

Officials mull ACE extension

By Kerana Todorov , The Tracy Press

Feb. 2, 2004

A commuter train could be built one day between Sacramento and Turlock with a connection to Tracy via the Altamont Commuter Express line, according to transportation officials. The 85-mile million-rail service could become an extension of the Altamont Commuter Express - the rail service that runs three trains between Stockton and San Jose on weekdays. The project could be discussed before the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission this year, as well as officials in Sacramento and Stanislaus counties, and others, ACE representatives said Friday.

The San Joaquin Council of Governments board of directors, which includes Tracy Mayor Dan Bilbrey, voted Jan. 22 to request that the \$66 million project receive \$27 million in federal funding. U.S. Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, could seek the \$27 million under the federal transportation bill, according to the application SJCOG approved Jan. 22.

The transportation bill, which could authorize road projects throughout the nation for the next six years, has yet to be put to a vote. Pombo could not be reached for comment.

The federal dollars would be used to improve the tracks and purchased train cars, according to the application.

The commuter train, said SJCOG executive director Andrew Chesley, would give the Central Valley another transportation option. It would continue the success of ACE, he said.

Brent Ives, a Tracy mayor pro tem, is a member of the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission, which runs ACE. The commuter train to Sacramento was envisioned from the very beginning, he said of ACE.

But the train will not be constructed quickly, Ives and others cautioned.

Chesley predicted the commuter train would not be built within the next five years. But the time to plan is now, he said. The dollars, he said, will eventually come.

According to Stacey Mortensen, ACE executive director, said the planning work is just getting under way.

Preliminary discussions have been held with officials in Stanislaus and Sacramento counties, she said.

Tracy City Councilwoman Evelyn Tolbert said she likes the idea of a commuter train, but wonders where the money will come from.

The train could bring even more wealth to the Central Valley and offer people access to affordable housing, she said.

[But questions may be raised on whether or not a commuter train would generate increased residential sprawl and more air pollution](#), she said. More people would be willing to move farther south to Turlock, she said.

In the meantime, the number of passengers taking ACE, which had dropped when hard times hit Silicon Valley, seems to be on the upswing, according to ACE data.

ACE, which averaged 2,400 ticket sales per day in 2003, has more passengers these days, according to ACE data. Last Wednesday, for instance, 2,802 tickets were sold, according to ACE. The staff sees a lot of new faces on the train, ACE spokeswoman Heather Swenddal.

Rural odors reek havoc for newcomers

By Alex Gronke, (Stockton) Record staff writer

Jan. 31, 2004

Tracy didn't always smell like this.

The shuttered Heinz plant on the east edge of town once pumped the sweet smell of stewing tomatoes into the summer air.

Until it closed in 2000, a sugar factory filled the Tracy breeze with the acrid aroma of boiling beets.

Nowadays, one agricultural industry dominates the Tracy atmosphere. And newcomers are discovering it isn't always easy to accustom one's nose to the quintessentially rural odor of cow dung.

It is a conflict being hashed out in suburbs and exurbs, all over the country: the potent smells of agriculture offending former city dwellers.

Longtime Tracyites are used to the methane and ammonia vapors that waft off the manure lagoons ringing Tracy, particularly when damp, cold winter air transmits odors with the speed of copper-conducting electricity.

For some, cow manure is the scent of home. For others it is the bane of a new home.

Last week, Joyce Bannon, her husband, and their granddaughter moved to Mountain House from Pleasant Hill. They love their home. They love the neighborhood. They don't love the smell.

Bannon said the 6-year-old is gagging at dinner from the odor of a dairy less than a quarter of a mile from their new house.

"She says, 'Oh man, what did we have to move out here for?' " Bannon said of her granddaughter's reaction to the dairy.

Tony Scott, compliance supervisor for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the child's question is one he wishes more folks from the Bay Area would ask before moving to San Joaquin County.

"We get these kind of odor complaints all the time," Scott said.

Scott said the agency doesn't respond to complaints about smells generated by the normal running of agricultural operations.

Scott pointed to an informational brochure published this month by officials in Stearns County, Minn., which bills itself as the top dairy-producing county in the state.

Titled "Manure Happens," the brochure advises newcomers to "research the area where you want to moooove ... Be aware of prevailing winds, where manure is being spread and the number of types of farms in the general vicinity."

The Stearns County's Web site declares it has plans to produce a scratch-and-sniff version of the brochure in the future.

Scott said he would like to see local officials in San Joaquin County publish a similar document.

While the Bannons struggle to adjust to the unfamiliar smell of a working dairy, they can take comfort in knowing that they moved to Mountain House during a time of year when dairy smells are at their peak.

Science backs up Bannon's observation that her granddaughter gags more often when fog is blanketing Mountain House.

Dr. Lawrence Katz, a neurobiologist at Duke University who specializes in studying the sense of smell, said there are two reasons the dairy smell is stronger when the air is damp.

Katz said that "the business end of the nose" needs moisture to function, and water in the air transmits smells more readily than dry air.

"The chemicals that actually cause the odor have to be dissolved in water," Katz said.

New residents of Mountain House report that the company selling homes there fully discloses the nearby presence of a dairy -- and one can't approach the main entrance of the new community from Interstate 205 without passing a mile of cows on the west side of Mountain House Parkway.

Leroy Ornellas, a longtime dairy farmer and San Joaquin County supervisor for the district that includes Mountain House, has words of comfort for residents whose senses are under siege: The dairy "will be gone soon."

Mountain House developers have optioned the dairy's property. Before 2010, the ground where cows chewed cud will be a business park.

But just as the demand for housing shows no sign of slackening, neither does the demand for dairy products.

The dairy "will probably move somewhere else and build a bigger operation," Ornellas said.

[Op-ed section, The Bakersfield Californian, Feb. 1, 2004:](#)

Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down

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A bill by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, designed to help farmers comply with new air pollution regulations, remains alive -- even if it is on a legislative respirator. It proposes relief from paying on-going fees for backup electric power to run irrigation pumps even during periods when the pumps are not used. Specific provisions of the bill were not dealt with, but the bill is being allowed to stay on the Legislature's agenda rather than being dropped.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Feb. 1, 2004:](#)

'Plain irresponsible'

I just finished reading The New Valley Times. Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer could score a real coup by arresting all the writers, because they were all obviously high on drugs.

When Fresno officials allow developers to take out orchards that cleanse the air to put in asphalt and concrete that absorbs and radiates heat that traps pollutants from the cars, trucks, mowers and leaf blowers, and then blame the rest of us, that's just plain irresponsible.

With the weather patterns being changed by the overdevelopment of the Fresno area, the restoration of the San Joaquin River will take much-needed water away from the agriculture that supplies the lifeblood of the Valley.

Electricity to recharge electric cars, electricity to run the FAST? Where's it coming from? Coal? Air pollution. Hydro? Damn -- dams. Nuclear? Heaven forbid! Then there's the issue of the tax breaks, tax credits and other tax incentives mentioned to facilitate and expedite these "progressive" ideas. You only think we have a deficit problem.

It's nice to dream, but people need to wake up and see what's happening. The Fresno "powers that be" are trying to make Fresno into another San Francisco or Los Angeles. It's time to stand up and say (as in the words of Susan Powter) stop the madness.

Ken Wakelee

Clovis

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Feb. 1, 2004:](#)

'It's the automobile, stupid!'

Thirty years back you could wake up and look east and see the Sierra, snow-covered in winter and clear in the fall. You could look east at the coastal range and see the same. No poor air quality here!

Now systematically subtract thousands of acres of farmland and add eight four- or five-bedroom homes per acre and then four or five autos per home. You wonder what happened to our air quality? I'm no scientist but I don't think we can blame it on cow flatulence, farm tractors, irrigation pumps, motorcycles, lawn mowers, fireplaces, etc.

It's the automobile, stupid! Wake up. The more agricultural land we lose to big developers the worse the air will get, period.

Leland Morse

Modesto