

Officials make case for county

By MELANIE TURNER, MODESTO BEE STAFF WRITER, November 7, 2002

Stanislaus County leaders painted a picture before state transportation commissioners Wednesday of an area that has lots of problems, from poverty and high unemployment to bad air and unsafe roads.

At the same time, they portrayed the county as one that is done whining and ready to take matters into its own hands to make life better.

The discussion came during a roundtable meeting in Modesto, with the Stanislaus Council of Governments hosting the California Transportation Commission. The commission is scheduled to hold its regular monthly meeting in Modesto today.

Stanislaus leaders hope their message will resonate with commissioners, who are in a position to help the county get money for projects.

"We want to be a good partner," said Paul Caruso, a county supervisor and chairman of the Stanislaus Council of Governments.

Commissioner Kirk Lindsay of Modesto said many people have tried in the past few years to make life better.

Some 45 people gathered for Wednesday's discussion, including representatives from the Great Valley Center, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board and city of Modesto.

Officials talked about air quality and the appearance of Highway 99. They described projects that are behind schedule, such as the Kansas Avenue-Needham Street overpass that has been on the books 50 years.

But officials also outlined what is being done to improve things, such as a task force working to improve Highway 99's appearance and StanCOG's plan to build a project without the California Department of Transportation, in an effort to speed up the work.

Modesto Mayor Carmen Sabatino said he was jealous of San Joaquin County. But once he discovered that San Joaquin is able to get major projects built more quickly because it has a sales tax for transportation, he decided that Stanislaus needs the tax, too. He and others are working to bring the half-percent tax to a future ballot.

But other officials said changes like these are not easy.

A similar measure failed in Merced County on Tuesday, and a 30-year extension of Fresno's transportation tax, on the books since 1986, also failed.

Barbara Goodwin, executive director of the Fresno Council of Governments, told commissioners that big transportation projects could be "cut off at the knees" if the valley does not meet air quality benchmarks and sanctions are imposed by federal regulators.

"We want assurances that we'll have the money to complete the projects," she said.

Commissioner Allen Lawrence of Los Angeles asked, "Certainly we're concerned about project delivery, but what are you doing to stay ahead of the curve?"

Officials described efforts to adopt air district rules, and new legislation to impose tougher smog check requirements on Bay Area auto owners -- but added that the required cleanup is daunting.

The valley is endeavoring to cut 300 tons of air pollution daily, from the total of roughly 1,000 tons.

[Fresno Bee Editorial, November 7, 2002](#)

The next Measure C

A painful lesson in compromise could be fruitful in the long run.

There are some vital lessons to be extracted from the rubble of Measure C, the failed extension of the Fresno County sales tax for transportation needs. We need an extension of the tax to pay for crucial projects here, and it's clear that we can't rely on the state for much help. A new measure must be crafted and passed by voters before the existing Measure C authority expires in 2007.

Perhaps the first lesson to learn is what damage can be done to any tax measure's chances at the polls when rancor and division dominate the discussion. Serious people raised serious objections to the measure that failed Tuesday, and those objections must be met.

At the same time, the vocal opposition to this measure made it impossible, almost from the beginning, to clear the daunting hurdle of the two-thirds majority the measure needed. Members of that opposition must not savor this outcome as a triumph. A new measure that is simply a wish list from those who objected to this one would likely fail by an even larger margin.

This is about politics. That means compromise. Some did not regard this measure as a useful compromise -- and it doesn't take many such voters to kill such a measure. The bitterness that some Measure C proponents now feel must be allowed to dissipate, and quickly, along with any inclination to gloat on the part of those who brought the measure down.

But a successful Measure C will inevitably contain elements that do not please everyone. **It is crucial to address air quality issues in a serious and aggressive way. It is also crucial to understand that those problems have taken a long time to reach the current emergency levels; erasing them will be a task of many years as well -- whatever path we choose toward that goal.**

Those who wish to see greater funding for mass transit must understand that some amount of road building -- perhaps even some freeway work -- will be part of any successful extension. Those who think roads and freeways are the solution to congestion and poor air quality must understand the growing horror in many people's minds at the thought of ever-advancing urban sprawl. Rail consolidation, addressing the needs of the disabled, rural transportation, pothole repair, more and better bus service -- it's got to be a comprehensive set of solutions.

People who seek a better quality of life -- and that's really what we're talking about, in the broadest sense -- are going to have to accept certain elements in any overall plan that may make them grind their teeth. Creating that better life will not happen all at once under the best of circumstances. It won't happen at all unless all the parties are willing to get started now on what we can agree upon, and keep working on the rest of it. That's the political reality.

So let the steam vent from this failed dry run, and then get going on a better plan -- which means one that can win a two-thirds majority.

[Fresno Bee Opinion Piece, November 7, 2002](#)

'Sparing themselves'

By Carlos Guzman
Fresno

I remember the first time I saw the "Pollution Solution" bus rolling down Cedar Avenue. Although it looked a little odd with its blue tone and cartoon characters, I convinced myself that this city-backed effort at awareness was well worth it. I thought, "More power to you and the cause of Fresno Area Express."

Then one day I saw a completely black bus with a fitness spa ad passing by. A few weeks later I spotted a fiesta-colored bus advertising Mexican cuisine. And there's that red, white and blue Crime Stoppers bus for those who want to take a bite out of crime. This one came with TV ads to boot.

To my dismay, I realized our city leaders were actually sold on the idea of complete muni-transit "body makeovers." This done in the interest of sparing themselves the headache of having to deal with fiscal constraints that plague just about every public entity today.

I'm no City Council member, but I do know an ugly bus when I see it. Apparently I am in good company.

I hope the City Council will show some backbone and put forth some real effort in coming up with financial solutions to municipal deficits. With all the commercialism plaguing our society, is trading part of our city's identity (trivial as some may think) worth being reduced to becoming a hawker for some membership-only health spa?

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, November 7, 2002](#)

'Get on board'

By P.L. Pettey
Fresno

Jason Laney, your weather columnist, said in his "Weather Watch" of Nov. 1, how nice it was to smell the aroma of fireplaces.

Obviously, Mr. Laney has no dear ones in our city with severe asthma or other breathing difficulties.

Meteorologists, above all, should be sensitive to the problems of our air pollution. Woodburning fireplaces are a major contributor to our dirty winter air. At least one homebuilder has begun adding natural gas fireplaces to his new construction to help keep our air clean.

I wish Mr. Laney would get on board.

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, November 6, 2002](#)

Freedom up in smoke

Well there goes some more of our freedom ("Fireplaces might go cold next year," Front Page, Nov. 1). I don't see how someone can tell me what I can do and can't do in my own home. If I want to use my fireplace it should be up to me, not some committee. Isn't it taking away our freedom? I thought this was a free country. Next there will be a committee telling me how to and where I can worship. If so, I'm out of here.

RODNEY BRADSHAW

Ceres