

Russ Tilleman for AC Transit Ward 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

GREEN PARTY OF ALAMEDA COUNTY 2016 ENDORSEMENT DECISION

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1. Why do you want to serve (or continue to serve) on the AC Transit Board?

I apologize in advance for the long answer, but there are several reasons I want to serve on the AC Transit Board of Directors.

GREENWASHING

One reason I am running for AC Transit Director is that AC Transit greenwashed the Bus Rapid Transit project and wasted \$178 million that was intended to fight global warming. The high cost and near-zero carbon reduction of BRT means it will have to operate for over 5000 years before it provides a significant reduction in carbon.

Carbon offset credits are a good way to analyze the greenness of a project, because they place a dollar value on the removal of a ton of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

The original full-scale version of BRT was estimated to cost \$250 million and to remove 9.2 tons per day of carbon dioxide from the air. The carbon offset credit price at the time was \$13.50 per ton of carbon dioxide.

Dividing \$250 million by \$13.50 per ton equated to 18.5 million tons of carbon dioxide that could be removed for that price using carbon offset credits. Dividing 18.5 million tons by 9.2 tons per day works out to about 2 million days or 5500 years of continuous operation for BRT to break even with the carbon offset credit standard and significantly help with global warming.

Global warming needs to be addressed now. The Earth shouldn't have to wait 5000 years before something is done.

Please contact me if you have any questions about any of this. I am confident these analyses will stand up to review by any qualified climate scientist.

ENVIRONMENTAL FRAUD

Another reason I'm running is that AC Transit went beyond greenwashing and committed environmental fraud when they lied on their application to relocate bus stops as part of the Line 51 upgrades. Again they wasted money that was intended to fight global warming, this time using it to needlessly move a bus stop. A move that provided no reduction in carbon, because the facts supposedly justifying the move were falsified.

As you can see in the attached combined.png file, AC Transit claimed the environmental justification for moving the southbound 51B bus stop on College Avenue at Parker Street in Berkeley as speeding up the bus "by allowing pedestrians to cross behind the bus." And as is clear from the crosswalk.jpg file taken before the relocation, the crosswalk was already located behind the bus stop.

When I pointed this out to the City of Berkeley, the manager of the Transportation Division contacted AC Transit and AC Transit said they knew the crosswalk was already behind the bus when they filed the application to move the bus stop. So AC Transit admitted lying about it.

This may seem like a small fraud but it is still fraud. To me this is a red flag that the AC Transit culture accepts lying about important issues. And it raises serious concerns that there might be fraud in the much bigger BRT project.

I do not know if the incumbent Greg Harper was personally involved in greenwashing Bus Rapid Transit or lying about the Line 51 improvements. Or even if he had any idea what AC Transit was doing. Regardless, I feel that he bears some responsibility for these actions. Because it is the job of a Director to oversee the operation of AC Transit, and these things happened in his ward. After 16 years in office, he should know what is going on at AC Transit.

RIDER SAFETY

The remaining non-environmental justification AC Transit gave for wanting to move this bus stop was to improve pedestrian visibility when crossing the intersection. However, by moving the bus stop AC Transit now forces riders from the East side of College Avenue, about half the riders who use that stop, to make two street crossings instead of one. They must now cross both Parker Street and College Avenue to get from the new bus stop to their side of College Avenue. Those riders previously only needed to cross College Avenue. I have personally seen 2 accidents in which bicyclists were hit by cars while they were crossing Parker Street at that intersection, so I know it is a dangerous crossing.

DO WE HAVE TO ACCEPT THIS?

It angers me that AC Transit wasted thousands of dollars moving the bus stop, and is wasting hundreds of millions of dollars building the non-green Bus Rapid Transit, when that money

could have done something good for the environment. I have never run for elected office before but I felt someone needed to stand up and try to do something about these issues.

If I am elected, I will push for a zero-tolerance policy for greenwashing, fraud and needlessly endangering riders at AC Transit.

PROBLEMS THAT CAN BE FIXED

Another reason I want to serve on the Board is that I see firsthand, and hear about from others, problems with bus service which I believe I know how to fix.

Bus bunching is a serious problem on AC Transit routes. Instead of one bus arriving every 15 minutes, two buses arrive together every 30 minutes. In addition to greatly reducing the quality of bus service for riders, this is also extremely inefficient from an environmental and financial point of view. Two buses are being used to do a job that could be done just as well by one bus.

There is a well known approach to solving this problem, which AC Transit has known about since at least 2012 when I discussed it with Stephen Newhouse, one of their transportation planners.

It is called headway based scheduling and you can read about it online. It has been proven to keep buses evenly spaced on 15 minute intervals. But AC Transit refuses to even try it, and as a result, riders are needlessly living with bunched up buses.

Some of the other improvements I would like to make will be listed below as answers to other questions.

2. (For incumbents:) What actions of yours during your term are you proudest of? What have you accomplished during your time on the board?

(For non--incumbents:) Which of your past experiences are valuable for serving on the board?

Have you been following AC Transit's actions the last 5 years? If so, what changes have you noted?

PAST EXPERIENCES

As a green transportation designer, I am experienced in analyzing the global warming effects of various forms of transportation. When I apply those skills to looking at AC Transit, I see that projects they present as being green, such as Bus Rapid Transit and parts of the Line 51 changes, are in fact not green.

This kind of greenwashing wastes resources that could otherwise be used to build wind turbine farms, put solar panels on thousands of homes, or provide other real improvements to the environment.

If I am elected, I will advocate for projects that can actually help with global warming, like improving the efficiency of AC Transit routes and making AC Transit buses more appealing to ride, to get as many people as possible out of their cars.

I will also push for accountability. On past projects like the Line 51 changes, we heard claims that service would be greatly improved, ridership would greatly increase as a result, and real reductions would be made in the Bay Area's contribution to global warming.

But when the project was done, we never heard how much service improved, how many new riders got out of their cars, or how much carbon dioxide was reduced. I think we should hear these results, so we can tell if the project was successful, and so we can use those results to plan additional successful projects in the future.

CHANGES I HAVE NOTED

The biggest change that I have personally seen recently is that AC Transit discontinued the 1R Rapid Bus line on Telegraph Avenue and International Blvd, and broke the 1 in half, into the 1 and the 6. I live on Parker Street near Telegraph Avenue and if I want to go to east Oakland or parts of downtown Oakland, it is now necessary to stop at every bus stop along the way and also to transfer at 12th Street. This is a major degradation in service compared to the 1R.

This change didn't need to be made. I have an alternative, and I think greatly superior plan called the 1ABC.

The 1ABC would divide the old 1 route into 3 zones, A, B and C. A would be south of Lake Merritt BART. C would be north of 51st and Telegraph. And B would be in the middle between A and C.

There would be 1AB buses running through zones A and B, 1BC buses running through zones B and C, and 1AC buses running through zones A and C but bypassing the bus stops and traffic of downtown Oakland by driving on the freeway.

Because the 1AB and 1BC buses would travel a much shorter route than the old 1, they would arrive much more often. And the 1AC would arrive much more often because it skips the traffic and bus stops of downtown Oakland.

Riders from the A and C zones could reach all of downtown Oakland without transferring, and they could reach destinations on the far side of downtown Oakland without having to go through all the traffic and bus stops of downtown.

To me, this seems a much better change than simply breaking the old 1 into the new "1-half" and the 6. It might cut half an hour off trips between zones A and C. We might need to add some carpool lanes or new ramps to the freeway to make the most of this approach, but the

basic plan would work with existing infrastructure.

3. Do you ride AC Transit and, if so, how frequently?

I can't ride AC Transit much because I have a dog I take nearly everywhere with me. I have ridden it at times and I talk to a lot of people who ride it. I also live very close to a 51B bus stop and I see the way the buses show up in pairs.

I'd like to see AC Transit be more pet-friendly so I might be able to ride it more. And I'd like to see it be more rider-friendly so I would want to ride if it I was able to.

4. People without access to cars are AC Transit's captive audience. What are your ideas for increasing ridership of those with cars, sometimes referred to as "choice riders?"

I am one of those choice riders, or I would be if I could bring my dog on the bus with me.

I think if we make riding AC Transit the same speed as driving, some people will get out of their cars and onto the bus. And we may be able to make AC Transit the same speed as a private car, by doing some simple things.

I would make AC Transit free if possible. Only 14 percent of the budget comes from fares. Making it free might not require a very big increase in subsidies, if any. There would be reduced costs of dealing with the money, riders could board on front and back doors, and buses would spend less time loading riders. All of these benefits would make AC Transit more appealing for people who could choose to drive their cars instead.

I would also implement a "virtual bus lane" during times of heavy traffic. When buses stop to pick up and drop off riders, they would stop in the traffic lane instead of pulling over out of traffic. Sidewalk bulb-outs could make it easy for riders to reach the bus.

During the time the bus was stopped, a "traffic vacuum" would form in front of it as the cars continued along through traffic. When the bus was done at the stop, it could simply catch up to the position in traffic where it was before it stopped.

The virtual bus lane could be implemented on any street, even single-lane streets like College Avenue, and wouldn't cost much, or disrupt traffic very much or remove much parking.

So my vision would be free, headway-scheduled buses operating in virtual bus lanes, with express buses where possible such as the 1ABC plan mentioned above. In this way, riding the bus could be about as fast as driving, plus it would be free.

5. What are your thoughts on AC Transit's current Transbay service? How do you think its ridership can increase? Do you think the ten Double Decker buses ordered for this service is a good idea?

AC Transit provides an important commute method for people who live on one side of the bay and work on the other. One of the advantages AC Transit has over BART is that bus stops can be spaced much closer together than BART stations are. So riders can board a bus near their home instead of having to drive to a BART station, take a long walk to a BART station, or take public transit to a BART station. Also BART is at capacity at some times of the day, and AC Transit can provide additional commute capacity.

I think high-capacity buses are a good idea for transbay service. Whether they are double decker or articulated, the important issue is how many riders they can comfortably carry and how fast can they get those riders on and off the bus.

6. After years of purchasing diesel buses with a few Fuel Cell buses, AC Transit is ordering 10 new Fuel Cell buses and five of their first Battery Electric buses. Are you satisfied with that direction? Why or why not?

I don't have the exact numbers for the greenhouse gas impacts of the fuel cell and electric buses. But in many cases, such as Tesla, electric vehicles produce as much greenhouse gas per mile as hybrid vehicles at a much higher cost. Which makes them worse for the environment. AC Transit needs to look at the total greenhouse gas consequences of buying, operating and maintaining these buses. If the numbers are better than the diesel buses, then buy a lot of them! Otherwise, wait for a better alternative to come along.

7. Do you think AC Transit's marketing could be improved and, if so, how?

I don't think marketing is the biggest issue facing AC Transit. People know the buses exist, they see them driving around and in many cases have ridden them in the past.

Getting drivers out of their cars and onto the bus is a difficult task. Simply improving service a little or improving marketing isn't going to do the job. It is necessary to fundamentally improve service, so it actually is more desirable to ride AC Transit than to drive. Fixing bus bunching, providing express buses like the 1AC, and making service free, can fundamentally improve the bus riding experience.

If major improvements are made, then marketing could be an effective way to let potential riders know that those improvements have been made. But if the problems stay the same, there isn't much to market.

8. How can AC Transit improve service for youth, seniors, disabled, and low-income riders?

Make it free and implement headway based scheduling, virtual bus lane, ABC plan for the 1/6 route.

9. What is your opinion of AC Go, the expanded and redesigned service that began this year on June 26?

The first goal stated for the first phase of AC Go is "Improved reliability by shortening long routes that can't maintain schedules because of traffic, construction, and other unavoidable impacts."

As I mentioned above, I feel that replacing the old 1 and 1R bus lines with the new 1 and 6 was a bad decision because it degrades service and requires a transfer for many riders. Implementing the 1ABC express service would be a better choice.

Headway based scheduling can solve the problems of maintaining schedules, without inconveniencing riders or requiring additional transfers.

So my opinion of AC Go is that it is a bad idea that should never have been allowed to be implemented. These are the kinds of decisions in which the Board of Directors can set the important priorities for AC Transit. If I am elected, I will try to protect services like the old 1 and 1R from being replaced by inferior new ones.

10. What endorsements have you received thus far?

I am not part of the East Bay political establishment so I do not have a collection of endorsements that I use every time I run for office. I don't have any confirmed endorsements at this time, and I am not putting much effort into seeking endorsements. I appreciate any endorsements I can get, but my campaign approach is to tell the voters the truth and let them decide for themselves whether to vote for me.

11. Please add anything more you wish to tell us so we can make a good decision.