CalTrans installs fast-charging stations near Tulare

Stations on Highway 99 will provide electric cars with an 80% charge in 30 minutes; are part of a 22 stations through the Central Valley

The Sun-Gazette, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021

TULARE COUNTY – New fast-charging stations have been installed in Tulare County as part of Caltrans' plan to provide electric vehicles with a reliable path to travel through Central California.

The two charging stations are located on both the north and southbound areas of the Philip S. Raine Rest Area on Highway 99 south of Tulare. The Level 3 DC fast chargers provide an approximate 80 percent charge in 30 minutes to electric vehicles (EVs) with fast-charging capability. The chargers have universal connectors and are able to serve all EVs on the market, including Teslas with an adapter. Charging is free with no time limit.

"Fast chargers are essential to continue growing EV adoption in California and meeting our state's goals for combating climate change," Caltrans Director Toks Omishakin said, referring to Gov. Gavin Newsom's plan to phase out gasoline-powered cars by 2035. "Expanding the availability of convenient fast-charging stations along state highways is significant for the future of California transportation."

The Tulare County locations are among nine stations installed by CalTrans in the Central Valley, including at the popular Tejon Pass Rest Area near the Los Angeles/Kern County line. Other new stations are located at:

- Junction Route 58/Route 184 in Bakersfield
- Caltrans Maintenance Station on Route 41 and next to I-5 in Kettleman City
- Caltrans Maintenance Station, 805 S. Lexington St., next to Route 99 in Delano
- C.H. Warlow Rest Area NB/SB Route 99 in Kingsburg
- Caltrans District 6 Office, 1283 N. West Ave., next to Route 99 in Fresno
- Caltrans Maintenance Station, 125 W. Almond Ave., next to Route 99 in Madera

"With four new EV fast chargers at the Tejon Pass Rest Area on Interstate 5, and 18 others staggered approximately 40 miles apart, Caltrans has reduced recharging concerns for plug-in EV drivers on long-distance trips through the Central Valley," said District 7 Director Tony Tavares, whose district includes Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

According to the California Air Resources Board, 70 percent of California transportation sector greenhouse gas emissions come from light-duty vehicles, including passenger cars, SUVs and light-duty trucks. These vehicles along I-5 and Highway 99 through the Central Valley which has some of the most polluted air in the nation.

"This project is a tremendous example of how public agencies can collaborate with the private sector to fill gaps in the zero emission vehicle (ZEV) market," said Tyson Eckerle, Deputy Director of ZEV Market Development at the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz). "More chargers throughout the state will help to incentivize the purchase of EVs, getting us closer to Governor Newsom's goal of 100 percent ZEV sales by 2035."

The governor signed an executive order on Sept. 23 requiring sales of all new passenger vehicles to be zero-emission by 2035 and additional measures to eliminate harmful emissions from the transportation sector. To ensure needed infrastructure to support zero-emission vehicles, the order requires state agencies, in partnership with the private sector, to accelerate deployment of affordable fueling and charging options. It also requires support of new and used zero-emission vehicle markets to provide broad accessibility to zero-emission vehicles for all Californians. The executive order will not prevent Californians from owning gasoline-powered cars or selling them on the used car market.

The Tejon Pass Rest Area is about 60 miles north of Los Angeles and 40 miles south of Bakersfield and is a popular stopping point for drivers traveling along I-5. The four new fast chargers are located on the southbound side of the interstate. Motorists traveling north on I-5 can exit at the Lebec off-ramp to Lebec

Road, which loops over the highway, to access the fast chargers, including one that is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The $4.5 million project is funded by Caltrans and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in Fresno. The prime contractor is Cal Valley Construction of Fresno. BTCPower (Broadband TelCom Power, Inc.) of Santa Ana provided and installed the DC EV Fast Chargers with assistance from electrical subcontractor CSI (Civil Substations, Inc.) of Clovis. Pacific Gas and Electric and Southern California Edison are the electrical service providers.

In addition to the new chargers in the Central Valley, Caltrans has six Level 3 DC fast chargers in San Diego County, two in Monterey County and one in San Luis Obispo County, and two Level 2 charging stations in Napa County and three in Contra Costa County—all available to the public.

The U.S. Department of Energy has a searchable database on public alternative fuel stations in California and nationwide. Motorists can find real-time traffic information and rest area locations at Caltrans' Quickmap by clicking on the Options menu.

Rail Commute

ACE to run Valley Link rail system

By Dennis Wyatt
Turlock Journal, Saturday, Feb. 13, 2021

Valley Link — the proposed commuter rail project that would connect the Northern San Joaquin Valley with the 131-mile BART system with 50 stations throughout the Bay Area — will be operated by the same agency that runs the Altamont Corridor Express.

The Tri-Valley-San Joaquin Valley Regional Rail Authority has entered into an agreement for the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission to operate Valley Link that is working toward a 2028 start-up date. The SJRRC also manages the Amtrak San Joaquins.

The Valley Link system ultimately means commuters in Ceres, Modesto, Ripon and Manteca could get go all the way to downtown San Francisco via ACE with transfers to Valley Link and BART. Lathrop commuters could take Valley Link and switch to BART.

Valley Link has $988 million of the $1.8 billion plus in funds committed needed for the initial phase.

That initial phase would connect with the new North Lathrop ACE station that will be built in the vicinity of Sharpe Army Depot when ACE service is extended southward through Manteca and Ripon to Ceres and northward through Stockton and Sacramento to the Natomas just miles from Sacramento International Airport.

Valley Link's first phase includes seven stations — North Lathrop, River Islands, Downtown Tracy, Mountain House, Greenville near Livermore, Isabel and Dublin/Pleasanton where passengers can connect with the BART system.

The overall travel time from North Lathrop to the Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station would be approximately 61 to 65 minutes depending on direction of travel. The 2040 service plan includes 12-minute peak period headways and 2-minute off-peak headways with more limited service on the weekend.

The second phase would extend service into Stockton.

The 42-mile right of way includes 16.1 miles of Union Pacific track in San Joaquin County, 14.5 miles of the old Western Pacific track that Southern Pacific deeded to Alameda County in 1984, and 11.7 miles down the median of Interstate 580 where it will connect with BART trains at the Dublin/Pleasanton station

Additional potential infill stations include Ellis Historical in Tracy, Grant Line Road in Alameda County (west of Tracy), and South Front in Livermore.

The maintenance and operations facility would be located in Tracy.

By 2040, Valley Link is expected to take 33,000 vehicles off of the Altamont Pass. Prior to the pandemic there were 93,398 vehicles crossing the Altamont on an average day.

Additional information on the Tri-Valley – San Joaquin Valley Regional Rail Authority, is available on the Regional Rail Authority's website at www.valleylinkrail.com.

Depending upon the technology chosen for the locomotives — diesel, electric battery or hydrogen — Valley Link could eliminate between 33,000 to 42,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Fresno Bee Editorial: Sunday, Feb. 14, 2021:

Should Fresno residents be able to ride city buses for free?

That is the issue coming to the City Council next week, when District 4 Council member Tyler Maxwell proposes that the city's transit system become zero fare.

The proposal is being co-sponsored by Councilmembers Esmeralda Soria and Nelson Esparza. In Soria's view, the zero-fare issue will reveal the priorities and values that the seven council members hold dear. For Esparza, zero fare is part of a larger picture of just how the Fresno of tomorrow will develop.

For starters, the typical passenger of a Fresno Area Express (FAX) bus is a single mother of young children who needs a way to get to school or work.

FAX statistics show that 76% of passengers earn $20,000 or less a year; 77% of riders don't have a vehicle or access to one. Most of the riders come from the city's lower-income neighborhoods in the central and southern parts of Fresno.

By making buses free to ride, there won't be any more fare disputes, which means less need for a police force dedicated to FAX, Maxwell says.

Air quality will benefit when more people ride buses rather than drive in private vehicles. He proposes his "Zero Fare Clean Air Act" on that expectation.

With free service, Maxwell envisions residents being able to get jobs they might not otherwise have taken, or ride to Fresno City College and Fresno State for higher education. Immediately, he sees riders taking the bus to COVID testing sites or vaccination clinics.

In summary, he sees a rising tide of opportunity for Fresnans wanting to improve their lives, powered through a bus service that can get them where they need to go.

But there's a catch.

Fare revenue

FAX earns around $5.5 million a year from fares paid by passengers. Then there are state and federal grants that also provide key support. State grants require matching funds. If FAX did not have that funding and those grants had to be dropped, the total loss to the city could actually be over $30 million annually, FAX officials say.

Maxwell is undaunted.

In other cities in the nation that are considering zero fare, like Kansas City, major health-care companies are being considered to subsidize some of the cost. That might work here, too. Firms like Kaiser Permanente could be approached.

He also points to federal funds that are available, like pandemic relief monies.

Maxwell sees potential support from large employers whose workers take the bus. And State Center Community College District, Fresno State and Fresno County are already top users who pay into FAX and will likely remain users.

Fresno's public transit is popular, Maxwell notes: From 2017 to 2019 the city's ridership grew by 1 million passengers. It dropped over the past year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Is free affordable?

It is easy to imagine that free bus service would raise the quality of life for lower-income residents and most likely improve the city's economy. So the idea has merit.

However, Fresno is not a wealthy town, and cannot easily add services without considering its budget.

For example, Fresno currently cannot pay for its parks system. Maintenance is way behind and few new parks can be built, despite the fact Fresno is one of the worst cities in the nation for quantity and quality of its parks.

That was the point of Measure P in 2018 — to develop a new funding source via higher sales taxes that could be devoted to the underfunded parks program.

Some city departments, such as police and fire, struggle with staffing shortfalls that are rooted in the 2008 recession.

Then there are concerns that making bus service zero fare might logically create a jump in ridership. Without fare revenue, how will the city be able to add buses that might be needed for all the new passengers?

These concerns are not meant to discourage a good idea. Soria is right; if this is a priority of the council majority, they may be able to find cuts elsewhere in the budget and redirect monies to transit.

But the funding questions must be addressed before the city can convert to a zero-fare system. It would be a shame to start the program, only to have to pull back in a year or two because it proves unaffordable.