

SANDAG calls for look into magnetic train link

By Jeff Ristine
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Some say a magnetic levitation train link to a regional airport in Imperial County is a visionary solution to San Diego's air-transportation needs. Others say it would add so much time and cost to a flight that travelers simply wouldn't use it.

A regional planning agency hopes to look into a more fundamental question: whether a maglev link over the mountains and desert is even feasible.

Yesterday, the San Diego Association of Governments' Transportation Committee started the process of finding a consultant who can look into the engineering and design issues and finish the study by April.

The hurry-up deadline could give the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority a chance to use the findings in selecting from its nine options for a future airfield, the farthest of which is in southwestern Imperial County.

U.S. Rep. Bob Filner, D-San Diego, who got \$800,000 into a federal transportation funding bill for the study, came by to promote the idea of a Shanghai-style, 300-mph maglev.

In Filner's vision, the train would zip along elevated guideways, mostly above the median of Interstate 8, with bridges replacing the mountain switch-

backs. Filner said he would like to see the line stretch to Arizona, making San Diego a port for Yuma.

A \$200,000 match from SANDAG will be needed to draw all the federal money.

The conversation quickly turned, however, to a hitch in the federal funding. Filner, whose district includes the southernmost strip of San Diego County and all of Imperial County, earmarked the money for an east-west link only.

To the extent any local official can criticize a congressman who has just handed them \$800,000, committee members said they wished the funding provided for the study of maglev along Interstates 5 and 15 as well.

Developer Sandor Shapery, recently given a nonvoting seat on the SANDAG board of directors, has been trying to whip up interest in a maglev system linking Lindbergh Field to Los Angeles International Airport. The six-county Southern California Association of Governments has been looking into a 275-mile system that would connect several airports.

SANDAG executive director Gary Gallegos said the agency will ask consultants whether it's possible to perform a parallel study on the feasibility of north-south maglev lines. Absent a change in the federal legislation, SANDAG would pay for such a study itself.