

BART's in Tracy sights

Council expected to OK participation

By Audrey Cooper, The Record Staff Writer, July 15, 2003

Tracy city leaders are expected today officially to sign on to the next phase of deciding if and how Bay Area Rapid Transit service should be brought over the Altamont Pass.

The City Council is scheduled to vote tonight on whether Mayor Dan Bilbrey should participate in policy planning related to the possible BART expansion. Bilbrey said he has been attending the various meetings, but the vote by the City Council would make him a nonvoting member of the policy committee studying the issue.

A recent study on the possible BART expansion indicates that various plans to extend rail or bus service over the Altamont would meet BART's criteria for expansion.

The options include using existing tracks to support diesel trains from Walnut Creek to Livermore and on to Banta. Also being considered is using dedicated bus routes to bring commuters to the Dublin/Pleasanton BART station.

Extension of the current BART trains is considered unlikely because of cost and the difficulties in getting the electric trains over the steep Altamont.

BART's project manager, Val Menotti, said he expects the BART board of directors to vote on the expansion by the end of the summer. After that, work could begin on environmental documents.

An environmental-impact report could take nearly two years. Rail or bus service could begin construction in five years or could take as long as 25.

Even if it takes decades before the first San Joaquin County rider climbs aboard a BART train destined for the Tri-Valley, Tracy city officials should be involved to protect future rights of way and plan for the rail extension, Bilbrey said.

"Think about the potential impact that could have on transportation, air quality, fuel resources and all the rest of the issues we talk about," he said. "It's not the answer, but it's a piece of the answer. If we could get a BART service to Tracy and Banta, who's to say it couldn't run to Stockton and Manteca and Lathrop and Modesto?"

Bilbrey said he would prefer to see a rail extension into Tracy instead of a dedicated lane for a BART bus. But more planning needs to be done, he said.

What seems to be the preferred route of a rail system would run through part of the Iron Horse Trail, a peaceful walking trail built on a Southern Pacific Railroad right of way established in 1891 and abandoned in 1977. Many houses in the East Bay back up to the trail, and it is unclear whether political support exists to build a rail system there.

According to BART projections, a rail extension could attract more than 24,000 riders -- at least 5,000 of whom otherwise would cross the Altamont Pass by car. The extension is expected to cost around \$1.3 billion. As envisioned, the trains would run every 15 to 20 minutes.

The BART train proposal is included in a possible list of projects that would be funded if San Joaquin County voters agree to renew a half-cent sales tax. The tax, known as Measure K, pays for local transportation projects.

But even if BART officials haven't solidified a rail plan by the time the renewal measure comes up on the November 2004 ballot, there are still options for paying for this county's part of the rail proposal, said Wil Ridder, a planner at the San Joaquin Council of Governments. COG administers the Measure K funds.

Meanwhile, local officials are discussing ways to make the Altamont Pass commute easier. The San Joaquin Regional Transit District has considered using rural roads and abandoned railroad rights of way to build a bus-only lane that would whisk commuters into the Tri-Valley.

No studies on that proposal have been completed yet, Ridder said.

BART to S.J. possibilities

- * Options include diesel trains on existing tracks from Livermore to Banta.
- * Another option is a dedicated bus route from Dublin/Pleasanton BART station to Tracy.
- * Expanding BART line into Tracy is unlikely because of difficulties getting the electric trains over the Altamont Pass.
- * Environmental- impact report could take two to five years to complete.
- * Project could take as many as 25 years to complete.

[Modesto Bee editorial, July 15, 2003:](#)

Under Bush, EPA exaggerates enforcement data

There's no nice way to put this. Under President Bush, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cut back on criminal investigations of polluters and manipulated the data to suggest the opposite. What constitutes a criminal investigation in today's EPA has been exaggerated and distorted to the point of deliberate deception.

Any call by any EPA agent, however casual, can be classified as an investigation. Thus, as one disgusted investigator told The Sacramento Bee, "I called the FBI and said, 'If you need us, give us a call.' That warranted a (criminal) case number. There was no investigation."

Pollution agency officials have seized upon the war on terrorism to boost the agency's enforcement numbers, at least as they appear on paper. Of the 674 enforcement cases officials claim they initiated in 2002, The Bee found that 190 were for "counterterrorism" efforts -- in many of them, like the call above, in which EPA was neither the major investigator nor a minor player. To record such a contact as an agency-initiated investigation is, as one agent said, "false." To be blunt, it is a lie.

EPA inflates penalties meted out to "polluters" in a similarly dishonest fashion. In April, the agency took credit for 471 years of prison sentences handed out to polluters in 2001 and 2002. The agency press release failed to note that a very large number of these cases involved drug traffickers. The EPA was brought in only to help dispose of toxic methamphetamine labs after the narcotics agencies already had completed the investigations that led to the arrests, prosecutions and incarcerations for which the EPA took credit.

While political spinners at EPA tout phantom enforcement, investigators responsible for fulfilling the agency's mission -- "to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment" -- complain anonymously to The Bee and other media that their work is being undercut. The number of EPA referrals to federal prosecutors has fallen 29 percent since the last full year of the Clinton administration. Enforcement budgets have been cut and personnel redirected to other duties. The agency's top enforcement official quit last year after documenting the Bush administration's systematic sabotage of enforcement efforts.

Under Bush, the EPA has been in full-scale retreat on environmental protection.

[Visalia Times Delta editorial: July 15, 2003:](#)

Improving air quality requires change

Growing public concern about California's air quality indicates that fewer people need to be convinced that the state and region have a problem.

The bad news is that most people still need to be convinced they are part of the problem.

Until that attitude changes, we shouldn't expect very much progress on cleaning the state's air.

The Public Policy Institute of California released results of a survey it took around the state as well as broken down by regions. Among the findings:

The number of people in the Central Valley who believe air pollution is a problem has grown by half over the past three years so that now 42 percent say air pollution is a big problem. In the Valley, 60 percent said the problem has grown worse over the past 10 years and only 20 percent think it can be improved.

Concern over bad air has remained about the same in other parts of the state, but overall, 80 percent said they are satisfied with the fuel economy of their vehicles, even though most people recognize that auto emissions are the state's biggest polluting problem.

In the Valley, that attitude is even more pronounced. Valley residents are more likely to believe that pollution arises from other sources and that the solutions should come from elsewhere.

Public attitudes about air quality are extremely important in finding solutions. Pollution is not a problem that can be handed off to lawmakers or corrected with large investments of money. Technological innovation can make a difference, but the real gains will come from changes in personal lifestyle. People will have to embrace those changes -- to drive smaller cars and less frequently, use public transportation and find alternatives to using heavily polluting machines.

Most people aren't ready for those changes, as the San Joaquin Valley found from the reaction on voluntary reduction of using wood-burning fireplaces.

As we have noted before, improving the air quality of the Valley and the state will require three distinct strategies:

- Public officials must be directed by the public to adopt regulations that will result in reducing pollution from all sources.
- California must encourage technological innovation and remove the restrictions that prevent them from being adopted.
- Individuals must embrace lifestyle changes that reduce pollution on a practical basis. That's going to take a huge change of thinking in our car-dependent culture.

At least more of us are acknowledging we have a problem. Now more of us need to recognize we are the problem.