

Track sharing could let BART to extend service as far as Tracy

By Mike Adamick

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Posted on Wed, Aug. 03, 2005

BART commuters could chug into the Central Valley under a proposal that would extend train service beyond Contra Costa County and create a new Northern California rail network.

A key Central Valley rail agency is studying ways to use the same tracks as BART's 23-mile extension into East County to continue the route to Tracy and beyond.

The San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission, which operates the Altamont Commuter Express, has commissioned a \$500,000 study to review new commuter train lines as the Central Valley population grows.

ACE or any new commuter train would "complement" the proposed eBART extension, not compete with it, said Stacey Mortensen, executive director of the commission.

"We would take a more supportive role," she said.

That could mean that BART commuters would be able to ride from San Francisco to Byron and possibly as far as Tracy, she said.

The new route, one of many to be studied, would offer an alternative to driving on Highway 4 or on Interstate 580 -- the most popular route from Stockton to the Bay Area.

BART board president Joel Keller said the transit district would be open to the idea, but finding money would be a problem.

"It would be a logical extension and a good train network for a growing part of the region," Keller said. "But those are visionary things with no foreseeable funding."

The roughly \$400 million, 23-mile BART extension known as eBART is in the midst of a two-year environmental review.

That plan would see diesel-powered trains running from the Pittsburg-Bay Point station to Antioch, Oakley, Brentwood and Byron. Construction is expected to be complete in 2010.

The extension would run along a Union Pacific rail bed and could continue into Tracy if more money becomes available.