have streets other than Euclid Avenue for automobile traffic. One response to an article about the project reads, "Go on this route in a car. You will laugh, cry, curse, and possibly get to your destination as long as you don't have to turn left." Other comments are, "Rest assured, any future trip that requires Euclid is a trip that I won't be making", and "This Euclid Corridor is the dumbest idea since musical cheese."

### Havoc for Pedestrians

Shortly after the bus line opened, the Plain Dealer printed an article entitled, "RTA's HealthLine debuts – minus fareboxes, plus jaywalkers." People commented on the safety issues posed by the bus stops in the middle of the street, which are exactly what AC Transit is planning for its BRT. RTA officials contend that the design is safe.



Yet a Plain Dealer article of July 12th, 2009, "Cleveland Clinic assigns two police officers to help people cross street" reports on one particularly unsafe intersection. A number of "near misses" at Euclid Avenue and East 93rd Street prompted police escorts for pedestrians. People who frequent the intersection be-

lieve that the dedicated bus lanes in the median have made crossing much more dangerous.

### Is Cleveland's BRT Fast and Reliable?

*Nope.* I've read every single comment I could find in blogs, newsletters and responses to newspaper articles and find no evidence whatsoever that the Healthline is either fast or reliable. The buses bunch up terribly causing delays; as many as six buses have been seen queued up at the East 14th stop. A Cleveland blogger who is an admitted transit enthusiast wrote at length on September 9th about how slow the Healthline is – "really painfully slow."

### An Experiment We Don't Need to Repeat

Cleveland tried cramming a BRT onto a four-lane street. It has not worked out as promised. AC Transit wants to try it here. Our City Council has shown every indication that they plan to give away two lanes of Telegraph Avenue to AC Transit. Don't let them do it. Begin by attending the Planning Commission meeting November 18th at 7:00 pm at the North Berkeley Senior Center, and let our city officials hear what you think about this ridiculous plan. •



# Cleveland's BRT – the Model for AC Transit Not Working as Promised

Cleveland's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is the prototype for AC Transit's proposal. Like AC's proposal, Cleveland's "Healthline" BRT on Euclid Ave. took the two center lanes from a four-lane street for bus lanes, with bus stops in the middle of the streets. It opened in 2008. What isn't working about Cleveland's Healthline?

- It's not reliable, the main goal AC Transit uses for taking away the lanes
- Bus "bunching" is a terrible problem with the BRT, leading to long wait times (one of the problems dedicated lanes are supposed to solve)
- It's slow
- The "bells & whistles" that were supposed to speed things up aren't working
- The fareboxes in the stations are a nightmare
- It creates traffic havoc for cars

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The following are quotes from Clevelanders, found in blogs, newsletters & on-line responses to newspaper articles, about Cleveland's Healthline BRT:

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"Unfortunately the main goal of this project has not been achieved and probably *will not be* achieved: speeding up the #6 along Euclid Ave. I tried riding the Heath line and it takes the same amount of time as the old #6."

"Now that I live in a part of town with better access to the Healthline, I finally got a chance to take a ride. My overall impression: wow, the Healthline is really painfully **slow**..."

"I ride this route frequently, and the BRT signal priority system has no observable effect anywhere. BRTs sit for long periods at intersections where there is no other traffic."

"Euclid Ave is now nearly useless if you are driving an automobile. I'm not being "negative", it's just a fact that any driver cannot ignore."

"Anybody else notice how bad the traffic has been at rush hour now that you can't turn right on red at E. 14th Street to head south towards the freeway? It took me 14 minutes last night just to go from E. 12 to E. 13."

"Does anyone yet understand that this project not only impedes the daily commute of countless citizens, but will actually result in greater gasoline consumption?"

"Go on this route in a car. You will laugh, cry, curse, and possibly get to your destination as long as you don't have to turn left"

More quotes →



"Rest assured, any future trip that requires Euclid is a trip that I won't be making"

"Now the first impression is cemented, and everyday riders view BRT as regular old BT without the R. The promise of speed is what justified having stations in the middle of the road, which anecdotally have not been well received."

"People end up running in the street to catch a bus instead of running on the sidewalk to catch the bus."

"I've lived and worked downtown for the better part of two decades. It amazes me that so many people can be blind to the obvious: This Project Was Poorly Conceived. At best, it represents a hideous compromise filled with graft."

"The sooner y'all scrap this project, the better off Cleveland will be . . . it turns out that, at the end of the day, a bus is still a bus. hope everyone who was in on the deal got paid well."

"Hundreds of Millions of dollars, years of inconvenience and lost business, a raise in fares across the board, and now jaywalking tickets: all just to change a bus line to run in the middle of the street instead of the side of the street."

"Here's my problem with the Euclid Corridor project . . . the project OBLITERATED local businesses."

"The only thing I see is many, many, many empty store fronts where small businesses used to be (and the construction killed)."

"The fareboxes are definitely frustrating. . . . About a half dozen screens, several options each, always starting on the least likely option, doesn't want to take any money I try to give it, and then it sets my ears a' ringin' with a 110 db shriek, I mean beep, to let me know the transaction is complete."

"Eastbound, there were 3 people at 3 stops who told the driver they didn't understand the machines and couldn't get a pass. . . . On the way home, there was an older, married couple who complained they couldn't figure out the machine and they were turned away and told to just keep trying it."

"I haven't seen the ETA readouts working properly for some time... none of them. Occasionally I see one working but it isn't accurate. I think it's time to audit what's still not functional (signal timing?) and hammer some vendors."

"This is THE WORST planned infrastructure project I have ever seen. And, P.S, the buses are not bringing more people downtown!"

". . .all is not lost, though – Cleveland was a guinea pig for the rest of the U.S. – that will help other working class taxpayers from around the country avoid the fate of Cleveland's working class taxpayers."

"This project will go down in history as one of the worst public works projects in U.S. history. Last one in Cleveland, turn out the lights."



## How "Rapid" is BRT?

Published by Rob Pitingolo on Sep 9, 2009 at 4:50 PM

I'll admit, I am a little late to the party on this one. It's been nearly a year since Cleveland launched its new BRT, the Healthline, and since Streetsblog proclaimed the line was getting "rave reviews". Now that I live in a part of town with better access to the Healthline, I finally got a chance to take a ride. My overall impression: wow, the Healthline is really painfully *slow*...



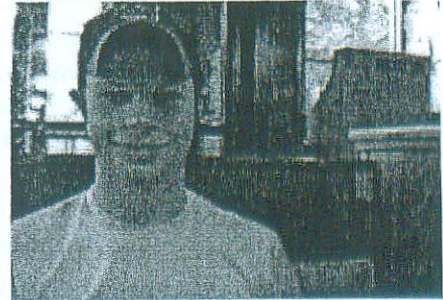
(from Wikipedia)

Perhaps my expectations were too high, but for all the hype, the improved boarding platforms, pre-paid fare system, dedicated bus lanes, unique traffic signals, and the fact that it has "rapid transit" in the name, I think I was justified in believing that its speed might be somewhat synonymous with rapid.

The official schedule lists an 8am weekday trip from East 105th & Euclid Avenue to Superior & East Roadway as taking 23 minutes. That's a distance of 4.08 miles. Calculating it out gives you the average speed for the trip as a whopping 10.6 mph.

Contrast this with the Red Line, an actual rapid transit line. On a comparable trip, from the University Circle Station to the Tower City Station, the schedule lists the ride as taking 13 minutes. The route is 5.34 track miles long, giving it an average speed of 24.6 mph.

### Welcome



Welcome! I am just one guy trying to make a difference. The opinions expressed here are exclusively my own.

### About

Me in 5 words: progressive, urbanist, entrepreneur, blogger, thinker

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I haven't actually timed it, but I am pretty confident that I could ride my bike down the Euclid Avenue corridor at least as fast as 10.6 mph. So why is the Healthline so slow?

For one thing, there are probably too many stops. If a subway or elevated rail line had been built along the same corridor, I suspect there probably would be about half as many stops. Bus lines always have way too many stops; some local buses have a stop at every single city block. The Healthline has them slightly more spaced out but still relatively close together. The unfortunate thing about designing the system with so many stops is that it makes it that much more difficult to develop around any single one of them, a problem I suspect that Healthline will face if the economic climate in Cleveland is ever favorable to development again.

The second problem is that there is an overabundance of traffic lights and the Healthline doesn't seem to be technologically advanced enough to efficiently cruise through them. I always imagined that true BRT would be equipped with some sort of GPS or a similar technology that would change the traffic lights just as buses arrive so that they would never sit at a red light... kind of in the same spirit as emergency vehicles that can manipulate traffic lights to get where they are going more quickly. Unfortunately, this is not the case with the Healthline. Sitting at long red lights is the name of the game.

Needless to say, I was disappointed with the Healthline from a speed aspect. Euclid Avenue looks great, though. The bike lanes are definitely the best part (although I will have more to say about that soon). So there certainly has been improvement along the corridor; but the improvements have more to do with aesthetics and bicycle improvements than with transit itself.

I hope this serves as a lesson to cities that are thinking about investing in BRT instead of rail. I think The Overhead Wire is correct in arguing that you get what you pay for with BRT. When interest groups argue that BRT is a cheaper alternative to light or heavy rail, an important question to ask is exactly *why* it is so much cheaper. If you want to do BRT right, and you want it to truly be a form of rapid transit, then you're going to have to pay, anyway.

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Labels: Cleveland, Transit

## 7 comments:

1. Pantograph Trolley pole said... 6:56 PM

I might add that the problems you mentioned aren't just problems for BRT but also LRT on arterial streets as well. The T Third that just opened up in San Francisco has some of the same issues due to too many stops. The distance of that new section of line is 5.1 miles and it takes 26 minutes on the schedule or 12 mph. I wonder if there was any time savings benefit to electrification of the health line and why they didn't consider it.

2. Rob Pitingolo said... 7:26 PM

Pantograph Trolley pole, perhaps it would have been appropriate to also compare the Healthline to Cleveland's two LRT lines as well. Both the Green and Blue lines east of Shaker Square are at-grade and required to obey traffic signals (with I think one exception on each line where they travel under a busy cross-street). Regardless, the average speeds on those stretches of track are 16.7 mph for the Green Line and 14.5