

Fresno city general plan/BRT proposals: A primer

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Fresno

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Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin will take a reworked Bus Rapid Transit plan to the City Council on Thursday. She is tying the proposal to a general plan outline that finally is getting some details. Here is a look at some of what is coming the council's way:

General plan

New growth would be allowed in specific areas west of Highway 99, southwest Fresno and southeast Fresno. Noticeably missing — north Fresno.

Future residential growth over the next two decades would be 58% new, 42% infill, compared to the original goal of 55%-45%. The reason: 2,500 units moving from infill to the proposed Southeast Growth Area project whose start most likely is many years away.

A specific plan will be done for southwest Fresno, reducing costs for private development.

Infill is to be anything within the city limits that meets the state definition — underutilized or vacant parcels in neighborhoods that are at least 10 years old.

Possible incentives for infill/rehabilitation projects include property tax abatement, impact-fee relief and pre-approval of plans. The council already has given authority to the city manager to waive city liens on properties.

Grants will be pursued for downtown public works projects. The state will be asked to take part in a loan guarantee program for mixed-use projects in downtown.

A rehabilitated property will count as infill if the owner invests at least 50% of the property's value.

City Hall at some point may seek an expanded sphere of influence, but only in southwest Fresno. The land would be put in an urban reserve until infill goals are met.

Bus Rapid Transit, backbone of an expanded public transportation system, must become reality.

Bus rapid transit

Service would be added to a third corridor — Shaw Avenue from Fresno State to West Avenue. The original plan proposed service along only the Blackstone Avenue and Ventura Avenue/Kings Canyon Road corridors.

All BRT buses will be 40 feet long. The original plan called for 60-foot buses.

There will be curb-level boarding on all three corridors. The original plan called for platform-level boarding on the Blackstone and Ventura/Kings Canyon corridors.

BRT stations on Shaw will be similar to current FAX stops, but will have amenities like fare machines. These stations will not poke into the inside lane. BRT buses will pull into traffic like FAX buses.

BRT stations along Blackstone and Ventura/Kings Canyon will poke into the inside lane. This will allow BRT buses after boarding to proceed without the inconvenience of oncoming traffic.

Things could change, but it appears regular FAX service would remain on Shaw. Among BRT's advantages — 10-minute service intervals at peak hours. It's unclear whether FAX service would continue on the Blackstone and Ventura/Kings Canyon corridors.

The cost of BRT service on Shaw would be covered by savings of approximately \$13.5 million from changes elsewhere in the plan.

— George Hostetter