AC Transit /OUSD Oakland Hills Bussing Issue

FACT SHEET

Every day, thousands of bus riders board AC Transit buses including: seniors, people with disabilities, the working poor, those seeking medical care, or transportation to vitally needed jobs. In the City of Oakland, AC Transit also transports many Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) students via “supplementary” home-to-school bus service. (“Supplementary” service is defined as home to school service over and above basic bus service).

For 20 years, AC Transit and OUSD have partnered to deliver home-to-school bus service, but a dispute has emerged between the two public agencies. At the heart of the dispute is essential bus service for students and families in the City of Oakland – particularly in the Oakland Hills.

**Background:** Since its formation in 1960, AC Transit has provided safe, uninterrupted supplementary home-to-school bus service to students from Fremont to San Pablo. Several supplementary bus routes, particularly those serving destinations in the hills cost considerably more than existing routes in central or flatland areas. By the 1990’s the cost of supplementary bus service to schools in the Oakland Hills became exorbitant. To ensure a pathway to public education, AC Transit partnered with OUSD to secure additional funds from the State of California to cover the extraordinary cost of providing service. In 1997, state funding was successfully secured resulting in a binding Agreement between OUSD and AC Transit that outlined how that money would be spent.

Since 1997, OUSD has received a state-funded allowance of $2.5 million to help pay for home-to-school transportation provided by AC Transit. Over the years, AC Transit has been faithful to both the binding Agreement and to transporting OUSD students to and from schools in the Oakland Hills. Even when the Great Recession forced AC Transit to close one of its bus divisions and slash service to save money, the transit district continued to provide supplementary service to OUSD students.

This past January OUSD broke its promise to AC Transit. Without notice, OUSD staff UNILATERALLY canceled the 20-year binding Agreement, and demanded that AC Transit continue providing the same level of service at no charge. To make matters worse, OUSD then declared it had no intention of paying its past outstanding bills (now totaling nearly $1 million!)
The problem is this: The “exorbitant costs” are still extraordinary! AC Transit currently provides bus service to 37 schools from Fremont to San Pablo, yet just three OUSD schools receive 56 buses per day - 26 buses in the morning and 30 in the afternoon. The total cost is a staggering $3 million or one-third of AC Transit’s supplementary bus service budget. Simply put, OUSD is receiving “deluxe” level service for its three Oakland Hills schools when other school districts (throughout AC Transit’s service territory) are receiving “economy” service. It’s not equitable. It’s not sustainable. And it’s not responsible to the bus riders and taxpayers that support AC Transit bus services.

AC Transit and OUSD had an Agreement and a program that worked for 20 years. When OUSD unilaterally canceled the Agreement this past January, it threw the future of this essential bus service into serious jeopardy.

To be clear: OUSD is asking for a $2.5 million free pass on a legal obligation to AC Transit - presumably to help cover the school district’s huge and growing budget deficit currently estimated to be at least $10 million in FY 2017 and $14 million or more by FY 2018.

Both public agencies have budget challenges. As public agencies accountable to local taxpayers, both agencies are required by law to balance their budgets.

So far, AC Transit is the only one looking for solutions; nothing has come forward from OUSD. BOTH sides MUST work together to find a workable solution and resolve this dispute for the benefit of the riders, families and public that both public agencies exist to serve.

How you can help:

1. CONTACT YOUR LOCALLY ELECTED OUSD SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS. Ask them to take a stand to “Renew the Agreement” and share the responsibility for finding a workable solution.

2. ATTEND THE COMMUNITY MEETING on May 4th. The AC Transit Board of Directors will hold a community meeting to receive public comment on the possible elimination of supplementary school bus service to Montera, Skyline and Community Day schools. The community meeting will be held on Thursday, May 4, 6 p.m., at Oakland City Hall Council Chambers, 3rd Floor (use entrance on 14th Street after 5 p.m.), 1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Oakland, CA 94612. The meeting site is wheelchair accessible.

3. SUBMIT YOUR COMMENTS on the service elimination proposal in writing or at the community meeting on May 4. Written comments will receive the same attention as verbal comments made at the meeting and should be addressed to the AC Transit Board of Directors and submitted in one of the following ways:
   - Email: districtsecretary@actransit.org
   - Fax: (510) 891-7157
   - U.S. Mail: 1600 Franklin St., Oakland, CA 94612
   - Leave a voicemail message: (510) 891-7201 in English (510) 891-7291 in Spanish (510) 891-7292 in Chinese