

Oakland Tribune - April 6, 2004

San Joaquin Valley's transit needs explored (Reps. explore transit needs)

By Dave Myhra, STAFF WRITER

TRACY -- The San Joaquin Valley's transportation potential, including a study of a possible freeway between Tracy and San Jose, dominated an appearance by local officials and the chairman of the House Transportation Committee on Monday.

Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, flew in to Tracy on the heels of House passage of the federal transportation bill that could bring more than \$30 million in road project funds to Rep. Richard Pombo's 11th Congressional District.

The district includes Tracy and portions of the San Joaquin Valley along with Pleasanton, Danville and San Ramon.

Pombo was on hand for the appearance along with Tracy Mayor Dan Bilbrey, Dublin Mayor Janet Lockhart and Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Atwater.

Young landed at the Tracy Municipal Airport in a private plane to say a few words about the transportation bill.

The money will go to projects including the Tracy Interstate-205/Chrisman Road interchange, the SJRCC/ACE Commuter Train project and the Contra Costa County Brentwood-Tracy Expressway.

The widening of Interstate 205 was not on the list of projects because it cannot be totally paid for by the federal government, Pombo said.

Young advocates integrating more freeways, public transportation and opportunities for air travel and water travel to ease congestion and move products.

"We have great challenges in this country; the average person spends 68 hours sitting still in traffic," Young said, adding that the congestion prevents the nation from moving products.

Pombo and Young took a small commuter plane to San Jose after the event to get a first hand look at Bay Area traffic choke points and bottlenecks.

"You can see that better from the air," Young said.

Pombo won federal money for a study on a freeway that would run from Interstate 5 south of Tracy to San Jose.

The plane trip also served as a way to "look at the possible route," Pombo said.

Bilbrey sounded an optimistic note.

"We don't have (traffic) problems in San Joaquin County, we have opportunities," he said.

This visit will help some of those opportunities come to fruition by "reinforcing conversations we've had with (Young) over the last two years," Bilbrey said.

Lockhart concentrated on the influx of people into the communities east of San Francisco and the effects that those new people are having on local highways.

"It's vitally important to receive funds for improvements," Lockhart said.

She said that funds for Interstate 580 were especially needed because the freeway connects Dublin and other cities in the Tri-Valley to San Francisco and the main state transportation corridor, Interstate 5.

Tracy, aside from the opportunity to showcase some transportation needs, was happy that its airport, which has its own transportation applications, was the site of the meeting.

"It puts the emphasis on our airport and ... its boundless possibilities," Tracy City Councilwoman Evelyn Tolbert said.

[Washington AP- Thursday, April 1, 2004](#)

Dirty air could persist beyond 2015 in some areas, EPA says.

H. JOSEF HEBERT, Associated Press Writer

Many of the nearly 350 U.S. counties in violation of federal air quality standards because of smog or soot are not expected to achieve compliance without additional local pollution controls, the head of the Environmental Protection Administration said Thursday.

Mike Leavitt, the EPA administrator, told a Senate hearing that "well over half" of the counties are expected to be in compliance by 2015 because of tighter controls on diesel trucks and power plants. But the agency's preliminary estimates show that dozens of counties won't be compliant by then and some areas with severe pollution won't come into compliance before 2019, he said.

More than 110 million people live in areas with unhealthy levels of ozone and 65 million people in areas that have too much soot in the air, Leavitt said. Smog and soot are leading causes of severe respiratory illnesses.

Leavitt promised that by April 15 the EPA would produce a final list of counties that do not meet the more stringent air quality standards for ozone -- a precursor of smog -- and follow with a list of areas not meeting the soot standard later this year.

He produced preliminary numbers, based on 2000-2002 data, that shows 346 counties nationwide -- mostly in the eastern third of the country and southern California -- in violation of one or both of the two air standards.

"We will bring well over half of counties now monitoring nonattainment into attainment with the fine particle (soot) and ozone standards between now and 2015," Leavitt said in testimony at a Senate Environment and Public Works subcommittee hearing.

He said the EPA is focusing on reducing two major sources of pollution to clean up the air: a cap-and-trade program to reduce nitrogen oxide and sulfur releases from power plants and requirement for cleaner diesel fuel and less polluting large truck engines.

The tougher smog and soot requirements were issued in 1997 to address concerns that the old standards did not adequately protect vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and people with respiratory illnesses. But their implementation has been delayed because of unsuccessful court challenges by the trucking and other industries.

Leavitt said that state and local officials will have three years to submit plans on how they intend to clean the dirty air and come into compliance.

"Attainment dates (for smog) are expected to range from 2007 to 2019, depending on the severity of the ozone problem and other factors," said Leavitt.

As for microscopic soot, Leavitt said the EPA anticipates issuing by December a final list of counties failing to meet the new, tougher standard. State plans for reducing soot levels will be due by February, 2008. Compliance is expected between 2010 and 2015, he said.

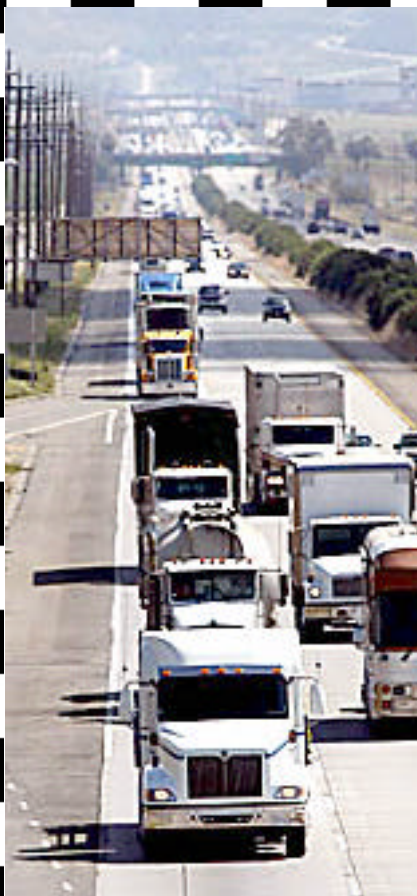
Leavitt said the preliminary estimates show that by 2015 the number of counties in noncompliance for ozone will drop from 226 to 27, for soot from 49 to 16, and for both pollutants from 71 to eight.

[Bakersfield Californian](#) - **Posted:** Monday April 5th, 2004, 11:20 PM

Tolls: Driving a hard bargain

Fresno mayor wants valley visitors to ante up at toll booths, but critics wonder if funds would really be used for roads, air

By MARYLEE SHRIDER , Californian staff writer
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Recent traffic on Highway 99 flows smoothly in both directions as seen from the Highway 166 overpass, a short distance before Highway 99 meets I-5.

Fresno Mayor Alan Autry wants better highways and cleaner air in the Central Valley, and he wants passing travelers to pay for them.

Autry is proposing to make Highway 99 a toll road, with toll booths at both ends of the Central Valley. He said a \$1 toll per vehicle could raise \$50 million to \$60 million annually to repair and expand the highway and help clean the valley's dirty air.

"I don't believe we can survive with the 99 in the shape it's in and still handle more than 10,000 trucks a day. And that's not counting the cars," he said.

Autry unveiled his proposal in January, but many details are still on the drawing board. He said there is no doubt the traffic that passes through the valley via Highway 99 will continue to grow -- including the heavy truck traffic that is vital to the state's economy.

Problem is, the state doesn't have the funds for the maintenance and expansion necessary to support such growth, he said.

"If you have to go through the valley at 45 miles an hour because of congestion, that causes increased pollution. If the state's not going to give us the money to fix this, what do you do?" he said.

Alan McCuen, Caltrans deputy district director for planning, said the state has a commitment of \$1.2 billion for road improvements -- \$950 million of which is allocated for the 99 corridor. Every two years, the state typically makes additional fund commitments that range from \$4 to \$6 billion, but there will be no such commitments this year, McCuen said.

"Because of the budget problem, we've tightened things up so much we couldn't add any projects to this two-year cycle. About once a decade we end up with some financial strait that's significant, like this," he said.

Several toll roads already exist in California. Toll revenue is intended for improvement and expansion, McCuen said.

"That applies to bridges, too, to pay for upkeep and toll collectors' salaries. That's the intent," he said.

Autry's Bakersfield counterpart, Mayor Harvey Hall, said he appreciates any idea that might generate a new revenue source, but questioned whether the tolls would have much impact on Central Valley smog. "I doubt the \$1-per-vehicle toll Autry is suggesting will do much in terms of cutting the number of cars on the road, but every idea on infrastructure opportunities should be followed up on," he said.

Hall said Autry's idea, if based on sound theory, could have merit, though he's concerned that money generated through tolls would not necessarily go to improve the highway. "It's like the fox guarding the henhouse. Any time you dabble around with state funds, you have to worry about another money grab from the state," Hall said. Autry wants to include in his proposal an exemption for valley residents, leaving the bulk of toll payments to visitors and truck traffic. He said it's important that the collection of tolls focus on those who enjoy the benefits of travel on Highway 99, but don't contribute to its upkeep.

"Right now we have too many trucks coming through and the only thing they're leaving behind is the refinery oil they're spewing into our atmosphere," he said. Autry said the trucking industry, which generates some of the most polluting emissions, is not being unfairly singled out.

But some trucking company officials said that remains to be seen. Roland Wiebe, general manager of H&B Equipment Co. Inc., said he hadn't heard about the proposal, but wouldn't be opposed to paying a toll if there were some residual benefit to the trucking industry. "It would be a benefit if trucks had their own lane or if trucks were allowed to go faster -- other states permit trucks to go 70 to 75 miles per hour with no problem," he said. Wiebe said trucks are a contributing factor in traffic congestion, but it's their speed, not their number, that's the problem. "They permit trucks to use the two right lanes, but they're going so much slower than the rest of traffic," he said. McCuen said the construction of toll booths on any state highway would require legislative action. Autry said he's already getting positive feedback for the plan in Fresno and other areas of the Central Valley, where air pollution is a major concern.

Brian Wise, executive director of Operation Clean Air, a collaborative of business, government and community leaders from Central Valley counties, including Kern, said the group is studying Autry's proposal.

"We don't have enough information yet, but we have formed a committee to look at the possible impacts," Wise said.

Autry, a committee member, will address the board of Operation Clean Air on April 19 at the University of California Merced Center in Bakersfield. Until then, the coalition will make no decision on whether to support the plan, Wise said.

In the meantime, the mayor promised to continue his efforts to drum up support. The funds needed to repair, maintain and expand Highway 99 must be found soon, he said. "We need to fix Highway 99 in this generation, not two or three generations from now. We're going to hang on like a bulldog until we get it done," he said.

Bakersfield Californian - April 6, 2004

City report on plans for bridge released

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Page: b1 **Section:** Local

City planners released a draft environmental impact report last week on plans for a 1,200-foot bridge along Allen Road across the Kern River. The bridge, which is slated to be built in 2005, would connect Allen Road north of the river with future extensions of Ming Avenue and Allen Road to the south, and will accommodate three lanes of traffic in each direction, a four-foot median, bike lanes and sidewalks.

The draft report released by the city examines the project's impacts in areas including noise, **air quality** and the ecology.

City planner Marc Gauthier said he believed noise from both construction and traffic on the bridge would be the most difficult impact to cope with. There are existing houses on the north side of the river west of Allen. Another subdivision is in the midst of construction south of the river on the east side of Allen.

To help reduce noise, the design of the bridge incorporates a five-foot sound-dampening wall, the first such bridge in the city to use such a design, Gauthier said. But Gauthier warned that construction of the bridge's supporting structure would be a noisy affair.

The project could actually benefit the region's **air quality**, Gauthier argued, by providing a pathway for faster and smoother traffic flow in the area. (Stop-and-go traffic and idling vehicles tend to produce more pollution than vehicles moving at a constant speed.)

City planners said the bridge, which has been in various planning stages for more than 10 years, is intended to help keep up with burgeoning growth in southwest Bakersfield.

Several big housing and commercial projects have been started or planned near Allen, south of the river. Local developer Castle & Cooke has plans for a new subdivision that would accommodate three schools, 12 parks and up to 20,000 people, Gauthier said. Another half-square-mile of land has been zoned for a large commercial development between Pacheco Road and Panama Lane, said planner Martin Ortiz.

The new bridge would also help route traffic to and from the proposed Westside Parkway, a major new highway designed to connect northwest and southwest Bakersfield with the center of the city. Copies of the draft environmental report are available at the City Planning Department at 1715 Chester Ave. Comments must be submitted by May 17. A public hearing on the project will be held May 6 before the city Planning Commission, Ortiz said. Comments on the draft report and responses from the city Planning Department will be incorporated into a final environmental impact report.

The project is expected to cost about \$8 million, all of which will be covered by traffic mitigation fees paid by developers, said assistant Public Works Director Jack LaRochelle. All the land needed for the right of way has been acquired, Gauthier said.

LaRochelle said the city will be undertaking two other major road projects in 2005: a \$15 million project to route Highway 178 under Fairfax Road in northeast Bakersfield, and a \$20 million bridge spanning Mohawk Street across the Kern River, also an element of the Westside Parkway.

[Tuesday, April 6, Modesto Bee](#)

ENERGY

Power plant up for debate

by Tim Moran

One power plant has been approved for construction in the Altamont Pass and another is still undergoing government review. The California Energy Commission announced last month that it needed more information on air quality and water supply for Midway Power's natural gas-fired, 1,120-megawatt Tesla Power Plant, and the commission expects to take up those issues Thursday at an evidentiary hearing and a public conference. The hearing is set for 11 a.m. and the conference for 6 p.m. at the Tracy Community Center, 300 E. 10th St. Calpine Corp. won approval in August for an 1,100-megawatt plant in the Altamont Pass; construction has not begun.

[Tuesday, April 6, Lodi News Sentinel](#)

Local officials, children work together to help Lodi remain a 'Tree City'

By J. Paul Bruton, News-Sentinel Staff Writer

Lodi Mayor Larry Hansen read a proclamation, elementary students read poems extolling the grandeur of trees, and free trees were given away to anyone wanting to take part in helping the environment.

Three elementary students from Lakewood School Junior Garden Club helped with the ceremonial planting of an oak tree.

Presented by the Lodi Public Works, Parks and Recreation and Community Development departments, Spring Fest 2004 is an event aimed at educating the public about the vital importance of trees in our community. By participating in the Spring Fest event, the city also achieves certain requirements to maintain its status as a "Tree City USA" said Mayor Larry Hansen.

"We have been designated as a Tree City USA for two years and we are working toward our third year of recognition," Hansen said. "To maintain that designation, there are certain requirements that we have to fulfill, such as an educational program, a tree planting program and a tree giveaway."

The National Arbor Day Foundation operates in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and the National Association of State Forests to recognize towns and cities across the U.S. that meet their standards for the Tree City USA program.

Towns and cities want to attain the designation as a Tree City USA for more than just the title, Parks and Recreation Superintendent Steve Dutra said. The designation comes with financial incentives aimed at getting more trees planted in each city.

"One of the benefits of the program is that when we apply for a tree grant, since we hold the designation as a Tree City USA, we get extra points," Dutra said. "This helped us receive a \$23,000 grant, and helped us plant 225 trees in the city streets and 75 more in our parks."

"This also saves the city money, since those trees were bought and planted with the grant money, that's more money that can remain in the city coffers for other purposes."

Lodi currently has 8,000 trees in city streets, and another 5,000 in parks, Dutra said.

"And these are just the trees we know are counted, that are on public property. This doesn't include all of the trees on private lots and properties," he said.

Other groups involved in the Arbor Day event included the Lodi Garden Club, Lodi Lake Docents, and the Lodi Garden Club. These groups donated over \$350, as well as volunteer hours, providing educational materials for the community.

Tree facts

- Trees keep our air supply fresh by absorbing carbon dioxide and reducing oxygen.
- An acre of trees can remove up to 2.6 tons of carbon dioxide each year.
- In one year, a single tree can absorb as much carbon as is produced by a car driving 26,000 miles.
- Shade and shelter provided by trees helps to reduce heating and cooling costs by \$2 billion per year.
- Trees cut down on noise pollution by acting as sound barriers.
- Trees improve water quality by slowing and filtering rain water and they help protect aquifers and watersheds.
- Trees are the longest living organisms on earth.
- Trees lower air temperature by evaporating water in their leaves.

Largest, tallest and oldest trees

- Amazingly, California is home to the tallest, largest and oldest trees on earth.
- One of the largest trees known is the General Sherman, a giant redwood sequoia located in Kings Canyon National Park. The tree is approximately 275 feet tall and is 25 feet in girth.
- The world's tallest tree is a coast redwood in Redwood National Park near Crescent City. It is over 360 feet tall.
- The world's oldest trees are 4,600 year old bristlecone pine trees, found in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest Inyo County.

-- News-Sentinel staff

According to City of Lodi Street Supervisor Tom Evans, 175 more trees -- oak, ash and pine -- were on-hand at the event, and all were being given away to Lodi residents.

Arbor Day is an annual observation that celebrates the role of trees in our lives and promotes tree planting and care. The nationally recognized tree celebration day began in Nebraska, where more than one million trees were planted on April 10, 1872.