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Contra Costa County wants more clout on BART board

Contra Costa directors say their county is underrepresented on the transit board.

By Denis Cuff

dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com

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Contra Costa County deserves more clout on the BART board, say two local officials who are angling to get the county a bigger share of the pie during the decennial redrawing of the transit agency's elected boundaries.

Just two of the nine elected BART representatives -- who oversee everything from setting fares to adopting police policies -- are from Contra Costa, even though it is the second largest of the three counties in the transit district.

"We have to find a way that the 1 million people who live in Contra Costa County are represented by their fair share of directors," said BART Director Joel Keller, of Brentwood, a longtime advocate of rail extensions in Contra Costa County.

His cohort on the board agrees: "The county's representation remains a concern to me," said Director Gail Murray, of Walnut Creek.

But finding a way to redraw BART's nine districts so that three will sit within Contra Costa County will be a struggle.

The BART board is considering station locations, the ethnicities and incomes of voters and other criteria for grouping together "communities of interest" in districts that are each supposed to average about 374,000 residents.

Another factor is the political reality that four directors live in Alameda County, the biggest BART county, and three directors live in San Francisco, the smallest county but the most popular destination for train riders.

BART Director Tom Radulovich, of San

Francisco, said he doesn't like the idea of making county boundaries a dominant priority in drawing district lines.

"We represent people, not counties," Radulovich said. "We shouldn't be trying to play a zero-sum game in which some counties lose or gain. It's in the public's interest to do things that benefit the entire transit system."

The redistricting is required every 10 years to equalize populations based on the census.

While a state commission draws boundaries for California lawmakers, it's up to local boards such as BART's to draw the political boundaries determining voters in a district.

On Monday, BART begins a series of 10 public workshops seeking comments on how to redraw the districts.

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San Francisco has about 805,000 residents, Contra Costa about 1 million and Alameda County about 1.5 million residents.

Figures released by BART make clear that some district boundaries must shift to the east to accommodate population growth in eastern Contra Costa and Alameda counties.

The biggest population growth occurred in Keller's District 2 in eastern Contra Costa County, and John McPartland's District 5, which includes eastern Alameda County and a portion of the San Ramon Valley in Contra Costa County.

The most difficult and politically delicate districts to redraw appear to be those in the middle of the system, not on the eastern or western ends, said BART Board President Bob Franklin, of Oakland, whose District 3 also includes Kensington in Contra Costa County.

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One area -- District 7, represented by Director Lynette Sweet, of San Francisco -- has slices of all three counties. It includes a portion of eastern San Francisco, but most of its residents live in Contra Costa and Alameda counties in an area stretching from Richmond and San Pablo to Oakland and Berkeley.

Sweet rejects the notion that Contra Costa is underrepresented on the BART board, because parts of the county are included within the boundaries of five separate districts.

Sweet said that up to five BART board members could live in Contra Costa County if Contra Costa candidates won board races in the districts with some of its territory.

The first election with the new boundaries is in November 2012. Murray, McPartland, and Franklin said they plan to run for re-election, while Radulovich and Sweet said they haven't decided whether to run.

"I've worked hard to serve Richmond and other Contra Costa areas in my district," Sweet said. "My address should not be the only factor in judging my performance."

Contact Denis Cuff at 925-943-8267. Follow him at [Twitter.com/deniscuff](https://twitter.com/deniscuff). Read the Capricious Commuter at www.ibabuzz.com/transportation.

If you go BART public meetings on redistricting:

- ALAMEDA COUNTY
- 6:30 Wednesday at Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter, 101 Eighth St., Oakland.
 - 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Centerville Community Center, 3355 Country Drive, Fremont.
 - 6:30 p.m. Oct. 10, San Leandro Library, 300 Estudillo Ave., San Leandro.
 - 6:30 p.m. Oct. 13th, Livermore City Council Chambers, 3575 Pacific Ave.
- CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
- 6 p.m. Monday at Richmond City Council chambers, Civic Center Campus, 440 Civic Center Plaza.
 - Noon to 1:30 p.m., Wednesday at Pittsburg Senior Center, 300 Presidio Lane.
 - Noon to 1:30 p.m. Oct. 11, Lafayette Library, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd.
- INFORMATION: www.bart.gov. Click on the link for redistricting meetings.

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"I've worked hard to serve Richmond and other Contra Costa areas in my district," Sweet said. "My address should not be the only factor in judging my performance." What a waste of time. This is a non-story. The board serves their district for what? If it is solely to pick new Bart Station locations then why not have all areas represented on the board? I am not sure if it is a paid board position but eliminate that and see how interested many will be. If the T stands for Transit, what other purpose can the board serve?

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