

# Fresno City Council OKs \$1.5 million bus rapid transit plan

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/03/20/3833598/fresno-city-council-oks-15-million.html>

By George Hostetter

The Fresno Bee

March 20, 2014

The approval of Fresno's newest public transportation system had all the excitement of an empty bus stop.

The City Council on Thursday voted 6-1 to embrace a modified bus rapid transit project that promises faster service but in some ways looks nothing like the original plan.

Council President Steve Brandau was part of an in-house panel that came up with the new plan, then cast the lone no vote. With a sheepish smile, he said he's not convinced there's sufficient demand for BRT.

The council's action was administrative -- the hiring of a firm for \$1.5 million to provide project management services. But the symbolism -- there's no going back now -- was not lost on anyone.

"This is going to be a great benefit to the people of this community," Council Member Clint Olivier said.

With BRT, Council Member Lee Brand said, "you're moving people faster to places they want to go."

Council Member Paul Caprioglio said the revised plan protects taxpayers.

Council Members Blong Xiong, Sal Quintero and Oliver Baines smiled at this praise. It was only seven weeks ago that Brandau, Caprioglio, Olivier and Brand concluded a sometimes emotional seven-hour hearing by voting to kill the project on a 4-3 tally.

The four had many beefs. BRT was too ambitious. The federal government, which is footing much of the bill, is too oppressive. The tried-and-true Fresno Area Express service is treated like an orphan.

Views changed.

"I can't believe all the love coming from the dais," Quintero said.

BRT calls for an L-shaped route that starts on Blackstone Avenue near the River Park shopping centers, goes to downtown's Courthouse Park, then heads into southeast Fresno via Ventura Avenue/Kings Canyon Road. Fares are to be the same as on FAX. There will be 10-minute waits during peak hours of demand.

Buses in the new plan will be 40 feet long, compared to 60 feet in the original plan. Stations in the new plan will be of modest size, compared to raised platforms in the original plan.

The new plan was stitched together by City Manager Bruce Rudd with the help of, among others, Brandau, Brand and Olivier.

BRT has caused City Hall fits for years. What about other routes? Should there be dedicated bus lanes? Will drivers abandon their cars for a snazzy bus?

Thursday's hearing had uncertainty, as well.

The original BRT plan was to cost about \$50 million. The new plan is less expensive, though the bill's estimated size is unclear.

Rudd said he plans to find money for enhanced service on a five-mile stretch of Shaw Avenue. It won't be BRT, but it won't be FAX, either. It's also unclear when the Shaw service might become reality.

All that is irrelevant for now. The decisive BRT hearing has come and gone. About a dozen audience members spoke. The council chamber was a calm place.

Baines summed up the mood: "I'm glad we all love each other."

The reporter can be reached at (559) 441-6272 or [ghostetter@fresnobee.com](mailto:ghostetter@fresnobee.com). Read his City Beat blog at [fresnobee.com/city-beat](http://fresnobee.com/city-beat).