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| |  | | --- | | **Richmond, transit agency bullish on planned commuter ferry service to San Francisco**  **By Robert Rogers Contra Costa Times**  Posted:   06/22/2012 06:30:25 AM PDT  Updated:   06/22/2012 01:49:04 PM PDT    Ferry service linking Richmond and San Francisco by 2015? The San Francisco Bay Water Emergency Transportation Authority likes the odds.  About 40 Marina Bay residents, property and business owners and city officials gathered at the Harbormaster Room at the Marina Bay Yacht Harbor on Thursday to hear officials outline plans for a commuter ferry that would take riders from Richmond to the San Francisco Ferry Building in about 35 minutes.  "It would [start](http://www.contracostatimes.com/news/ci_20912675/richmond-banking-proposed-commuter-ferry-service) out as a commute only (service)," said Chad Mason, a transportation authority planner.  The proposed ferry would initially accommodate about 300 people, mostly Richmond residents who commute to San Francisco, Mason said.  The Richmond terminal would be at the southern tip of the [Ford](http://www.contracostatimes.com/news/ci_20912675/richmond-banking-proposed-commuter-ferry-service) Peninsula, just a few steps from the Craneway Pavilion. The site is desirable, Mason said, for its ample parking, deep water and continued growth in residential and commercial development in Marina Bay and other areas in Richmond.  The Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory has selected Richmond's southern shore area as the site of its next lab, which would bring hundreds of [jobs](http://www.contracostatimes.com/news/ci_20912675/richmond-banking-proposed-commuter-ferry-service) to the city and could be completed by 2016.  "It was exciting news for us and everyone else when Cal chose this location" for its new lab, Mason said.  Mason said the project would be funded mostly by about $22.5 million from Measure J, a Contra Costa County sales tax measure aimed at improving transportation.  Advertisement  Residents asked Mason whether recent troubles with a Marina Bay railway underpass project -- which is on hold because of a dispute with the state Department of Finance -- would dim the prospects of the ferry project.  Mason said no.  "Our project happens with or without that," Mason said.  Mason said environmental review for the project should take six to nine months, followed by about 18 months of final design and construction.  Fares would be between $6 and $7 each way, Mason said.  By 2035, Mason said, the ferry service could become the preferred daily commute for 1,080 to 1,700 people.  The proposed new Richmond terminal would replace an existing ferry facility consisting of a gangway, float, ramping system and piles, according to a transportation authority information flier.  The authority is bullish on Richmond's prospects for growth.  "The planned development of [employment](http://www.contracostatimes.com/news/ci_20912675/richmond-banking-proposed-commuter-ferry-service) centers is likely to transform Richmond into a destination as well as an origin for ferry service," according to the authority's project website.  Max Scheder-Bieschin, CFO for Ekso Bionics, a Marina Bay-based firm that engineers exoskeletons for people with disabilities, said many of his employees would welcome a ferry as an alternative to driving from San Francisco.  "Let's get this (ferry) as soon as possible," Scheder-Bieschin said. | |