

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 it's 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 $\frac{1}{2}$ mile apart compared to $\frac{1}{4}$ 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 (\$.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)

Bus Rapid Transit Project

➤ 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

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