Fresno Area Express
Bus Rapid Transit Project

City of Fresno
City Council Workshop
December 12, 2013
Bus Rapid Transit Project

- Purpose of the Workshop
  - Provide a better understanding of BRT and its connection to land use and air quality compliance:
    - Federal Air Quality Regulations
    - City’s General Plan Update
  - Topics to be discussed
    - History of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
    - Operational Overview
    - Implications on Public Transportation
    - Implications on development throughout the City, County and Valley
    - Next Steps
History of the Bus Rapid Transit Project

- BRT began as a result of the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint and Measure C Public Transportation Infrastructure Study (PTIS) (2006-2008)
  - Intended to mitigate the impacts of future growth
    - Improve air quality by reducing VMT and related harmful emissions, including greenhouse gases
    - Improve core services along key corridors that had been diminished by suburban growth pattern
  - Improve mobility choices and access for residents
  - Reduce reliance on automobile
  - Address concerns related to agricultural land preservation
History of the Bus Rapid Transit Project

Measure C 2008 PTIS Findings:

• The San Joaquin Valley is one of the most polluted areas in the United States
  ▪ Until recently the San Joaquin Valley continued to exceed Federal One Hour Ozone standards
    ✓ Eight Hour standard will be increasingly difficult to achieve
  ▪ Particulate matter continues to be a challenge in Fall and Winter months
• Since 1987, over 90% of Measure C dollars had been used to pay for new roads for fringe development
• New development is encroaching on valuable farmland
• Low density development is occurring in Fresno’s urban fringe where public transit doesn’t exist and probably won’t
• Very little traffic congestion makes it attractive to own a car
History of the Bus Rapid Transit Project

2008 PTIS Sample Policy Recommendations

- Adopt a new General Plan and zoning changes to support high capacity transit
- Reduce parking requirements for new development near BRT and other transit corridors
- Limit the extent of fringe development and expansion of the sphere of influence of cities within Fresno County
- Require that new development located within fringe areas bear the full cost of providing and maintaining streets and public infrastructure improvements
- Pursue funding to build BRT on Blackstone and Ventura/Kings Canyon
- Consider adding a third BRT corridor along Shaw Avenue some time in the future
- Continue providing demand responsive transit for rural cities until demand for fixed route service is achieved in rural areas
History of the Bus Rapid Transit Project

- 2008, Lawsuit was settled related to Fancher Creek (MAHA)
  - Retrofitting of buses
  - Funds BRT Transit Master Plan
  - Establishing a “transit impact” fee that would be used to fund capital improvements along these corridors

- In 2009, Council authorized “Small Starts” grant submission needed to fund BRT along Blackstone and Ventura/Kings Canyon Corridor
  - FAX was successful and received $38 million Federal grant in 2009

- The City began work on updating its General Plan relying on the implementation of BRT based on Councils approval of the BRT and secured funding
  - Planning Department began to initiate changes to 2025 General Plan
    - Envisions activity centers and high capacity transit corridors along Blackstone, Kings Canyon, Ventura, Shaw and California
History of the Bus Rapid Transit Project

2010 through 2012 - Funding

• Council approved more than $7.8 million for General Plan Updates and BRT related expenses
  ▪ $4.1 million on preparing General Plan, Code Updates and MEIR
  ▪ $3.6 million for BRT project management, design and engineering services and related environmental studies
  ▪ Authorized FAX to seek grant funding for operating assistance
  ▪ $3.5 million CMAQ grant to fund three years of BRT operating expenses
History of the Bus Rapid Transit Project

2010 through 2012 – Policy

- Council approved Alternative A on April 19, 2012, which includes BRT corridors, and directs staff to initiate an update and supporting MEIR

- Council approved BRT Mitigated Negative Declaration
  - Councilmember expressed concerns about Business Access and Transit lanes

- Council asked to approve revised Mitigated Negative Declaration that excludes BAT lanes
Operational Overview

Difference between BRT and traditional fixed route service?

- Wait times and customer boardings take less time
- Schedules are more reliable due to traffic preemptions/jump lanes
- Operating costs per passenger/hour have been shown to be lower than traditional fixed route service
- Travel times are faster due to fewer stops
  - Stops are located ½ mile apart compared to ¼ mile
  - Walking distance is generally comparable depending on access point
- Improved safety and level of passenger amenities provided at BRT stations
- Designed to attract a larger market share
  - Transit agencies have reported increases ranging from 20% to 120%
- Proven to increase private sector investment along and near the BRT
Operational Overview

- BRT operations are financially stable
  - First three years of operating costs covered by a $3.5 million CMAQ grant
  - Five year projections indicate that funding levels are sufficient to sustain BRT once CMAQ grant expires
  - Assumes that operating costs will increase by 2.5% annually
  - Assumes no increases in fares until FY17 ($0.10)
  - $9.0 million dollar operating reserve will be funded during this time
  - Other fixed route services will not be impacted
  - Seeking CMAQ funds to improve fixed route service along Shaw Avenue and to provide new service to Veteran’s Home on California Avenue
  - Capital funding and local match provided by Federal and State grants that cannot be used for street repairs or other public works projects
  - No Gas Tax funds, Flexible Measure C, etc., are being used
Implications on Public Transportation

Public Transportation Implications – No BRT Project

- FAX would need to identify $12.5 million in new funding to replicate service levels
  - $9.0 million for buses (eight replacement and ten new) to provide similar frequencies
  - $3.5 million to fund three years of operating expenses to replace the loss of CMAQ grant
    - Would delay ability to establish an operating reserve
    - Raise fares
- Service levels and convenience for the passengers will not improve
- Doubtful that simply adding more buses will spur reinvestment along BRT corridors
  - Will make it difficult to attract larger market share
  - Projected General Plan densities may not be achieved
Implications on Development throughout City, County and Valley

- Development Implications - No BRT Project
  - Consequences to development in the City of Fresno
    - Failure to approve BRT invalidates General Plan Update MEIR
    - New development projects anywhere in the City will not meet CEQA requirements and will be subject to litigation
    - New General Plan update could take 18 months to two years at an estimated cost of more than $3 million
  - Consequences to development in Fresno County
    - Fresno COG will not be able to comply with SB375/RTP requirements making development in every City and unincorporated areas in Fresno County vulnerable to CEQA challenges
  - Consequences to development in the San Joaquin Valley
    - Increased densities/VMT reductions from Fresno’s General Plan Update are required for the Region’s RTP to meet future air quality standards (e.g., eight hour ozone standard)
    - Non-conformance to air quality standards could jeopardize federal transportation funds, except for transit, in the San Joaquin Valley (estimated at more than $2 billion annually)
Why Not BRT?

- Operating costs per passenger are lower compared to traditional service, but offers better service and improved reliability
- Proven to be a catalyst for private investment along the corridor
  - Increased property values
- Federal grant paying for capital related expenses
  - Half the cost of a project such as Veteran’s Boulevard that is funded with local tax dollars
- Helps the City, County and Region to meet environmental requirements needed to allow all development to occur
Next Steps

- Approve revised Mitigated Negative Declaration that excludes Business Access and Transit lanes on Ventura/Kings Canyon (12/19/13)
- Award contract that will be used to finalize design and specifications (January, 2014)
- Award project construction and management contracts (January, 2014)
  - Includes enhanced public outreach efforts to property and business owners
  - Recommended by FTA funded Peer Review
- Award contract to construct stations, jump lanes and install traffic preemption equipment (March, 2014)
- Adopt General Plan Update and supporting MEIR (date specific)
  - Update will include zoning changes that will streamline TOD projects
  - TOD projects are less onerous under CEQA
Fresno Area Express
Bus Rapid Transit Project

City of Fresno
City Council Workshop
December 12, 2013