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NEWS

Rail authority to reimburse cities

For cost of analyzing electrification project

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The California High-Speed Rail Authority is promising to reimburse cities along the train tracks for their time analyzing the agency's project, but Atherton officials don't want this to be seen as buying the town's approval.

The town of Atherton is currently suing Caltrain over its electrification project, which is needed as Caltrain plans to switch from diesel to electric trains.

Atherton's lawsuit says that electrification is described as a "standalone" project separate from high-speed rail. But the changes necessary for electric trains will make the tracks compatible with the high-speed rail system.

Concerns about conflict

At Wednesday's City Council meeting, City Attorney Bill Conners said this reimbursement agreement with the rail authority is separate from the lawsuit. This should not be seen as buying the town's approval of the high-speed rail project, he said.

Vice Mayor Mike Lempres said it makes sense for the town to seek reimbursement for its time, but not if it means giving up its legal rights.

"We don't intend it that way," Ben Tripousis, northern regional director for the rail authority, told the Post Friday.

This reimbursement agreement is a "standard agreement" as part of the development process, he said.

It's for cities and agencies to recover the costs for their time that they wouldn't have incurred if not for this project, Tripousis said.

Council voted Wednesday to have Conners prepare and authorize City Manager George Rodericks to execute a reimbursement agreement to recover costs associated with town officials' time spent to review legal documents, plans and environmental reports related to high-speed rail.

If an agreement is reached, it wouldn't be retroactive, Rodericks said. So any reimbursement starts at the time the agreement is signed, he said.

Up to \$250,000 per city

Between San Jose and San Francisco, Tripousis said 15 cities, three counties and various other agencies are being offered reimbursement.

The rail authority is offering up to \$250,000 per city or agency, Tripousis said. Some cities will receive more money than others, he said, because they have more work to review, such as San Jose which will be one of the cities with a train station.