



## Empower Oakland 2024 Candidate Questionnaire

*Empower Oakland is a movement fueled by Oakland residents who recognize that “business as usual politics” will only further perpetuate Oakland’s downward spiral. We believe in empowering Oaklanders to amplify their collective voices for greater political impact and influence.*

*All submissions will be unedited for spelling, grammar, and format and published on [empoweroakland.com](http://empoweroakland.com) to educate Oakland voters. Empower Oakland will also use candidate submissions to help inform their Candidate Endorsement process. Candidates may be asked to interview in-person with the Empower Oakland Endorsement Committee. Final endorsement decisions will be made by early September.*

*Please email the completed questionnaire as a .doc or .pdf document to [info@empoweroakland.com](mailto:info@empoweroakland.com). Due by Friday, August 16th by 6PM.*

---

**Candidate Name:** Victor Flores

**Email:** [victor@victorfloresforbart.com](mailto:victor@victorfloresforbart.com)

**Phone Number:** (510) 935-3447

**Office & District Sought:** BART Director District 7

**Campaign Website:** [www.victorfloresforbart.com](http://www.victorfloresforbart.com)

**Social Media Handles**

- Twitter: @VicFlores4BART
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VictorFloresForBART>
- Instagram: @victorflores4\_bartd7
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/victor-e-flores-jr/>
- TikTok: @vflores4bart

**Expected total Fundraising Amount:** \$115,000

**Funds Raised To Date:** \$48,000

### General Questions

**1. What is your background/experience in Oakland or Alameda County?**

- a. I was born and raised in Oakland’s Fruitvale and have lived in a few neighborhoods in Oakland such as Columbian Gardens, Hoover-Foster, East Lake, and now Jack London Square.
- b. I worked for two Oakland City Councilmembers and worked on Public Works, OAKDOT, Code Enforcement, and other issues and projects. In my current role sound Land Use policy I’ve advocated for Oakland General Plan Updates to ensure we expand green space, better transportation, resilient infrastructure, and building more homes. As a staffer I attended multiple Neighborhood Crime



Prevention Councils and many community meetings to listen to constituents in order to learn how to address their concerns.

- c. I'm also leading my organization's work for the Oakland Alameda Adaptation Committee's public engagement and education efforts. This focuses on planning for adaptation measures for the estuary, San Leandro Bay, and Bay Farm Island around sea level rise.

**2. What are the top two challenges facing Oakland today? What are the bright spots?**

- a. The top two challenges in my opinion are housing and public safety. These two issues impact the other major challenges such as the general fund.
- b. The lack of housing in the entire state but specifically in the Bay Area which has created many jobs over the last two decades, has resulted in the search for affordable housing. Oakland has been severely impacted due to its relative affordability. This has led to displacement as housing costs have grown. I believe that and COVID has helped fuel public safety issues and increased homelessness. We can't implement strategies like Homes First if we don't have homes to place people in. Providing services for unsheltered focus is necessary and expensive. The more people we can keep in homes and get off the streets into housing, the more money we save to invest in other public services.
- c. Public safety is a major concern for every community I talk to whether it's about BART or Oakland. Through my recent work on workforce development, I know that there are a lot of local and national businesses that are interested in investing in Oakland but the two issues they have are public safety and housing. Regardless of whatever approach people want to take on public safety, we can all agree that accountability is necessary for any community to thrive. I am a systems impacted person who was arrested at 17 and tried as an adult to serve eight years in state prison. There was nothing about that experience that I would call rehabilitating. What did help me is my family and friends as well as a welcoming community in Oakland that provided opportunities and rewarded hard work. I'm proud to serve on the Neighborhood Opportunity & Accountability Board (NOAB), a youth diversion program that has about a 90% success rate. I understand the needs and complexities of our public safety staff through my work in the City of Oakland. I look at public safety as a three phase process: prevention through addressing root causes, intervention to catch people committing crimes and starting the accountability process, and finally rehabilitation/ reintegration. We need to invest in all those phases rather than solely focusing on intervention which typically only looks at arrests and incarceration but can also use diversion. When we create safer communities, it also means we can invest our precious public dollars into other services and infrastructure to improve the quality of life for our residents.
- d. Over half general fund revenues come from property taxes and business licenses. Without a safe, clean, and housed community, we will struggle to



increase those two sources of revenue as well as sales taxes. We need to address these two challenges in order to create a cycle of prosperity.

**3. Why are you running for office and why are you uniquely qualified to fulfill the office you are running for at this time?**

- a. I'm running for office because my work is about service, not politics. BART is looking at a fiscal cliff and half its board will be new after this election. BART Directors aren't just responsible for setting the district's vision, policy, and budget. Their ability to bring a coalition together and build consensus will be important for regional coordination. The relationships they bring and can build will help them bring resources back to BART. I have the vision, coalition, and relationships to support BART through these financial challenges. I also have the experience of working for the government as a staffer for policy makers and as departmental staff at the SFPUC. My work on land use and infrastructure, which includes transportation, also provides me a regional perspective to the challenges many Bay Area residents face around transportation and housing challenges. I am qualified because I have the experience, relationships, and work ethic to push BART to the next level.

**4. Prior to running for office, how were you involved in local government and/or your community? What were your biggest accomplishments?**

- a. I've worked in the public sector for the City of Oakland and San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. I've also been involved in many organizations such as the Lake Merritt Breakfast Club, Oakland Rotary #3, Gamma Zeta Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Latine Young Democrats of the East Bay, East Bay Young Democrats, California Young Democrats, NOAB, the Alameda County Community Corrections and Accountability Community Advisors Commission, and Oakland Latino Chamber of Commerce.
- b. I can't take sole credit for all the things I've worked on but the project I'm the most proud of has been serving on NOAB to provide Oakland Youth with a second chance and give them the resources they need to stay out of trouble and have a brighter future.
- c. I'm also proud of uplifting a bench of young and upcoming leaders by providing them with the resources and connections they need to be successful whether it's in government, community service, the private sector, or politics.
- d. I'm proud of all the land use plans I've worked on/ am working on that will create healthier, sustainable, resilient, and vibrant communities that generations of families will benefit from.
- e. Working on California Jobs First, a \$150 million fund for high road and resilient jobs has been one of the most challenging recent projects but it's a step forward towards building a more just economy that will create jobs our communities across the state will benefit from.



## BART and AC Transit

### **5. What is your vision for the agency in 15 years? What specific and measurable steps will you take to advance toward realizing that vision in the next 4 years?**

- a. My vision for BART is an system where every rider, especially parents and their children will find our service safe, clean, reliable, and enjoyable. Where each station is a hub of life where community is built. In 15 years I want BART to be the national example of financial sustainability and expanding its coverage and frequency.
- b. We can begin this process within four years by implementing three things: Community Hubs Program, Real Estate Investment Policy, Hub of Hope.
  - i. My concept of Community Hubs focuses on activating stations through consistent daily programming in order to turn each station into a destination point by making them places people want to spend time at. This will help diversify who our riders are, meaning we will get more riders who use the system for non-work related reasons. This includes supporting entrepreneurs from start up to brick and mortar by providing the space and technical assistance. We can start a pilot program with pop up markets, kiosks, and arts programing. Scaling up could look at constructing modular space within our stations. The final stage is integrating that with future Transit Oriented Development based on lessons learned so that we won't have high vacancies in our commercial real estate.
  - ii. My idea of a real estate investment policy is looking at Hong Kong's MTR Corps Rail + Property policy and making sure that all future developments include BART as an investor rather than just a land lessor. BART should capture the value of its real estate to reinvest the profits into transit operations, capital, and future real estate development. Doing so would also give us the funds for our own affordable housing units so we aren't completely reliant on competitive, and finite, subsidies like Low Income Housing Tax Credits, etc. We currently own 250 acres of land across the Bay Area which means we have a diversity of markets that can be better integrated within the regions primary transportation network.
  - iii. The Hub of Hope is a program in Philadelphia that was created to be a space where unsheltered folks on SEPTA's trains are able to go for shelter rather than sleeping on the train. There they will receive a bed, warm food, showers, and access to services. This type of idea could help reduce quality of life complaints while freeing up public safety resources to address serious and violent crimes.



- c. The two hubs could be funded by philanthropy which would mean BART will not need to dig into its limited resources to begin them. I will work to secure those philanthropic dollars.
  6. Please describe how you plan to address **ridership** if elected (or re-elected). Summarize the problem(s) your agency faces, how we can address them, and what trade-offs might need to be considered (if applicable). Please discuss your perspectives on:
    - a. Rider safety (including perceptions of safety)
      - i. Public safety is a major concern for me and everyone I talk to. I want to expand our ambassadors' and crisis intervention specialists ranks and improve cleanliness at stations and trains. We also have to ensure we fill vacancies for our police officers while expanding their training to ensure they do not place the lives of our riders at risk. I also want to bring SEPTA's Hub of Hub model to BART to support our unsheltered communities and free up resources for serious and violent crimes. Investing in all of these tools will reduce quality-of-life calls while freeing up officers to respond to violent and serious crime.
    - b. Cleanliness
      - i. I want to implement more frequent cleaning of the train cars by looking at what other agencies are doing such as having staff go into cars as they're traveling to clean up and also doing more robust cleanings when the train reaches the end of the line. We will need to ensure we have the staff and funding to implement this.
    - c. Coverage vs frequency
      - i. We need both but I believe that frequency should be a higher priority because the more reliable and frequent the service is, the more competitive BART will be compared to driving. This will lead to higher ridership and funding which will set us up to expand coverage. Coverage is important to cover service gaps and to provide services to communities that have been paying into the system for decades such as Eastern Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. If we expand coverage without high frequencies across the system then we will grow our operating costs without the ridership to increase operations revenue.
7. Please describe how you plan to address **operations** if elected (or re-elected). Summarize the problem(s) your agency faces, how we can address them, and what trade-offs might need to be considered (if applicable). Please discuss your perspectives on:
  - a. Fiscal sustainability
    - i. The biggest opportunity to become fiscally sustainable is to invest in our real estate. The trade off in this respect is that this activity will require more staff time and we will need to raise the seed capital to begin



investing. With community hubs, we can also build a pipeline of retail opportunities from pop-ups to brick-and-mortar that is supported by technical assistance. I support regional funding but see that as more of a cushion to allow our new investments and programs to mature.

- b. Service reliability
    - i. BART has major service delays with 43% being categorized as “Other” the majority of which is weather related (rain). We need to ensure we upgrade all of our infrastructure to be resilient to weather impacts and we also need to invest in upgrading facilities as well as continue maintaining it so that we don’t have accrued deferred maintenance which will cost us more in the long run. We also have staff that is stretched thin so we need to continue hiring so that the amount of mandatory overtime goes down and staff don’t burn out.
  - c. Equipment and vehicle maintenance & upgrades
    - i. BART has the Transbay Corridor Core Capacity Program which is investing in the new fleet, traction power, train control, and rail car storage. This will improve headways and reliability.
8. Please describe how you plan to address **public safety in the BART system** if elected (or re-elected). Summarize the problem(s) your agency faces, how we can address them, and what trade-offs might need to be considered (if applicable). Please discuss your perspectives on:
- a. BART Police policies
    - i. Use of force will always be an issue. While BART’s Police force has made strides in improving it’s policies, we need to maintain robust training and oversight so that we don’t endanger passengers.
  - b. Balance of sworn and non-sworn responders
    - i. Our sworn officers have a high number of vacancies with a large number also being or becoming eligible for retirement. Recruitment has been challenging as other police departments have experienced. We need to make sure we remain competitive so we can recruit more officers. Our non-sworn staff on the other hand are budget for 10 ambassador FTEs and 20 Crisis Intervention Specialist FTEs. We need to grow those numbers.
  - c. Specific opportunities to increase interAgency partnerships
    - i. Interagency Partnerships with other Transit agencies can be challenging due to resource constraints especially around service delivery and coordination. With municipal and county partners the problem can also be resource constraints and organizational silos. As someone that brings a broad coalition and relationships I can support BART staff in bridging some of those gaps and as we become more financially sustainable we can increase riders for everyone which will also increase revenue for our



Transit Partners as well. The trade offs with and collaboration is what do we have to give up in order to be good partners and calculating how that serves the greater good.

- d. BARTs role in addressing homelessness and mental health
    - i. BART has become the last resort social safety net for many who use it as a shelter from the elements. Due to our funding structure it makes it difficult to invest in programs that can support those who use our system to shelter or are going through mental health issues. For these reasons, I believe in bringing the Hub of Hope model to BART in order to have a centralized resource center that can support our unsheltered community with a place to go to where they'll have access to services. For folks experiencing mental health the challenge is that we service five separate counties and each county has their own mental health department. Coordinating with them has been challenging and this is another example of why I believe I can be valuable to the BART board of directors.
9. What is your plan to address your agency's **projected budget deficits** in the coming years? (\$35M projected deficit in 2026 and the ongoing \$350M deficit thereafter for BART and [\\$49M in FY2026 for AC Transit](#))
- a. As noted above, I believe that the Community Hub program, investing in our real estate, and hub of hope will move us to addressing our fiscal cliff by generating new revenue and changing the funding structure. We need to fight for a funding measure to cushion our path towards fiscal sustainability. I want to make sure any measure we put on the ballot is as winnable and equitable as possible.
10. What is BART's role when it comes to **real estate development**? What has it done well so far and what will you guide it to do differently regarding how it develops its real estate assets?
- a. BART's current role in real estate development is in constructing transit oriented developments, in communities that have interest. I think it's done a good job of getting 20-30% subsidized affordable housing and working with partners to get projects off the ground. How I would guide BART differently is ensuring we become investors in development, maximizing the amount of units we can get per development, and ensuring that the development is a catalyst for positive change in the neighborhoods where our stations and projects are located.