

Bus system is hot topic as Fresno council begins budget hearings

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A Fresno Area Express bus drives by Manchester Center.

FRESNO BEE FILE

Buses and lawyers took center stage when the Fresno City Council began budget hearings Thursday.

Mayor Ashley Swearingin is proposing a nearly \$1 billion spending plan for the fiscal year beginning July 1. The general fund budget -- money spent at the elected leaders' discretion -- is \$286.4 million.

The fate of that kind of cash will keep the council busy for the next two weeks. Department heads from Fresno Area Express, the City Clerk's Office and the City Attorney's Office took center stage on Thursday afternoon.

City Manager Bruce Rudd introduced new Transportation Director Brian Marshall. The purchase of new bus shelters and the rehabilitation of existing shelters are FAX priorities, they said. The department wants four police cadets to supplement security at transit centers in downtown and Manchester Center.

FAX in 2015 hopes to begin moving the Bus Rapid Transit system from expectation to reality. But it is the

old-fashioned bus system that grabbed council members' attention.

Several audience members asked the council to create a strong FAX service to the state veterans home in west Fresno. Council Member Oliver Baines, who represents the area, made a motion to do precisely that.

Motions go to vote at the end of the hearings.

City Attorney Doug Sloan said his shop is doing more with less. Council Member Lee Brand made a motion to hire a paralegal who would ensure that city clients comply with contracts. Brand said he believes the cost will be offset by higher revenues.

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