

News Brief – Bakersfield Californian

Nov. 7, 2002

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) - An appellate court here has denied a request by environmental groups to block construction of the new University of California campus in Merced.

The 5th District Court of Appeal denied a request from the San Joaquin Raptor Rescue Center, Protect Our Water and the Central Valley Safe Environment Network for a stay on Wednesday.

The groups hoped the court would temporarily halt construction after a Merced County Superior Court judge said last month that plans for the campus met state environmental requirements. Judge William Ivey's ruling cleared the way for construction to begin on 100 acres.

Environmental groups claim university officials did not adequately evaluate the campus' impact on air pollution, water quality and surrounding areas.

University officials broke ground for the first phase of the campus, which includes classrooms, libraries and an office building, on Oct. 25.

Letters to the Editor – Bakersfield Californian

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Fight urban sprawl

That traffic congestion in our fair city is approaching that of much larger communities is beyond dispute. But simply widening the streets or adding traffic lanes is not the answer any more than letting out one's belt is the solution to obesity. Short-term thinking doesn't deal with long-term problems: there are too many vehicles on our roads, not to mention many of them are over-sized, contain too few passengers and are driven too fast.

Next time you are stuck in traffic, count the number of vehicles going by that contain merely one person. Air and water pollution, noise levels, consumption of petroleum resources, deteriorating streets and many other problems demand better city planning, including incentives for in-fill development, improved public transportation, promotion of car pooling and safe bike lanes. Urban sprawl is a lose-lose proposition and simply widening streets is feeding a bad habit.

JEROME KLEINSASSER, Bakersfield

Survey wastes our money

My mother received a questionnaire in the mail from Caltrans a couple of weeks ago. It said that on April 25, between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., she (or whoever was driving her car) was driving northbound on Interstate 5 north of Gorman and south of Lebec.

Some of the questions were: where did her trip begin and end? How many stops did she make, and where? What was the purpose of her trip? What kind of home did she live in? What was her household's total income? And what kind of business was she in?

When she called Caltrans to make sure this wasn't a scam, the person who answered the phone said, "Just throw it away, we've had so many complaints about this."

I don't even want to know what this cost us. And then Caltrans says to throw it away. Plus, if you filled it out, you would be entered in a drawing for a cash prize of \$1,000, \$500 or \$200. That's \$1,700 right there.

I fail to see how this questionnaire can improve the quality of our roads, but it is just typical of more unnecessary spending of our tax dollars.

I think it must be a prerequisite for these decision makers to be idiots. What happened to good old common sense? I call these people educated idiots. Give me good old-fashioned common sense any day.

PATSY SADLER, Bakersfield

Group wants to take S.J. on transportation odyssey

Meeting aims to raise support for public transit issues

By Audrey Cooper

Record Staff Writer

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It's a sure way to get a headache.

Think about the traffic, the endless highway construction to faraway strip malls, the limited number of bike trails, whether sidewalks exist on your route to work, whether a wheelchair-bound resident could cross at an intersection, whether there is a bus route that would get you home at night.

There are plenty of transportation needs, and a transportation-advocacy organization is targeting San Joaquin County for a new outreach campaign.

The nonprofit group Odyssey is planning a community meeting Thursday to get residents excited about pushing for new transportation solutions.

The Sacramento-based group is made up of labor representatives, manufacturing officials, politicians and transportation experts who agree that public transit should become more of a statewide priority. The group pushes for everything from walking paths to commuter rail systems.

And the group's focus has turned to the Central Valley, said Odyssey's executive director, Kristina Egan. It is pushing for specific projects in Sacramento and Fresno.

"In Stockton, it's a little different. One of the unique things is that there isn't an organized group of people pushing for better transportation. But through interviews, we have found there is a real concern about the future of transportation there," Egan said.

A number of transportation-policy decisions are looming. The San Joaquin Council of Governments, a regional transportation-planning agency, plans to try in the next few years for voter approval of a half-cent sales-tax increase for transit programs. The current half-cent tax approved by voters in 1990 and managed by COG expires in 2011.

Also, Congress soon will have to reauthorize the federal transportation bill, which could have major ramifications for federal spending in California, Egan said.

"These decisions are going to change the shape of not only Stockton but all of San Joaquin County, and a public coalition could really help make those decisions," Egan said.

County transportation planners say they'll welcome any extra help, but add that they've already made public transportation a high priority here.

COG's deputy director, Andrew Chesley, said that one-third of the money raised by the half-cent Measure K tax is spent on mass transit. That's more than most counties spend, he said.

Odyssey's public outreach in Stockton is paid for in part by the San Joaquin Regional Transit District.

Stacey Mortensen, executive director of the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission and Altamont Commuter Express, sits on the Odyssey board of directors. She said the group fulfills a missing link in public transportation planning.

"It's a great thing, because they're out to form grass-roots support for public transportation where there isn't a lot out there today," Mortensen said.

"A lot of people get involved in highway projects and where to put stoplights, but there is a real disconnect between people's public transit needs and desires and actually building those needs into the decision making," Mortensen said.

More public support for transit could benefit the county's bus system, COG and the rail commission, she said.