

EDITORIAL: Revised Bus Rapid Transit plan is a better fit

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By The Bee Editorial Board

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Supporters of the proposed Bus Rapid Transit system in Fresno were disappointed when it was voted down in January, but the BRT system that is scheduled to be voted on this week is a big improvement on the previous plan.

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When a majority of Fresno City Council members voted down a proposed \$50 million Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system at the end of January, some of those opposed to the project said they would work with Mayor Ashley Swearingin's administration to improve the proposal.

Council Members Clint Olivier and Lee Brand have kept their word. The BRT system that is scheduled to be voted on during Thursday's meeting is a strong improvement on the original plan — a plan that we backed.

What is better about grant-funded Fresno BRT 2.0?

For starters, it will cost \$13.5 million less to put together.

And it adds a third line of five miles — along Shaw Avenue between Fresno State and West Avenue — to the previously designated lines on the Blackstone and Kings Canyon/Ventura corridors.

How will residents get more for less?

Instead of buying 60-foot articulated buses, the city would purchase less expensive 40-foot buses with features designed for BRT operation. The BRT also would use "at grade" bus stations instead of elevated stations.

In addition to saving \$6 million in construction costs with at-grade stations — which still will allow people in wheelchairs to roll onto the buses — the city would have the flexibility of moving them around the city based on rider demand.

In a memo to council members, City Manager Bruce Rudd said that even with the changes, the BRT system would still include 10-minute intervals at peak demand periods, traffic signal coordination, pre-paid ticketing, real-time passenger information signs and buses with low floors, multiple doors and low emissions.

The project, Rudd said, "will result in improvements required to increase bus speeds and ensure high schedule adherence."

Olivier had considerable input into the changes. The suggestions, he said, came from a visit to Stockton and riding its BRT lines. Stockton started its system with 40-foot buses and at-grade stations. Now, with ridership going up quickly, it is ordering 60-foot buses.

Despite the improvements, Olivier said that he is undecided about the project. His concern is that the plan doesn't include security personnel at major stops such as the one at Manchester Center. With the expected increase in ridership, Olivier said, security personnel are essential to public safety and ensuring BRT's success.

We share Olivier's concern and urge Rudd and the council to add a security component to this otherwise excellent plan.

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