

CHAPTER 1  
ACCESS TO PARKS

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Introduction

In order to fulfill the goal of providing the urban residents of the East Bay with recreational opportunities, the East Bay Regional Park District must plan its system of parklands to maximize their accessibility, either by acquisition of more inner-city parks or by providing easy access to existing parks through innovative transportation planning and improvement. With the expansion of the East Bay metropolitan area as the result of urban growth, available public land suitable for parks is quickly diminishing. As parks become more remote and distant, a recreation-based transportation system will be the logical alternative.

For four decades since the creation of regional parks and development of EBRPD, only the young and the mobile auto-owners could enjoy that "green open space somewhere just over the hill." Not until 1968 did some of the parks become accessible to the transportation-disadvantaged groups. Two parks, Tilden and Anthony Chabot, were the first to be connected with urban centers by public transportation through the initial cooperative program of EBRPD and AC Transit. It was during that time that the idea of "parks for everyone" was finally recognized. The elderly, handicapped, poor and minorities with no access to an automobile were able to utilize the public bus service to reach the parks. Now, more and more parklands are being served the year around by regular commuter transit. In 1973, direct bus service was provided during the summer from early June through the beginning of September to four regional parks: Tilden, Chabot, Don Castro and Redwood. This special service has been in existence since then and will be continued if the budget allows. With the development of a regional trail system and BART, an accessible transportation network is formed.

Besides serving the urban public, public transportation to and from parks is aimed toward energy conservation and environmental protection. It also offers solutions to parking and congestion problems in the most heavily used parklands. Unfortunately, most park visitors are still travelling by private automobile. As more and more people visit the parks each year, parking and congestion problems are becoming more apparent.

Despite the fact that the ridership of the bus service has risen significantly during the last two years, the absolute number of riders is still too small to make the service a successful operation. The low ridership as well as the inflating cost of public transportation hinder further development of more efficient and extensive service to the existing parks and new service to more distant parklands. Presently, service is limited to four parks and during the summer months only.

There are several problems which will arise in the course of future planning. In view of the continual growth of population and suburbia, the metropolitan area will be expanding. In order to serve the growing population adequately without reduction in accessibility, more parks will be needed. Secondly, the present trend indicates that the future population will be composed of a larger proportion of old people. This means that a more responsive and efficient transportation system will be needed to accommodate the demographic change. The need for public transportation is further intensified by the energy shortage and environmental protection incentives. Thirdly, the available open space which is reasonably accessible and suitable for parkland is quickly diminishing. New acquisitions may be more distant from urban centers, and this will create a problem in accessibility to both auto-owners as well as transit dependent residents. Fourthly, in order to maintain or expand the present operation of direct service, which is limited to only four parks, a significant improvement in ridership and public awareness is needed to provide a stronger incentive and encouragement. Finally, public transportation planning and operation has become increasingly expensive and other alternatives will have to be considered. To make matters worse, the passing of the Jarvis-Gann property tax reduction bill would eventually lead to a substantial cut-back of state funds to both EBRPD and AC Transit.

#### Analysis of Accessibility of East Bay Parklands

Of 39 parks owned by EBRPD at the present, 31 are open to the public year around. All of these parks are accessible either by freeways, highways, or street routes. Sixteen of the 31 parks were selected for this analysis because of their locations and popularity. Road distance was measured from each park to the nearest BART station. The availability of public transportation which provides access to the parks is noted (Table 1).

<u>Park</u>	<u>Approx. Location</u>	<u>Miles from nearest city center</u>	<u>Miles from nearest BART station</u>	<u>Regular commute service</u>	<u>Special direct service</u>
Black Diamond Mines	Antioch	6.0	9.5		
Briones	Lafayette	3.0	3.0		
Don Castro	Hayward	6.0	4.5	x	Summer
Anthony Chabot	San Leandro	5.0	4.0		Summer
Contra Loma	Antioch	5.0	15.0		
Coyote Hill	Fremont	7.0	6.0		
Cull Canyon	Castro Valley	2.5	6.5		
Del Valle	Livermore	6.0	28.0		
Robert Crown Beach	Alameda	1.5	2.5	x	
Las Trampas	S. Ramon-Danville	2.5	7.5		
Pt. Pinole	S. Pablo-Richmond	3.5	5.5	x	
Redwood	Oakland	5.0	4.0	x	Summer
Shadow Cliff	Pleasanton	3.5	17.5		
Temescal	Oakland	4.5	1.5	x	
Tilden	Berkeley	2.5	2.5	x	Summer
Wildcat Canyon	El Cerrito	2.0	2.5	x	
<u>Total: 16</u>		Avg. 4.1	7.5	44%	25%

Table 1: Accessibility of EBRPD Parklands

The average distance from the nearest city center to the parks is 4.1 miles, with the majority of the parks averaging from 4 to 5 miles. This indicates that many of the parks are located quite close to the city centers, where the population is the most concentrated. But the travel distance is not necessarily a good indicator of accessibility. Time and comfort of travel are important factors. Both are affected by traffic and road conditions, which in turn influence the perception of accessibility by the traveller. Thus, a park can seem more accessible despite the fact that it is relatively farther away in comparison with another park. The perception of accessibility then becomes an important factor in both the frequency of visit and popularity of a park.

The average distance between parks and the nearest BART stations is 7.5 miles, ranging from 1.5 miles in the case of Temescal in Oakland to 28 miles in the case of Del Valle in Livermore (Table 1). Most of the parks are located farther away from the BART stations than the nearest city centers. This indicates that BART may be of only secondary importance in terms of accessibility to the parks. A connecting bus line will be needed to transport passengers to the parks from the BART stations. At the present time this service is limited to four parks and four BART stations, and it is available during the summer months only. In terms of convenience, passengers are required to load and unload twice if they ride BART, as opposed to once if they ride the bus. This can greatly affect the decision-making of potential riders, especially those limited in physical mobility such as the elderly and handicapped. Parks are visited by the most number of users during the weekend. But the fact that BART doesn't provide Sunday service greatly depreciates its value as the transportation medium. Finally, BART costs more to operate and charges higher fares. The factors of cost in addition to the reputation of being unreliable discourage both the transportation planners and potential users from including BART in their plans.

Of 16 parks selected for this analysis only four parks (25%) can be reached by direct bus service: Tilden, Chabot, Don Castro and Redwood. And the service is limited to the summer months. Only seven (43%) of the 16 parks can be reached year around by regular commuter buses, including three of the parks mentioned above. This is only 30% of the total 31 open parks.

Why isn't there more bus service to the parks? Several reasons have been suggested. One is that the employment of direct bus service is a recent development and still in its experimental stage. Two, funds may not be available for improvement and expansion of the present system.<sup>7</sup> Three, the low turnout in number of users hinders further system development.

Despite the fact that the present service is inefficient and inadequate, and slow in terms of progress, there is still a need to plan and employ a workable transportation system to provide for those who are transportation-disadvantaged. This includes the elderly, poor, handicapped and those who have no access to an automobile. This transportation-disadvantaged group is by no means small. Various estimates indicate that almost 50% of the population of the Bay Area or more than a million persons in Alameda, Contra Costa and San Francisco Counties fall into this overlapping group.<sup>1</sup>

Monetary Cost and Impacts of Jarvis-Gann Initiative

Table 2 summarizes the cost of proposed service for the summer bus service of 1976 and 1977. For 1976, the net cost was more than \$13,000 for three parks, of which \$3,450 was subsidized by EBRPD and the remainder was absorbed by AC Transit. In addition to the subsidy the district spent an additional \$2,500 for promotional and advertising work. The annual cost of the summer bus program to EBRPD amounts to \$6,000.

If the Jarvis-Gann tax initiative is passed by the voters this year, both the AC Transit and Park District will experience substantial cutbacks in revenue. EBRPD has been dependent on the property tax for 80% or more of its total revenues over the history of its existence. Unless replacement revenues are forthcoming during 1978-1979 fiscal year, the Park District will be faced with a drastic budget reduction of \$13 million, or more than 70%, of the 1977-78 budget.

Presently AC Transit is proposing to terminate the summer special service in order to meet an increasing annual deficit. Under Jarvis-Gann, the Transit District will be forced to cut back drastically on public services as well as the summer bus program.

<u>1976</u>		<u>1977</u>	
Tilden	8549	Tilden	9613
Redwood	8628	Redwood	8917
(Don Castro)	(2983)	Don Castro	33
Lake Chabot	215	Lake Chabot	313
Total Cost	17392	Total Cost	18876
Less Fare Revenue	<u>3723</u>	Less Estimated Revenue	<u>4334</u>
Net Cost	13669 (excluding Don Castro)	Net Cost	14542
<hr/> Source: Agenda of regular meetings of Board of Directors EBRPD 1-6-76		<hr/> Source: AC Transit Regional Park Service Progress Report 10-22-76	

Table 2: Cost of Proposed Services, 1976 and 1977

Ridership and Public Awareness

Table 3 shows the ridership pattern of the summer bus service to four parks for the past years. Although the increase in number of passengers for some parks in 1976 appears to be quite encouraging, the actual number of riders per bus trip is still quite low. For instance, the Redwood bus transports an average of 127 passengers a day, or 15.8 passengers per bus. In the case of Don Castro, the average number of riders per bus is 1.5 during the weekend and 0.25 for the weekday.

1976 Bus Schedule (June 12 to Sept. 6)

<u>Park</u>			<u>Number of Round Trips</u>	<u>Frequency +</u>
Don Castro (from Hayward BART)	weekday	7am - 7pm	24	2
	weekend & holiday	10am - 6pm	16	2
Redwood (from Fruitvale BART)	daily	11am - 6:30pm	8	0.8
Tilden (from Berkeley BART)	daily	11am - 6:30pm	8	0.8
Lake Chabot (from Hayward BART)	daily	10am - 6pm	8	1

Ridership (Average number park passengers per day)

	<u>Tilden</u>	<u>Redwood</u>	<u>Don Castro</u>	<u>Lake Chabot</u>
1968	28	x	x	8.5
1974	92	53	45	27 *
1975	94	69	21	8
1976	139	127	6 **	14

\* only 4 trips Sat & Sun into Don Castro

\*\* full daily service in 1974

+ frequency = number of trips per hour

Table 3: Summer Special Service Analysis

Source: AC Transit Regional Park Service  
Progress Report 10-22-76

This low turnout in number of passengers immediately raises the question of whether the special bus program is serving its purpose. A survey of park-users and non-users conducted in 1975 by Tyler Research, Inc. disclosed that 37% of users and 34% of non-users said they considered public transportation to and from parkland "very important."<sup>6</sup> This finding, in addition to the fact that there are approximately a million transportation-disadvantaged individuals in the Bay Area, suggests that there are more potential riders in the urban area and that other problems either promotional, operational, or both, may be the cause of low ridership.

Low public awareness of the present service is due in part to ineffective promotion and advertising. EBRPD spends \$2500 annually for promotion of the special service to the general public. Fliers and pamphlets are sent to public schools, churches, youth groups, Y's, senior citizen centers, organizations for the handicapped, government office buildings and libraries. But this method of promotion has not proved to be effective.<sup>7</sup> Other means of advertising, such as newspaper, T.V., and radio are also employed, but the exposures in these media are limited to small ads and odd hours. Very few park-goers report learning of the EBRPD parks they visit via newspaper or other commercial channels of communication.<sup>6</sup> Thus the existence of bus service may be even less known among the park visitors and to the general public.

Psychologically captive car users are less receptive to public transportation. People are more likely to use a car because of habit than because of perceived necessity. The private automobile is preferred in many cases over public transportation in terms of convenience, comfort and travelling time. Even if an acceptable transit service is provided, automobile users have a residual preference for the private auto as a transportation mode.<sup>2</sup> Public transit carries a low percentage of the travel in its market. The regional surveys show the transit share of all person trips, which include shopping, sightseeing, work and recreation, to be 5.9% in the San Francisco Bay Area.<sup>4</sup>

The operational management may be unresponsive to consumer's need in terms of schedule and route flexibility, location and availability of the service. Present service which provides access to the parks year around is limited to regular commuter buses. These buses are not preferred as a recreational transportation medium because of their "commute" characteristics: slowness, crowdedness, frequent stopping and other inconveniences. As for the special summer program, its route coverage is insufficient to make the service accessible to many potential riders.

Psychological barriers may affect the use of mass transit by potential riders. The idea of meeting weird people and the fear of assault can influence the decision-making of the potential passenger.<sup>5</sup>

#### Proposals and Recommendations

After a review of the present problems of accessibility and transportation needs in relation to social, economic and demographic changes, several suggestions and recommendations can be made for future improvement and planning.

Assuming that replacement revenues will be available to both the Park District and AC Transit if the Jarvis-Gann initiative passes this year, the Park and Transit Districts should:

1. Improve public awareness of the present service with more intensified promotion and advertisement. Provide the public with more information on schedule, routes and operation of present service. Increase media exposure with special emphasis on the awareness of the transportation-disadvantaged group.
2. Improve the image of public transportation with efforts centered on improvements to existing system. Stress the importance of schedule and route flexibility to provide maximum coverage and convenience.
3. Be more demand-responsive in future transportation planning in terms of housing patterns, population density and age group distribution.
4. Encourage auto owners to utilize available bus service through advertising to create positive attitudes toward public transportation and through stronger incentives in increasing use.
5. Encourage and support group visits and activities in Regional Parks.
6. Develop and improve other transportation modes - bike routes, regional trails.

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