



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a set of improvements that allow buses to achieve the speed, reliability, and convenience of rail but at a much lower cost. One of the first BRT projects in the Bay Area is being planned along the Alum Rock corridor in San Jose. In the spring of 2010, TransForm surveyed 217 merchants along the corridor about the proposed BRT service. TransForm strongly believes that merchants are critical stakeholders to involve in the planning of BRT because they have a deep understanding of the communities in which they do business, and the way that the project is designed will directly impact their businesses. TransForm's survey examined perceived parking availability, desired corridor improvements, perspectives regarding bicycle and pedestrian safety and the proposed BRT project, preferences related to BRT station design, and other topics. The following are the key survey findings and TransForm's recommendations to the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) and the City of San Jose.

Key Survey Findings

Merchants generally support the concept of BRT along the Alum Rock corridor.

- 70% of merchants surveyed support BRT, 28% are neutral or undecided, and 3% are opposed.

Merchant support for BRT is based on the expectation that that it will draw more customers to the corridor or at the very least have a neutral effect on businesses.

- 75% of merchants surveyed expect that BRT will have positive or neutral effects on their customer base, 19% are unsure of the economic impacts BRT may have, and 7% expect that BRT will reduce their customers.
- When asked what they are excited or concerned about regarding the Alum Rock corridor BRT project, most merchants stated that they are excited about increased foot traffic and economic vibrancy as a result of being more well-connected.
- Most merchant concerns are related to parking removal, business disruption during construction, and traffic impacts. Merchants without access to off-street parking are more likely to feel that their existing parking availability for customers, vendors, and employees is poor and may therefore be more vulnerable to parking removal than merchants with access to off-street parking.

Merchants tend to see BRT as more than just a public transportation improvement project. They expect that the BRT will make the corridor more accessible, safer, and more comfortable for their customers and employees. They also hope that BRT will help beautify the corridor through attractive and well-maintained transit stations and other streetscape improvements.

- 80% of merchants surveyed support bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements. Merchants' highest priorities for bicycle and pedestrian safety are better street lighting, safer crosswalks, and new/improved bike routes.
- Most merchants want the BRT stations to be safe, clean, and well-maintained. Merchants also want the stations to integrate natural and environmental features and reflect the history and culture of their neighborhoods.

The majority of merchants surveyed stated that they'd be interested in working together to form a business assessment district to help raise revenues for corridor improvements and maintenance. This is

important because one of the primary barriers to integrating landscaping into the BRT project is ongoing maintenance costs.

- 53% of merchants surveyed are supportive of a business assessment district, 38% are opposed, and 11% stated “other” or that they are unsure.

Although merchants were provided with general information and visuals about the Alum Rock BRT project, many merchants need more specific information about the project, such as parking removal details, in order to feel well-informed.

- 32% of merchants surveyed feel well-informed, 55% feel somewhat informed, and 12% feel uninformed.

TransForm’s Recommendations

1. Provide merchants with more detailed information about the Alum Rock corridor BRT project and make a strong effort to meaningfully involve them in the planning process (VTA). Merchants would benefit from specific information about the taking of properties, parking removal, traffic impacts and other topics that may directly affect them. TransForm highly recommends a multi-lingual door-to-door outreach approach for the remaining phases of the Alum Rock corridor planning process and VTA’s future transit improvement projects.
2. Conduct a parking management study to evaluate existing parking demand along the corridor and identify strategies to minimize impacts to businesses from any parking removal that cannot be avoided (VTA/City of San Jose - DOT). VTA and the City should work closely with merchants and property owners affected by parking removal.
3. Strongly integrate bicycle and pedestrian safety infrastructure into its BRT plans and pursue additional sources of revenue to ensure safety for all users along the corridor (VTA/City of San Jose - DOT). More specifically, TransForm recommends the following measures to improve the safety of the corridor.
 - a. Limit the width of auto travel lanes on Alum Rock Ave. in the BRT plans to the greatest extent possible in order to calm traffic, improve safety, minimize parking impacts, and reduce the taking of private property.
 - b. Integrate bulb-outs and medians where possible in order to provide safe pedestrian refuges and reduce the distance for pedestrians to cross the street.
 - c. Incorporate bike routes into the Alum Rock BRT plans on parallel streets (north and south) and to each of the future BRT stations.
 - d. Acquire funding for a community-based transportation plan in order to identify other ways to make the corridor safer and more inviting for all users.
4. Set aside sufficient funding for ongoing maintenance and station security and integrate neighborhood preferences in BRT station designs (VTA). Local context including history and culture should be incorporated into the design of the stations.
5. Consider working with merchants and property owners to form a business assessment district (City of San Jose - RDA). An assessment district could generate greater revenues for streetscape improvements and other corridor needs while helping to bring merchants together to engage in this and future planning processes.

TransForm works to create world-class public transportation and walkable communities in the Bay Area and beyond. We build diverse coalitions, influence policy, and develop innovative programs to improve the lives of all people and protect the environment. To learn more about the work we do, please visit our website at TransFormCA.org.

For questions regarding the Alum Rock BRT merchant survey report or to get involved, please contact our Silicon Valley Community Planner, Chris Lepe, at 408.406.8074 or at CLepe@TransFormCA.org.