

East County Times (Antioch, CA)
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EBART EYES FAIRGROUNDS FOR STATION
ANTIOCH: FAIR ORGANIZERS BALK AT MOVING THE \$1.1 MILLION ANNUAL EVENT TO AN
ANOTHER LOCATION IN THE COUNTY
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With an **eBART** light rail station proposed for the 80-acre property, Antioch's fairgrounds faces an uncertain future.

Concrete plans have not been drawn up or negotiated, but officials say the swath of land that is home to the annual Contra Costa County Fair would be an "outstanding" station site.

"It's a good location for downtown access, providing service for the community around there and as an opportunity for high-density development," said **eBART** project manager Ellen Smith.

The station would be part of a roughly \$400 million Bay Area Rapid Transit extension, which proposes diesel-powered trains running from the Pittsburg-Bay Point station to Antioch, Oakley, Brentwood and Byron.

Service is expected to begin in 2010.

Three of the six stations envisioned as part of the 23-mile extension would use land in Antioch. Proposed station sites include the fairgrounds, Hillcrest Avenue and a shared site on Empire Avenue.

Antioch plans to begin studying the potential for riders in March or April.

Even so, the fairgrounds' managers said they haven't been approached to sell the land and have not officially taken a stance on whether they would want to move the fair.

"We will be working with obviously whoever wants to talk to us about our facility, but we need them to come talk to us about it," said Lori Marshall, chief executive of the fairgrounds.

If plans for a station do proceed, **eBART** would expect to use about 10 acres for a station and hope to encourage high-density housing and a transit village on the remaining land at the fairgrounds, **eBART's** Smith said.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission approved a policy last year requiring an average of at least 2,200 apartments or single-family homes within a half-mile radius of each proposed station before the agency will give them federal funds.

The fairgrounds are operated locally but the property is owned by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, which funds about 10 percent of the fair's annual budget.

Mike Treacy, director of the state's Division of Fairs and Expositions, said there haven't been any discussions about shuttering the fair.

The Contra Costa Fair has a \$1.1 million annual budget and is considered medium-sized. There are 78 fairs in the state.

Contra Costa has struggled with attendance in recent years and in 2000 moved its dates from the end of July to the week after Memorial Day. The new dates allowed it to become the first fair in a regional lineup _ including San Joaquin, Alameda and Solano counties' fairs.

Contra Costa's annual attendance has fluctuated during the past five years, with about 58,179 fairgoers last year, up about 9 percent from 53,173 in 2000.

The fairgrounds also is the site of multiple events throughout the year, including group events, wrestling, auto races and private celebrations.

Some fair board members are in favor of moving the fairgrounds - possibly to the recently released Concord Naval Weapons station - and letting mass transit take over. Others say a station doesn't belong in the 10th Street spot.

"I know that BART has taken out a tape measure, but that is not the right place," said Barney Parsons, longtime board member and former Antioch mayor. He fears that the land's proximity to Antioch High School would cause traffic problems when combined with a mass transit. Board member Jeff Clark said he would like a decision from BART in time to compete for a spot on the old naval weapons station.

"The fair is viewed as an East County fair and not the Contra Costa Fair," Clark said. "I think a more centrally located fairgrounds could kind of give it new energy and a new pool of people to draw from for attendance."

The fair board was scheduled to hear a presentation from an Antioch planner and Smith this week, but the meeting was canceled because of a lack of quorum, officials said. The meeting has been rescheduled to next month.

Victor Carniglia, deputy director of Antioch's community development, said the city believes the fairgrounds are the best potential site but "the fair board needs to be on board."
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Breakout- Want to know more?

For information about **eBART's** proposed site locations: www.ebartproject.org

For information about the Antioch fairgrounds: A Contra Costa fair board meeting with an **eBART** presentation is scheduled for 7 p.m. February 1 at the fair office, 1201 W. 10th St. in Antioch, or reach the fairground office at 925-757-4400.