

TRAIN PLAN INCHES AHEAD BRENTWOOD COUNCIL VOTES YES ON EBART MEMO, BUT RAISES SOME CONCERNS

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BRENTWOOD - The Brentwood City Council moved a step closer to eBART, the long-awaited diesel train service that promises to connect East County with the rest of the BART system. Council members on Tuesday agreed to execute the latest "memo of understanding" between transit agencies and various cities, but did voice concerns that the latest, most final draft wasn't available to them before the meeting.

"I support the project of course, but I'm concerned because we haven't had the chance to look at the document," said Councilman Bob Brockman. "I'd like that opportunity." Transit officials explained by saying the new version wasn't ready until late in the day Tuesday, but did offer a presentation on the major document revisions. They also promised to get the new memo to the city.

Vice Mayor Ana Gutierrez noted that Tuesday's decision was not to approve the actual memo, but to authorize Mayor Brian Swisher to sign the document once the city manager and other Brentwood staff members have had a chance to review it.

The council voted 4-0 in favor of the execution, with Swisher absent.

The memo has been revised several times based on concerns that East County cities have _ for example, cities here don't want to be penalized if projected ridership figures don't jell. They also want assurances that the transfer point from eBART to the BART station in Pittsburg will be smooth and efficient; otherwise, they say, people won't ride it.

The memo's constantly changing language is something those involved say is necessary, so that when environmental studies begin, cities and transit agencies are on the same page. Pittsburg and Antioch have approved the document with revisions, and Oakley approved it this week. Officials there, however, had the same concerns Brentwood council members had about the document's availability.

An eBART train in East County will require the assistance of local jurisdictions to prepare ridership development plans. The proposed route includes portions of Pittsburg, Antioch, Oakley, Brentwood and Contra Costa County. Authorities are saying construction could begin on the project in 2007, and that the train could be running by 2010.

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