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Readers Forum: eBART will deliver cost-saving, efficient transit to East Contra Costa County

By Joel Keller, Gail Murray and Federal Glover
Guest Commentary

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THE TIMES recently published a guest commentary ("BART is Shortchanging East Contra Costa County, Nov. 21") which said, "Livermore is getting a 'real' BART extension while East Contra Costa is getting eBART."

The eBART Project is a 10-mile extension from the BART Pittsburg/Bay Point Station to the city of Antioch using Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) technology instead of conventional BART technology, which is one option the BART to Livermore project may consider using — and only if funding is ever identified.

The DMU technology planned for eBART is an affordable and funded option that is capable of providing BART-quality service. Conventional BART is 2.5 times the cost of eBART or \$1.2 billion vs. \$462 million. The eBART Project is designed to allow for a future conversion to conventional BART, if funding is identified.

Ultimately, the purpose of eBART is to take cars off Highway 4 and reduce CO2 emissions, which will result in a cleaner, less congested environment for everyone. Utilizing DMU technology meets that goal as soon as possible.

With eBART, there will be a station in Pittsburg at Railroad Avenue and a terminus station near Hillcrest Avenue in Antioch. Passengers will transfer between DMU and BART trains at the transfer platform east of the Pittsburg/Bay Point Station by walking across a platform of approximately 28 feet, similar to the transfer at the MacArthur BART Station.

BART has worked tirelessly with the cities of Pittsburg, Antioch, Oakley and Brentwood, and with Contra Costa County, the Contra Costa Transportation Authority and the California Department of Transportation, to name a few of the many agencies and groups involved in the eBART planning process.

BART has worked with our partner agencies for several years to secure the \$462 million needed to construct the project. It would take many more years to find the funds needed to bring conventional BART to East County.

The eBART Project is currently fully funded and on schedule to break ground in 2010 and to begin service in 2015.

Meanwhile, in the Livermore corridor, BART is preparing a program level environmental review of alignment alternatives that could provide service to Livermore. The main purpose of this preliminary step is to identify the preferred route and the right-of-way that needs to be preserved.

This environmental review document is expected to be completed and certified in spring/summer 2010; it does not evaluate any technology.

Once the initial review is complete, another, more specific environmental impact review process must begin, including evaluation of several different technologies.

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Furthermore, the alignment alternatives for the proposed Livermore extension vary in length and cost from 5.2 miles at \$1.2 billion to 13.2 miles at \$3.8 billion. It would take many years to secure the funding needed for construction of any alternative.

East Contra Costa County residents need and deserve a rail transit option now. The eBART Project delivers service equal to that of conventional BART, provides a cost-effective and technology-appropriate system, and does so in the next five years.

Keller and Murray are members of the BART Board of Directors, and Glover is a member of the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors representing East County.

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