

No more East Contra Costa cul-de-sac? Meetings to discuss transit link to San Joaquin area

By Paul Burgarino Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

Posted:

ContraCostaTimes.com

Residents can voice their preferences this month for a long-sought transit link between the East Contra Costa region and San Joaquin Valley.

Several routes and travel methods are being considered for TriLink, a 20-mile rural stretch from Highway 4 south of Brentwood to interstates 205 and 580 near Tracy,

Modes being studied include an airport connector between Vasco Road and Byron Highway, a south link along the Byron Highway from the Byron Airport to Interstate 205, a north link from Highway 4 to the airport, a link from Highway 4 to the interstates, a transit link for buses or light rail and bicycle facilities.

Community meetings are being held in Brentwood, Tracy and Mountain House, with the first scheduled for 6:30 to 9 p.m. Thursday at the Brentwood Community Center.

TriLink, also known as Highway 239, could improve access for those who live and work in the region, while boosting the economy, said Andrew Hill, a project consultant hired by the Contra Costa Transportation Authority. Thus far, a dozen Contra Costa, Alameda and San Joaquin county agencies, along with environmental and business groups, have brainstormed project ideas.

"We're trying to see if any or all of this will pencil out," Hill said. "Now, we're taking it to the public to see what they think the key issues are and their wants."

Most agree there is a travel gap caused by having only two-lane country roads to the east, especially with the emphasis on improving East Contra Costa transportation from the west.

"The entire region could become a huge benefactor from this. It could really open the area up," said Brentwood Mayor Bob Taylor, who represents the city on transportation issues.

Some nongovernmental stakeholder groups have cautioned the road expansion could lead to gridlock.

There is no funding or planned construction for any of the options being discussed. Depending on options chosen, county officials say the project could range from \$30 million to \$700 million.

Highway 239 was first identified more than 50 years ago and approved by the state Legislature, but studies have progressed slowly. Contra Costa County was granted \$14 million in federal earmarks for planning in 2005, receiving Caltrans' approval to access the money in January 2010.

About \$2.9 million is going toward the project's planning.

"It really seems like (the plan) is way in the future, but the future is quickly becoming the present," Taylor said.

Based on this month's public input, the TriLink project will undergo a more detailed study involving Caltrans over the next year, including an environmental review, Hill said.

Contact Paul Burgarino at 925-779-7164. Follow him at [Twitter.com/paulburgarino](https://twitter.com/paulburgarino).

IF YOU GO:

What: Town hall meeting on TriLink or Highway 239 project

When: 6:30 to 9 p.m. Thursday

http://www.contracostatimes.com/east-county-times/ci_23141060/no-more-east-contra-costa-cul-de-sac

Where: Brentwood Community Center, 35 Oak St. Meetings will also be held May 8 in Tracy and May 16 in Mountain House, as well as a "virtual open house" on the TriLink website.

Information: Go to www.TriLink239.org