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McNerney has high hopes for transit

Incoming congressman's \$2.6B vision: BART extension to Tracy

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Inside Bay Area

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DUBLIN — Incoming Rep. Jerry McNerney hasn't even taken his seat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and he's already thinking big.

At a groundbreaking at Dublin City Hall on Friday for a \$9 million traffic management project for the Tri-Valley, McNerney said he hoped to secure federal money for a BART extension down the middle of Interstate 580 — all the way to Tracy.

"BART to Livermore and Tracy — these are things that I'm very interested in," said McNerney, a Democrat who Nov. 7 wrested the 11th Congressional District from Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy. As a member of the committee, McNerney added, "I will have the opportunity to bring projects to our area."

McNerney, whose new district comprises much of San Joaquin County and includes the Interstate 680 corridor in Alameda County and part of Contra Costa County, said improving links such as I-580 and BART "fits into my plan to bring economic development to San Joaquin County."

BART officials estimate that it costs roughly \$100 million per mile to extend its heavy rail lines, which would ring up McNerney's 26-mile extension at \$2.6 billion.

The groundbreaking gave officials and the public a showcase for several projects aimed at alleviating long-standing traffic headaches along I-580, culminating in an unfunded ideal of a 12-lane highway that includes carpool lanes and a median wide enough for a BART extension or other mass transit line.

Even if such a large project couldn't be done, McNerney said that BART at a minimum should connect to the Stockton-to-San Jose Altmont Commuter Express rail line.

The project McNerney helped kick off Friday will use devices such as radar counters to give highway managers better information about backups and accidents. That information in turn would help them clear wrecks more quickly, alter on-ramp metering lights and get messages to commuters via roadside signs and a Web site.

Transportation officials welcomed McNerney's enthusiasm but cautioned that even getting BART to Livermore would be an uphill battle.

"In order for BART to be successful, we have to have a lot of local money in it. We can't expect the federal government to pay for it," said Randy Rentschler, spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. "We're fortunate if we can get a 50-50 deal," such as the federal grant that made possible the BART extension to San Francisco International Airport.

Santa Clara County already has secured \$2 billion in funding for BART to San Jose, but the project is on life support because officials have been unable to secure the remaining \$2.7 billion balance of the project's cost.

"If they can find the money, then it can happen," said BART spokesman Linton Johnson. "But at this point, there is no money."

On the other hand, officials said, the new Democrat-run Congress, combined with the Bay Area's own Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, becoming House Speaker, could make the project possible.

McNerney is "talking about something that I think most people believe is the case, that there is this large federal commitment to mobility," Rentschler said. While that isn't currently true, he added, "maybe Congressman McNerney can change that. He's certainly on the right committee to do that."

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