



Transit link project driving ahead

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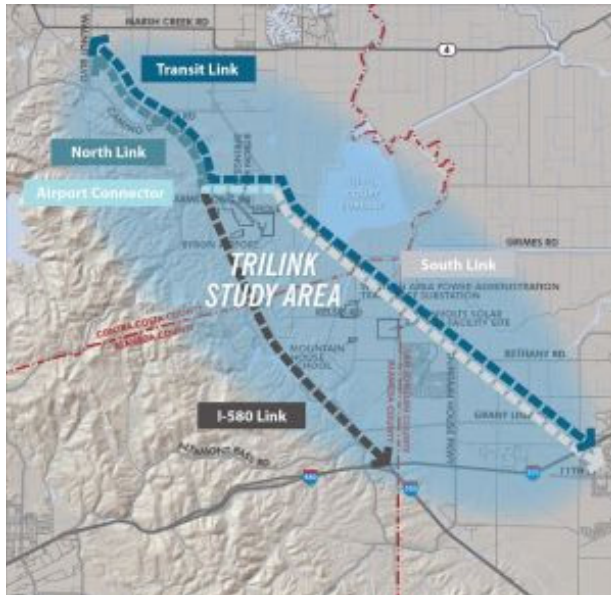
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The State Route 239 project that will eventually connect State Route 4 near Brentwood to I-205 west of Tracy is well off in the future.

But with each passing day, it becomes closer to reality.

The project, which could start as early as 2024 and include up to five corridor elements, is aimed at ending the cul-de-sac nature of Eastern Contra Costa County that lacks adequate connecting roadways to San Joaquin County.

“As far as East County and its connections to the Central Valley and San Joaquin County, we think transportation is vital to a robust and healthy economy,” said Matt Kelly, an associate planner for the



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TriLink Project

Plans for the 239 transit connector project, above, are aimed at ending the cul-de-sac nature of Eastern Contra Costa County that lacks adequate connecting roadways to San Joaquin County.

Photo courtesy of the Contra Costa County Transit Authority

Contra Costa Transportation Authority. "Creating new connections to the Central Valley as part of the TriLink Project would bring new economic opportunities to East County and support growth that is planned for both jobs and houses and enable shorter and safer trips for the residents connecting to the Central Valley and same for people coming from the Central Valley to Contra Costa County."



Possible key improvements include connecting State Route 4 to Vasco Road through a connection either east or west of Byron Hot Springs, improvements to Byron Highway that would connect into a planned interchange that the City of Tracy has planned on Grant Line Road and I-205, an I-580 link that would tie into a planned interchange at I-580 and I-205, and connecting Vasco Road to Byron Highway. A transit link that could include connecting Brentwood and Tracy by way of e-BART or rapid transit bus is also being explored.

Talk of the connecting route was first identified in legislative language in 1959 but heated up when the county received \$14 million from federal legislation in 2009 to establish a multi-jurisdictional partnership to explore options for the corridor. Since that time, a planning study has been conducted and transferred to the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA).

"I'm glad to see it resurrected because it was a dead issue for many, many years," said Brentwood Mayor Bob Taylor. "Now it's starting to be in the limelight."

The planned improvements are expected to be a boon for the region, helping support planned development and job growth, enhance the movement of goods, improve roadway safety and benefit emergency response, according to a Feasibility Study Draft Report recently released by the CCTA.

The transportation authority is exploring various different construction scenarios and the possibility of each link being built independently or together due to its high price tag, which could reach \$750 million. One key question yet to be answered is how the project will be funded, Kelley said. About \$242 billion in state, local and federal funds are available to help pay for identified transportation projects until 2020, but it's expected the project's steep price will force planners to seek supplementary sources of income. All funding options are being explored, Kelley said, including a transportation fee program, tolling fees, private financing or new funding initiatives.

"We are basically looking at all options for funding because there is nothing available today," Kelley said.

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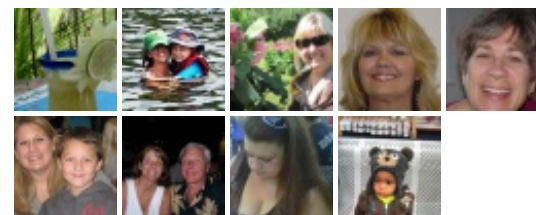
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Once the improvements are in place, however, the strain on Vasco Road, Byron Highway and the I-580 corridor should be relieved. Current estimates indicate the volume of traffic on Vasco Road and Byron Highway to be around 2010 levels in 2040 if all goes according to plan.

“The projections show the project will take traffic off both Vasco Road and Byron Highway and also over 580 on the Altamont Pass,” said Steve Morton of Parson Transportation Group, which has been helping the county since 2010 explore options for the SR 239 corridor. “Those will be the big reductions in traffic.”

Other possible improvements include travel lanes in each direction along Byron Highway as well as a standard shoulder and dedicated facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. As a whole, the project will also provide additional evacuation routes in the event of flooding or an earthquake.

“TriLink is an essential part of East County,” Taylor said. “It will also be very beneficial to the valley.”

The transportation authority, which recently completed a feasibility study, will now spend the next two to three years creating a series of project initiation documents, including a project study report to explore the scope, schedule and estimated cost of the project and an environmental impact report.

While the project is just a little more than a blip on the radar, the end result is expected to be worth the wait.

“It would be a reliever for those routes that are very heavy today,” Kelley said. “We think there are a lot of benefits to the TriLink Project.”

For more information about the project, visit www.trilink239.org.

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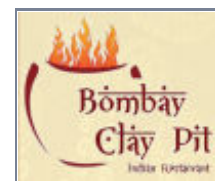
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