

Highway event pushes passage of bond package

BY David Burger, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger stopped by a Kern County highway junction Tuesday to promote what he called a "historic" \$37 billion bond package for education, housing, levee repair and transportation.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, left, joins in with California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Bakersfield Mayor Harvey Hall, right, along Highway 99 and Highway 65 gaining support for an infrastructure bond on the November ballot. The program calls for \$1 billion in improvements to Highway 99.

The bond package, passed by the state Legislature Friday, needs only to be signed by the governor to be put on the November 2006 ballot. If approved, it would be the largest bond package in the state's history.

Schwarzenegger was flanked by other speakers Bakersfield Mayor Harvey Hall, state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, and state Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield. They spoke behind a podium that proclaimed "Investing in California's Future" and in front of the intersection of Highways 65 and 99.

"This is the year for rebuilding California," Schwarzenegger said.

The governor held his news conference next to Highway 99 because \$1 billion in the proposed bond measures are expressly devoted to upgrading that highway.

"(Kern County residents) were sick and tired of being stuck in traffic," the governor said.

The bond measures have four aims: \$10.4 billion to improve education; \$2.9 billion to make housing more affordable; nearly \$4.1 billion to repair levees and improve flood control; and \$19.9 billion to fund road repairs and reduce congestion, leading to better air quality, the governor said.

Spokespeople for the governor provided handouts that specified what Kern County might get if the bond measures are passed by voters.

The beneficiaries might include Greenfield Union and Rosedale Union Elementary school districts for new school construction.

Two hundred million is proposed for school bus retrofitting to reduce air pollution and exposure to diesel exhaust.

Florez's support for the measures stems in large part for the bus retrofitting; he said cleaner air and healthier children will be the benefits. He added that this fall he plans to campaign with the governor as Schwarzenegger promotes the bond measures.

Schwarzenegger acknowledged Florez's support for the measures, saying that the bond measures show that Democratic leaders like Florez -- who the governor said bench-presses an "amazing" amount of weight -- and Republican leaders like McCarthy can work together in bipartisan spirit.

Hall, who Florez called "the finest mayor in the state of California," also urged voters to support the bond measures that hold "extreme value ... for everyone."

Schwarzenegger began his day in Chico, then traveled to Merced, and headed back to Sacramento after his local visit.

It was the second visit by the governor to the Bakersfield area in little more than a month; he hosted a round-table discussion with women business executives in Bakersfield on March 29.

Proposed chicken farm ruffles feathers of Lathrop residents

By Roman Gokhman, San Joaquin News Service

Published in the Lodi News-Sentinel, Friday, May 5, 2006

One million chickens will have to wait to see if they call Lathrop home, after the San Joaquin County planning commission Thursday delayed voting whether to approve a poultry farm outside the city west of I-5,

County Community Development Director Kerry Sullivan said she got a fax at 5 p.m. from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District warning of a potential health risk caused by the odors emanating from the farm.

The farm is being proposed by the Olivera Family Partnership and is opposed by Lathrop officials, developers of planned subdivisions in the area and owners of expensive new homes.

The major concerns are that home values will plummet, new development will not be bought and that the city will lose money because of this.

"Ag land includes chicken ranches, but that is not the place for one," said Lathrop resident Ronald Del Barba, one of about forty residents who showed up to protest the poultry farm sporting a drawing of a chicken with a thick red crossing running through it. "There is too much open space away from residential development."

If approved, the poultry farm will be built over six years on Undine Road north of Lathrop, on 7 acres of a 239-acre parcel.

It would have six egg-laying houses, a processing plant, and a waste area on the north part of the property. A belt system would be installed under all chicken cages to catch manure, cross ventilation would dry the manure and reduce odors, manure would be removed twice weekly and taken to the waste area. According to a staff report, the manure would be removed from that area twice a year, during the spring and fall planting seasons.

Chickens who reach their egg-producing limit would be killed using carbon monoxide gas, and all dead chickens will be incinerated on the property.

The air pollution district previously said odors would be contained by the ventilation system, but apparently changed its mind at the last minute. Sullivan said she was not able to reach anyone at the district after getting the fax.

The poultry farm has drawn plenty of opposition from Lathrop officials and residents in the surrounding subdivisions of Mossdale Village. Residents and developers are worried that the stench from the farm will be carried by wind to the houses there, as well as the planned River Islands and other Lathrop.

Complaints have also centered the project being in a flood-prone region and that it will prevent future housing development. The latter may cost the city Lathrop millions in the future.

Dean Ruiz, representing developer Richland Planned Communities at the meeting said if the planning commission eventually approves the project, Richland may appeal the decision to the Board of Supervisors.

"It depends on what the final project looks like and what mitigating factors are included," he said.

County planners disagree with the complaints. In the staff report, they say flooding would not be a problem because all facilities would be built one foot above the flood plain.

As far as the land-use issue, county staff said since the farm will lie on agriculture-zoned land and outside Lathrop's sphere of influence, and because the county has a right-to-farm ordinance, residents who move into homes in the area have to accept inconveniences from the smell or dust in the area.

If it were approved, construction on the farm would have started in as soon as a month. With the delay, a start time would be months from now.

250 New O.C. Buses to Use Natural Gas

Ordering now saves \$5 million and avoids the possibility of an equipment shortage if gas prices prompt ridership to increase.

By David Reyes, Times Staff Writer
LA Times, Tuesday, May 9, 2006

With bus ridership and gasoline prices surging, Orange County transportation planners on Monday approved the purchase of 250 compressed natural-gas buses over three years.

Noting that ridership is up 7% and fuel prices are soaring, Art Leahy, chief executive of the Orange County Transportation Authority, persuaded the authority's directors to order the natural-gas-powered buses now and get a \$5-million quantity discount.

Leahy said that if bus ridership increased only 1%, "that change in behavior could overwhelm the bus system."

The authority has 67 million fares a year.

Leahy said he didn't want a repeat of what occurred in the 1970s during the last severe fuel shortage. More bus riders meant increased demand for buses, which caused a run on bus sales. Some transit agencies couldn't get enough, he said.

Most of OCTA's 564-bus fleet is diesel-powered, and the rest run on liquefied natural gas. The diesel buses are scheduled to be replaced by cleaner-burning buses as they are retired.

The state Air Quality Management District prohibits transit agencies from buying diesel-powered buses because of clean-air regulations, OCTA officials said.

Compressed natural-gas buses are cleaner-burning than comparable diesel vehicles, particularly in nitrogen oxide and particulate matter emissions, two primary elements in smog.

When the \$106-million purchase order is filled, the agency will have 299 natural-gas buses in service by 2009.

By comparison, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in Los Angeles County has 2,200 natural-gas-powered buses, the largest such fleet in North America, said Kim Upton, an MTA spokeswoman.

The MTA's natural-gas fleet reduces emissions of particulate matter by more than 90%, carbon monoxide by more than 80% and greenhouse gases by more than 20% compared with its diesel buses, she said.

In other business, OCTA directors approved seeking federal funding for a \$15.8-million study by water and transportation agencies to determine whether an 11-mile tunnel through the Santa Ana Mountains was feasible.

The controversial tunnel would be an alternative to the congested Riverside Freeway, the main artery linking Riverside and Orange counties.

The action comes amid growing support for the tunnel by Riverside County officials, who want to ease traffic congestion, and increasing opposition by southern Orange County officials, who fear that a tunnel would flood neighborhoods with more traffic. Water districts see a tunnel as a route for pipelines.

Laguna Niguel Mayor Cathryn DeYoung, who attended Monday's meeting, criticized the "terrible tunnel" for its estimated \$6-billion cost and the traffic it would add to South County. "It's a terrible waste of transportation dollars," she said.

Burbank set to OK plan to make roads by schools bicycle-friendly

BY JASON KANDEL, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Tuesday, May 9, 2006

BURBANK - The Burbank City Council was scheduled to approve a plan late Tuesday to pay nearly \$80,000 for new technology at 11 intersections near elementary schools to make it safer for kids to ride their bikes to and from campus.

The Safe Routes to School plan is part of a Caltrans project, which provided nearly \$66,000 in 2004 to help get the effort off the ground. Under the plan, the city would chip in \$14,000 from Proposition C, the Los Angeles County half-cent sales tax measure approved by voters in 1990.

"In Burbank, a lot of the major streets are too narrow to accommodate bicycle lanes," said David Kriske, a senior planner with the city. So the city wants to identify nearby local streets that parallel major roads and provide a safer street for cyclists, he said.

The plan would allow bicyclists to use local streets to get through town and would make signal improvements to help them cross Victory and Glenoaks boulevards, Hollywood Way, Alameda Avenue and other major streets.

As part of the plan, traffic engineers would extend the timing of signals and install cameras, pavement sensors and push buttons specifically so riders won't have to get off their bikes.

The plan would dovetail with the city's \$9 million Bicycle Master Plan, a 20-year road map for more than 32 miles of bike paths, lanes and routes in Burbank and connections to other regional bike routes across the San Fernando Valley.

Air purifiers found not so pure

UCI study says popular devices shown to produce unhealthy ozone.

By PAT BRENNAN

Orange County Register, Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Popular indoor air purifiers can sometimes emit dangerous levels of ozone, a lung-damaging pollutant, a UC Irvine chemistry professor says.

Some purifiers can create the indoor equivalent of a Stage Two smog alert.

The findings, similar to those in recent studies by the state Air Resources Board, suggest that the popular devices could be a significant source of indoor air pollution.

The worst of them, when used in a small, poorly ventilated room, could produce as much as three times the ozone levels recommended for outdoor exposure by state and federal air quality agencies.

"You have to put them in a smaller room to produce dangerous results," said UCI assistant chemistry professor Sergey A. Nizkorodov, whose study of the purifiers appears in the current issue of the Journal of the Air and Waste Management Association.

But if the purifiers are placed in a large, well-ventilated room, they have little or no effect, he said; far more air is moving through such a room than the purifier units can process.

The UC Irvine results showed potentially harmful buildup of ozone in small rooms even from low-emission units, Nizkorodov said.

"The major surprise of this particular research is that you can get high readings in ozone concentrations even from air purifiers that produce almost no ozone at all," he said.

Although ozone high in the stratosphere protects Earth's surface from harmful ultraviolet radiation, ozone at ground level, a component of smog, is a recognized health threat and is closely monitored by federal, state and regional regulators.

Regulators have imposed clean-air rules to reduce ozone emissions from businesses or vehicles, but no such standards exist for the indoor home environment.

So, while the purifiers exceeded federal and state thresholds for ozone in experiments done by Nizkorodov and his students, the companies that make them are not violating any laws.

The UC Irvine study involved so-called ionic purifiers, which emit ozone through the process of ionization -- that is, causing airborne particles to become electrically charged.

Both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Air Resources Board have warned consumers about possible risks of these air purifiers, although they remain unregulated.

The state Air Resources Board will hear a report from its staff on the issue May 25. And while the report is just an update on the purifier situation, the board could decide in the future to regulate the devices.

A bill to allow state regulation of indoor air purifiers was introduced in February by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, and could come before the full State Assembly this week or next week, Pavley said.

"There is really no state agency that has any kind of regulatory authority, nor enforcement, over these products being sold," Pavley said Tuesday.

Consumer Reports magazine has also taken companies that sell air purifiers to task for high ozone emissions.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Wednesday, May 10, 2006:](#)

Protect the bay -- and a neighborhood

By Dennis Herrera

The regional Water Quality Control Board is scheduled to vote today on whether to accept the recommendation of its staff and approve a permit that would allow Mirant Corp. to continue operating its Potrero power plant in San Francisco out of compliance with environmental standards until June 30, 2011. The board should reject the permit.

Under its permit, Mirant's Potrero plant uses a "once-through" cooling system that every day sucks some 226 million gallons of water from San Francisco Bay, runs it through super-heated plant facilities, then returns it into the bay as scalding, polluted discharge. The adverse impact to the regional environment isn't limited to the fish and other organisms essential to the bay's ecosystem that are sucked into the plant, cooked alive, then spewed back. Mounting evidence additionally demonstrates that the Potrero plant's massive output in shallow water represents a significant environmental threat, too, stirring up polluted sediments laced with harmful levels of copper, dioxins, mercury, PCBs and other toxins, and dispersing them throughout the bay.

The permit by which Mirant operates its plant in this manner was issued in 1994, for a five-year period. In 1999, the regional water board granted an administrative extension of Mirant's permit for another five years, expiring in May 2004. Since that time, the permit has been extended by administrative inaction. Now, the regional water board's staff is proposing that the permit be extended again, this time until 2011 - representing a remarkable 17-year run, virtually without modification, for a five-year permit. In and of itself, such regulatory languor would not be unwelcome if no circumstances had changed since the original issuance of the permit.

But much has changed since 1994.

First, we have seen increasingly convincing evidence of the environmental damage this power plant is doing to the San Francisco Bay and, quite possibly, to the surrounding communities. The San Francisco neighborhoods of Potrero Hill, Bayview and Hunters Point, which include some of the city's most economically disadvantaged residents, have in recent years seen disturbingly high rates of asthma and other health-care problems known to be influenced by environmental factors. Even if the nexus between water pollution and the high prevalence of health issues remains inconclusive, it is hardly overreaching for environmental regulators to require a power plant to merely comply with standards where such problems exist. Indeed, it is a shocking affront to the notion of environmental justice -- the principle of fair and even-handed enforcement of environmental protections regardless of race, color, national origin, or income -- that Mirant's noncompliance in this vulnerable area could be permitted for still another five years.

Second, a clear consensus has emerged since 1994 concerning the harms posed by once-through cooling systems such as that used by Mirant's Potrero power plant. When Mirant sought to expand its Potrero operation in 2002, in fact, the state Energy Commission opposed the proposal because of the significant harm to aquatic biological resources posed by the facility's cooling system. The Bay Conservation and Development Commission similarly opposed the plant's expansion, citing the feasibility of cooling system alternatives that would not pollute the bay. As recently as last month, the State Lands Commission resolved to reject leases for power plants statewide that utilize once-through systems for cooling.

Third, members of the regional water board have a better choice before them. Working together, with leadership from Supervisor Sophie Maxwell, Board of Supervisors President Aaron Peskin, S.F. Public Utilities Commission General Manager Susan Leal and others, city officials and community leaders have forged an alternative permit that provides a reasonable schedule for Mirant to bring its plant into compliance with current laws. The community-backed permit allows Mirant to come into compliance over

time by installing an upland cooling system -- with no adverse impacts to the bay -- or to close the plant when it is no longer needed for electric reliability.

Over the course of many years, city and community leaders have worked diligently to clean-up old, dirty power plants in San Francisco or replace them with cleaner, more reliable sources of electricity generation. We have done so in full partnership and cooperation with the California Public Utilities Commission, the Independent System Operator, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and other community and governmental entities. Now, the Regional Water Quality Control Board has the opportunity to join and support this longstanding effort by enforcing current water quality standards.

Today's vote is a decisive moment for environmental protection in the Bay Area. The regional board should reject the staff-proposed permit before it, and instead adopt the community-backed alternative that protects the bay and the people who live around it. It is time for Mirant to stop polluting San Francisco Bay.

Dennis Herrera is San Francisco's city attorney.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, May 10, 2006:](#)

Case for supervisor

District 4 incumbent has earned the right to another term.

After serving two terms in any elected office, most people fall into one of two categories: those who grow, and those who merely grow stale. Judy Case, who seeks a third term representing District 4 on the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, clearly falls into the first category. The Bee recommends her for re-election on June 6.

Case has worn many hats. She is a nurse, works with her husband in the family's cattle operation and served as a city council member and mayor in her hometown of Sanger. After eight years, she has a well-honed command of the nuts-and-bolts of county government.

She has worked hard to preserve agricultural lands in the Valley, appropriate for someone who represents a sprawling district full of farms and the small towns that rely upon them. Steering development into urban areas is no small task, given the love developers have for bare dirt and its lower prices, but Case has made an energetic effort.

Case has always been a supporter of the new juvenile justice campus about to open on American Avenue at Highway 99. That's a prudent investment in the lives of the county's troubled children and the safety of its residents.

She has been protective of the taxpayers' money, voting in 2005, for example, to stop a budget increase for board members and their staffs that would have cost the equivalent of eight sheriff's deputies.

If there is one thing we'd like to see from Case in a new term, it's a more aggressive approach to the struggle to clean up the Valley's air. Case and her board colleagues have often opposed efforts to get the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to move more aggressively itself. We understand the politics of this, in a rural district in the world's richest agricultural area, but the problems with our air are transcendent.

Fresno County has a lot on its plate in the years just ahead, and much of it is unpalatable. Budgets are excruciatingly tight for local government these days. The state government is no help, as the legislature and a series of governors continue a hallowed tradition of taking tax money out of here and shipping back loads of lip service. And in the Valley -- particularly Fresno County, growth is expected to soar.

It will take leadership of the highest caliber to address all these issues, something we don't always see in local government. We think Judy Case has the temperament, the experience and the skill to help, and we urge voters in District 4 to give her the chance to do so.