

Pittsburg rejoins regional transportation alliance

By Paul Burgarino Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

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There are no more bumps in the road; Pittsburg is officially back in a key regional transportation planning alliance.

Member agencies in the East Contra Costa Regional Fee and Financing Authority have finalized a deal bringing the city back into the group three years after it separated because it thought local projects were being shortchanged.

The new pact sets \$5.5 million in funding for Pittsburg's long-sought 1.7-mile extension of James Donlon Boulevard and a future eBART station; establishes a rigid project priority list for the region; and locks all member agencies into the authority until 2031.

"We're happy with the unanimous vote on the settlement and pleased that by rejoining, it accelerates and provides certainty for James Donlon and BART," said Pittsburg Vice Mayor Sal Evola, who represents the city on transportation issues.

The money allows Pittsburg to acquire right-of-way, secure environmental clearance and design James Donlon, a long-sought two-lane expressway through the steep hills south of town. About \$196,000 would cover legal fees.

Pittsburg will also again receive local "return to source" funds, as TRANSPLAN, which oversees regional plans, withdrew its objections with the county that the city is out of compliance with regional transportation standards.

Agency members say they are eager to move forward.

"It's a relief to have it resolved," said Brentwood Mayor Bob Taylor, who represents that city on transportation issues. "To have all of the cities back as a cohesive group as we address more issues in the future is good for us all."

County Supervisor Federal Glover, of Pittsburg, points out that being united makes it easier to lobby for state and federal dollars.

"We've been able to see success when working together," said Glover, noting that about a billion dollars' worth of transit improvements are currently under construction. "But no one is going to want to give support where there is a divide."

After Pittsburg left the authority in September 2010, TRANSPLAN sued the city the following April. It appeared that a settlement had been reached in summer 2012, but the offer was abruptly withdrawn in November, and the suit was dropped.

After that, the two sides worked on a new compromise.

"I think we were all probably surprised it took as long to resolve as it did," Taylor said.

Taking commuters off Buchanan Road will greatly benefit residents in Antioch and farther east, Evola said.

Past studies indicate that about 90 percent of the traffic on James Donlon would not be Pittsburg commuters.

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