

GREEN PARTY OF ALAMEDA COUNTY 2020 ENDORSEMENT DECISION

Please email your responses to: greenvoterguide@lists.riseup.net In the subject line, please include the name of the office you are running for. Finally, please send your responses as text in the body of your email, as our list does not handle attachments very well.

Name: Victoria Fierce

Current occupation: Director of Operations, California Renters Legal Advocacy and Education Fund

Website (if any): <https://fierce.vote/>

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

I'm running for the Board of AC Transit because I want a transit agency that works for everyone, not just the few. We need leadership that ensures the district won't just merely survive the COVID pandemic, rather, we need leadership that can guarantee it will thrive once we're out on the other side.

I can be that leadership. I have a decades-long background in community organizing, leadership, fighting for equity, and urban issues. I'm one of the original founders of East Bay for Everyone, a 2000+ member urban justice organization with activities throughout the entire east bay. My work there was more than organizing letter writing or running an endorsement process; I made sure that we were building an organizational culture of love and respect.

A guiding principle I brought to the organization is that if we want to change the world, we cannot possibly seek to replicate its inequalities and structures in ourselves. We embody the ideal of radical inclusion by making our decisions online over a period of days, instead of the usual requirement that you vote in person; not everyone has the luxury to take hours out of their days and spend them in meetings every week. Because of this, we also hold our discussions in public for all to see. We avoid rigid structure that favors the well-connected, instead opting for transparency and honesty between ourselves as organizers.

I have a vision that a better world is possible; it's there for the taking, if we want it. I'm bringing my enthusiasm, my energy, and my optimistic spirit to AC Transit.

2. (For incumbents:) a) What actions of yours during your term are you proudest of? b) What have you helped the District accomplish during your time on the board?

Hopefully you can ask me this again in four years.

3. (For non--incumbents:)

a) Which of your past experiences are valuable for serving on the board?

There are a lot of answers I could put for this. I've been a community organizer all my life; I know how to lead, how to effect change in government, how to get things done. In my dayjob, I

manage the half-million dollar legal war chest for my two-person non-profit. When I'm not managing lawsuits or nonprofit finances, I'm organizing the communities I'm part of.

I get laws passed in Sacramento. I do fundraising for my own salary. I've already won an election to the Alameda County Democratic Central Committee earlier this year. I organize thousands of people into action several times a year. Since October, I've been an appointed member of the ABAG Regional Housing Needs Assessment Methodology Committee, a regional long-term housing and transportation body. I haven't owned a car in 6 years, because I either ride my bike or take the bus to get where I'm going.

I am exceptionally equipped with a vast array of skills and experiences for serving on the board of AC Transit.

b) Have you been following AC Transit's activities and progress over the last several years?

Yes, of course!

c) What changes have you noted, either positive or negative?

Since moving to the bay area almost 6 years ago, I've certainly seen a number of changes come and go with AC Transit, but what I think about the most is how little the district has really changed. The year is 2020, and the best our agency can do for public outreach is the occasional twitter post mentioning a bus is a few minutes behind schedule. Meanwhile, BART has established itself as a social media juggernaut in its own right. Using their impressive talent for posting and reading the cultural zeitgeist, they've managed to do what AC Transit isn't doing: getting young, extremely online city-dwellers excited about public transit. They make memes in support of federal funding that organizes millennials to do the one thing guaranteed to give my generation hives: pick up the phone and make a call. They are widely recognized as a leader in government agency social media, and their online presence has completely reworked the very idea of how public agencies can communicate operational changes to their riders.

AC Transit does not do this. It is passing up this opportunity to get people excited about public transit and educate the world on the environmental benefits that come with riding it. Their public outreach strategy appears unchanged since the days before everyone had the internet available through their pocket computer.

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

Yes! In The Before Times, I rode a mix of the 51A, 51B, 72/72R/72M, 18, 12, 57, 26, and 60 lines just about every week. Nowadays I work from home, and my office is also just a few blocks

from my apartment, so I've ridden significantly less. I was one of the first to ride the new BRT line; I rode it on a sleepy Monday morning the day after it opened.

5. How can AC best leverage emerging technologies that offer new modes of transport, as well as rider independence, choice, and convenience; while improving both service and cost profiles for target populations, including youth, seniors, limited-income, and people with disabilities?

When the Key System went bankrupt, the people of California came together to save their transportation network. We lobbied Sacramento to enable AC Transit to form from the ashes of the Key System, and it worked.

To that effect, I'm proposing that AC Transit develop a plan and financing to acquire bikeshare, scootershare, and other mobilityshare startups that will not survive COVID. Automobile sales are climbing, in part because people are afraid of riding a crowded bus. The district was formed from the ashes of the Key System; we have an opportunity to repeat that story in a way that offers people an ecologically beneficial alternative to car ownership while maintaining the inherent social distancing people need: scooters, e-bikes, cargo bikes, and more.

6. What are your thoughts on AC Transit's current Transbay service?

a) How do you think its normal (non-COVID) ridership and/or efficiency can increase?

The number one thing we can do to increase ridership is to provide reliable, quality transportation that gets people where they need to go. The number one barrier to this in transbay service is the long delays it takes to cross the bay bridge and get into the transit center. I'm advocating for a bus-only lane that runs not just across the bay bridge itself, but through the MacArthur Maze, down Grand Avenue, and straight into the heart of Downtown Oakland. Most transbay delays don't occur on the bridge, they're due to buses fighting with private automobiles to get onto the bridge in the first place. A bus lane removes this contention and will transform transbay service in a way that allows us to run the high quality, high frequency, highly reliable transit needed to attract more riders.

b) How should AC balance Transbay service with local, especially trunk line, service during COVID restrictions?

Today's riders are nervous about sharing close quarters on a bus. The district is limiting the number of riders on our bus lines to accommodate for social distancing, but that doesn't help the rider who is unable to board an already full bus. To accommodate this increased demand for space, the simple answer is to increase access to space by running more buses at a higher frequency. Bus lanes, as I described in the previous answer, are how we'll be able to do that.

c) Do you think that double-decker buses ordered for Transbay service is a good idea?

I think they're fine. They've already been bought, and they carry our passengers, just like you'd expect from a bus. If we want to maximize the public money invested in these double-deckers, we'll need to be making sure we can run as many as we can, as quickly as we can. Bus lanes can help us maximize this public investment.

7. What do you feel AC's direction should be for developing a zero- or super low-emission fleet, after the District's experiments with hydrogen fuel cell and other technologies over the past decade and a half?

We absolutely need to decarbonize our transportation network, but I have a more holistic perspective than whether fuel cell buses are a good idea. Don't get me wrong, they're an absolutely important and crucial step along the road to an all-electric bus fleet, in the same way that investment in wireless charging, battery power storage systems, or overhead catenary wires are.

However, electrifying our bus fleet will do absolutely nothing to get people out of their cars and reduce our society's oil consumption if that electrification comes at the expense of quality, reliable transportation.

Riders don't want fancy BRT branding, or hydrogen fuel cells; reliable, quality infrastructure is boring and I want the most boring thing imaginable: a bus lane network that gets people to their destinations on time, sometimes a bit early, but never late, and done so reliably that there are riots if political forces threaten its removal. I love the bus and I think everyone else can too, if we let it be something worth loving. When people love the bus, they'll ride the bus more. When they ride the bus more, they stop burning oil.

8. How can AC Transit sustain and/or improve upon progress made so far in social and environmental justice (including socio-geographic coverage/equity), as well as economic equity (including fare policies)?

AC Transit needs to decriminalize riding the bus. Our brand new BRT system is keeping cars out of the bus lane through automated ticketing, which can be regressive. I'm proposing that we install physical barriers instead; a concrete bollard can't refuse enforcement of the bus lane to a white driver, no matter how nice they might seem.

I'm also a huge supporter of Prop 15, the "Schools and Communities First" initiative, which promises to generate millions in revenue for the district, because I see that revenue growing over time such that we could provide free transit and abolish fare enforcement. Most people ticketed by AC Transit for fare evasion are people of color. The communities most in need of cheap, accessible transit, aren't white communities and as consequence they're burdened with the expenses of car ownership and maintenance. When they can't afford a car, they're riding an AC Transit bus who in turn is stuck behind someone else's private automobile. When AC Transit suffers, the Black rider community suffers and the white riders call a Lyft. Lets fix that.

Improving our transit network to reduce car dependency and ownership will reduce pedestrian deaths disproportionately borne by communities of color while increasing economic opportunities for riders of color. It will also reduce air pollution near our busy streets and freeways, which is often the only place in town a person of color can afford to rent. I fully believe that transit justice is climate justice and racial justice. I know that Black lives matter, and I will act like it.

9. What will be the benefits of the new bus rapid transit (BRT) service to AC's ridership and the system, and do you understand and agree with how surrounding bus lines were (or are slated to be) re-structured to both support the BRT line and improve overall service coverage and frequency?

The biggest benefit I see us getting from BRT is that we'll better know how to execute it for the next BRT line. When I rode the new 1T line on a sleepy Monday morning the day after it opened, it didn't seem too much faster than before. Bus lanes aren't continuous along the entire stretch, meaning the bus still needs to weave in and out of traffic in certain segments. Stops are spaced very close together compared to other BRT systems in the world, which increases dwell time along the route. It also took over a decade to complete, which is several years longer than any other BRT system on the planet. In those 10 years, we learned a lot about the do's and don't's of planning, designing, building, and launching a new BRT line that can make future system expansions much, much faster and cheaper.

I understand that some of the surrounding bus lines are being restructured to better support the BRT line, but I'm regrettably unfamiliar on the details of how they're being modified. My expectation and desire is that they're being rerouted to act as strong feeder lines with the BRT stations as transfer points. In doing so, it's important we don't alienate current riders; Tempo's branding already gives some long-time riders pause to question whether or not the line is being designed with them and their needs in mind, or if it is being targeted at new riders who might not have such a longstanding relationship with the agency. Social alienation and a feeling of lost agency over your own life is a powerful thing, and I will make sure that AC Transit's outreach programs are cognizant of this.

10. What do you see as the most workable strategies for AC to cope with the COVID-19 crisis, and ultimately to transcend whatever the long-term impacts may be, including making choices on, and how to fund:

- a) "Protective" features of vehicles, equipment, facilities, and policies, including public education regarding riding safety**
- b) Additional service density on major corridors and adequate geographic coverage in both transit-dependent and "choice rider" communities**

I'm a big supporter of Prop 15, which would raise property taxes on commercial properties and bring millions in funds to the district. Our economy won't recover overnight, but perhaps in 2 or 3

years Prop 15 will produce enough revenue to completely replace fare revenue and allow us to implement free transit. More immediately, passing Prop 15 in November means the district can avoid or reverse major service cuts due to lost revenue.

Even if Prop 15 passes in November, money won't be available for some period of time while properties are reassessed and the property tax bureaucracy grinds away. We need an interim solution, which is why I am proposing a sales tax on rideshare services to generate additional revenue. As I've described earlier here, a rideshare tax would simultaneously generate revenue for increased service while reducing automobile trips that cause service delays and reduced service quality.

I also believe that the district should acquire rideshare startups that won't survive COVID. There is clearly high demand for individualized alternatives to bus transportation, as evidenced by increased automobile sales. I see no reason why AC Transit shouldn't be working to tap into a share of this demand and earn transportation revenue. In turn, we'd be removing the executive and profit overhead that comes with a for-profit startup and providing good jobs to the local economy in the form of rebalancing and maintenance operations.

11. What endorsements have you received thus far?

So far, I've been endorsed by Berkeley Transportation Commission Vice-Chair Terry Taplin, San Leandro City Councilmember Victor Aguilar, Oakland Pride CEO and founder Frank Ciglar, Berkeley Architect Alfred Twu, and many more community leaders and organizers as listed on my website.

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

In addition to helping pass AB 2923, I've helped pass numerous other anti-sprawl laws as part of my organizing work while supporting development of dense affordable housing projects across the state of California. For my dayjob at California Renters Legal Advocacy and Education Fund, I sue suburban cities who deny housing developments in violation of anti-sprawl state housing laws.

Building dense housing next to transit is a requirement if we want to save the world from environmental catastrophe. Nonetheless, the City of San Mateo rejected a proposal to build 10 units of housing along El Camino Real between two Caltrain stations on an unlawful basis. I brought CaRLA's lawsuit against the city; at trial, we received a ruling so bizarre, so counter to public environmental and housing policy, that our state Attorney General Xavier Becerra has filed to intervene on our side and defend the constitutionality of the Housing Accountability Act.

Any politician can come to the Green Party and say they're pro-environment. Many would point to their rhetoric, their public statements, their lofty resolutions in support of a green new deal. Very few can point to concrete actions that directly lead to environmentally friendly changes in

the built environment. I, however, have a body count of suburbs who thought they could simply ignore the law at the expense of the environment, with the physical housing to back it up.