

## **EDITORIAL: Bus Rapid Transit essential to Fresno's future**

By The Bee Editorial Board

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Since it was first talked about in 2006, the Fresno City Council has backed the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project every step of the way. What's more, the city has had tremendous success in obtaining \$50 million in federal and state funding for the effort — in part because those branches of government recognize the ill effects of San Joaquin Valley air pollution.

But now some council members are expressing grave concern about a system that would speed up bus passenger travel along the Blackstone Avenue and Kings Canyon Boulevard corridors. They say they are concerned about BRT being a boondoggle that eventually will cost the city millions of dollars in annual operating losses.

Our sense is that their objections are fueled by something else: a wish to undo the 2035 General Plan Update that the council passed in spring 2012. Powerful developer interests have pushed to tear up the update, which calls for 45% of new growth to be infill.

The reality is that if the BRT project is shot down during the evening session of Thursday's council meeting, city leaders will have to draw up a new general plan update.

Based on what the city has spent on the approved update and the BRT project, such a decision would send \$7.7 million down the drain. That's not to mention the \$2 million more it would cost to author a replacement update.

Moreover, the fears raised and the arguments made by BRT opponents don't withstand scrutiny.

To qualify for the federal funding, the city had to show that the system would be viable long term. City Manager Bruce Rudd said that though he has been conservative with ridership estimates, the system pencils out beyond the first three years when it would receive operational subsidies.

Opponents also are using a political trick — arguing that any money invested in Fresno Area Express should be spent for other things (such as beefing up bus frequency on other routes). However, the federal and state grants that Fresno has received are solely for BRT. Meanwhile, the city is pursuing grants to increase the frequency of buses on Shaw Avenue, another busy corridor.

Finally, as Rudd wrote in a letter Monday answering concerns about BRT raised by the local Building Industry Association: "If the city does not move forward with BRT, new development

proposals within the city of Fresno's sphere of influence over the next five years will be extremely vulnerable to CEQA challenges. ... "

The Fresno City Council must move forward with BRT and give residents a much-needed upgrade in mass transit.

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