

RTD to buy hybrid buses

Nick Juliano

Tracy Press, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2005

By next summer, regional transportation officials will start replacing exhaust-spewing diesel buses with more environmentally friendly hybrids to ferry residents around the county.

San Joaquin Regional Transit District announced Wednesday it would purchase 50 diesel-electric hybrid buses that get nearly twice the gas mileage of older models. RTD is spending \$24.5 million for the buses — about \$500,000 each.

By August, the first 10 hybrids will run in Stockton along a new express route that is designed to approximate an intra-city light-rail system, said Paul Rapp, an RTD spokesman. The route includes just five stops between downtown and north Stockton, at which buses will arrive about every 15 minutes.

The remaining buses will be phased into the county's 161-bus fleet as others are removed from service, Rapp said. Buses are replaced after 12 years or 500,000 miles, whichever comes first. All the new hybrids will be delivered by the end of 2007.

The purchase is a continuation of the agency's goal to replace all its buses with hybrids by 2017, at which point RTD hopes to begin replacing the hybrids with emission-free hydrogen fuel cell buses, Rapp said.

RTD operates various bus routes throughout the county, connecting the county's cities and commuter routes to Sacramento and the Bay Area.

The agency says hybrid buses will reduce certain emissions, including carbon monoxide, by up to 90 percent. The hybrids also get better gas mileage — 6.4 miles per gallon compared with 3.3 to 4.1 mpg for RTD's current fleet, according to a state study cited by the agency.

RTD is paying for the buses with an \$18 million federal transportation grant with the rest of the cost coming from the state.

Ten other transit agencies from California, Nevada and New Mexico joined with RTD to purchase a total of 157 buses at a cost of \$78 million from Gillig Corp., based in Hayward. Joining with the other agencies allowed RTD to save \$2.5 million, the agency said.

Free Valley Air kids calendars available

Visalia Times Delta, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2005

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's "2006 Clean Air Kids" calendar is available free of charge.

More than 800 drawings by children in the eight Central Valley counties were submitted to be considered for inclusion in the annual calendar. The drawings reflect their interpretations of air pollution.

Drawings from 14 children are included in the calendar, none from Tulare County.

Calendars are distributed to schools, community groups, health-care facilities, churches, civic organizations and non-political groups in the Valley.

Individuals wanting calendars can call 230-6000.

Air advisory issued

Modesto Bee, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2005

People in Merced County are asked to refrain from using fireplaces and older wood stoves today because of concerns about air quality. Forecasters say the air will be unhealthy for sensitive people, such as those with chronic breathing problems. The "burning discouraged" advisory

comes from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Today's advisory is the first step: a voluntary request. The next step is a mandatory prohibition. No advisory is issued for today for San Joaquin or Stanislaus counties.

County set to approve paint ball site, kennel

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2005

A paint ball facility, dog kennel and other proposals face county planning commissioners tonight. Here are some highlights:

- **Paint ball:** Carl Watkins is proposing a 78-acre paint ball facility for the southeast corner of Round Mountain Road and South Granite Road. The operation could hold a maximum 200 players. Some opponents object to traffic, noise and [air pollution](#). The planning department recommends approval. The commission's decision will be final unless appealed to county supervisors.
- **Dog kennel:** Shirla Wright is applying for a five-year permit to keep a dog kennel on a quarter acre at 10605 Paul Ave., roughly near the intersection of Hageman and Jewetta. Wright has 13 poodles. More than 30 neighbors oppose the plan; another 30 or so support it. County planners recommend approval. The commission's decision will be final unless appealed to supervisors.
- **Other items** include a proposed 445-foot wind turbine in Tehachapi; vesting rights for the huge McAllister Ranch community southwest of Bakersfield; a permit for a 72-student preschool at the Christian Life Assembly Church in Tehachapi; and permission to use a commercial coach as a Sunday school at Elberon Christian Church in Woody.

Air quality after accident shows pollution no higher than average

By Bruce Lieberman

San Diego Union-Tribune

December 8, 2005

Yesterday's fuel tanker fire near Qualcomm Stadium sure looked like a health hazard. But people not heavily exposed to the smoke that billowed into the air will face no medical danger, pollution officials said.

The amount of pollutants lofted over Mission Valley and other parts of San Diego County paled in comparison to the overall volume of pollution emitted every day by vehicles in the region.

"The same stuff comes out of cars, but in lower concentrations," said Bill Brick, senior meteorologist for the San Diego Air Pollution Control District. "It really wasn't a significant increase in emissions – unless you were directly impacted by the plume of smoke."

Instruments that measure air quality throughout the county did not detect any rise in pollution above levels seen on an average day, Brick said.

Winds initially carried the fire's smoke toward the north-northwest, then shifted toward the north-northeast.

"Like we expected, (the smoke) dispersed pretty quickly," Brick said. "As far as I know, we didn't have any serious impacts" on the ground.

The thick smoke contained a variety of toxins, including benzene.

Short-term inhalation of benzene may cause drowsiness, dizziness, headaches and irritation of the eyes, skin and respiratory tract, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. At high levels, the chemical can make people lose consciousness.

The agency has classified benzene as a cancer-causing agent.

The fire also released the chemical 1,3-butadiene. Inhaling very high levels can damage the central nervous system; blur vision; cause nausea, fatigue and headaches; lower blood pressure; and lead to unconsciousness, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Breathing lower levels of 1,3-butadiene might irritate the eyes, nose and throat.

Mayor Picks Outsider as Port Executive

Geraldine Knatz of the rival Long Beach facility is named to vacant post over two officials promoted by ex-Mayor James K. Hahn.

By Deborah Schoch, Times Staff Writer

LA Times, December 8, 2005

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa passed over the city's top port executives Wednesday to nominate an outsider to head the nation's largest seaport, calling it "a new day for the Port of Los Angeles."

Villaraigosa named Geraldine Knatz, managing director of development at the Port of Long Beach - the Los Angeles port's biggest rival - to oversee the sprawling San Pedro seaport with 58 berths and a budget of \$693.5 million.

The move makes it clear that the mayor wants fresh leadership at the port and intends to make wholesale changes in its business practices and environmental standards. The Los Angeles port has lost ground in the last two years to Long Beach, the nation's second-largest port, and it has come under increasing criticism for rising levels of diesel exhaust from ships, trains and trucks.

If, as expected, Knatz is confirmed by the Los Angeles City Council, she will be the port's first female executive director and one of the top-ranking women in a U.S. maritime shipping industry largely dominated by men.

Villaraigosa, with Knatz at his side and cargo cranes looming in the background, praised her experience and her infectious enthusiasm.

"I liked her energy, frankly. I really did," Villaraigosa said, noting that she shares his reputation as a high-energy individual "who wants things done today."

Some harbor-area residents praised the choice, but several well-known local environmental activists faulted Knatz for what they called inadequate environmental reviews of some major Long Beach port projects.

"Her 'Green Port' policy is all smoke and mirrors," said Bry Myown, a Long Beach activist. "She's been very good at accomplishing port business growth, but she has little regard for the health of the residents or the safety of the port."

Knatz will continue in her current post for the Long Beach port until mid-January, when she moves across San Pedro Bay.

She steps into a hot-seat post that has been vacant for more than a year and faces a host of serious challenges, including slow growth, vacant positions, internal turmoil, security challenges and rocky relations with port-area residents concerned about traffic and [air pollution](#).

Several Los Angeles officials pointedly noted that the Long Beach port operates with about 350 employees, less than half the 858-member staff in Los Angeles. Long Beach contracts out more work, but that does not altogether account for the disparity, they said.

By choosing Knatz, Villaraigosa is rejecting the harbor management and policies set in place by his predecessor, former Mayor James K. Hahn. The port's two current top executives, Bruce Seaton and Stacey Jones, sought the post, which has been vacant since Larry Keller resigned in the autumn of 2004.

Seaton and Jones were semifinalists for the job; Jones was one of the three finalists. The other finalist was former Oakland port chief Tay Yoshitani.

Hahn promoted Seaton and Jones, and named Seaton as interim executive director. In addition, Hahn's sister, Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who represents the harbor area, lobbied hard for Jones to get the top job.

Knatz, 54, who has a doctorate in biological sciences, has held her current job since 1999 and was planning director for the Long Beach port for the previous 11 years. She has wrestled with the same challenges now facing the Los Angeles port - spiraling air pollution and angry community reaction, demands for costly security measures, a lack of land for expansion, and cargo transportation problems caused by clogged freeways and strapped rail lines.

The mood at the Los Angeles port differs starkly from four years ago, when Hahn inherited a seaport at the top of its game. Villaraigosa finds himself overseeing a port that has seen its cargo growth slow to 1.3% a year from double-digit increases. The adjoining port in Long Beach has almost 20% annual growth.

Los Angeles' port has suffered from the delay in deepening the main channel to handle enormous new ships that carry 8,000 containers. Those ships now dock in Long Beach.

Knatz said she does not think the Los Angeles port is doing anything wrong, but did say that once the main channel is deepened, the port's fortunes would improve.

"After that happens, all that business is coming back, of course," she said, provoking laughter from a crowd that included Los Angeles and Long Beach port representatives.

S. David Freeman, whom Villaraigosa recently named to head the Board of Harbor Commissioners, has already made dramatic changes at the port, encouraging public input and pushing for innovative new energy sources. He praised Knatz.

Freeman said he watched the mayor interview candidates. "She seemed the one most capable of thinking big," he said.

Michele Grubbs, a vice president of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Assn., which represents shippers and terminal operators, served on the selection committee and has worked with Knatz in her current job.

Describing Knatz as bright and innovative, Grubbs praised her work as a principal architect of Long Beach's "Green Port" program to improve the harbor environment.

Wilmington resident Ken Melendez, another selection committee member, said he strongly supports Knatz, calling her highly qualified.

But Wilmington activist Jesse Marquez and San Pedro activist Noel Park expressed misgivings.

"I think she's part of a system, and the systems of Los Angeles and Long Beach are the same, so it's very disappointing," Park said.

If Knatz improves the port's environmental record, residents will support her, he said. But if not, he promised: "We'll be in her face every day, like we have to Mr. Seaton."

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2005:](#)

Don't waste our tears over this spilt milk

It's too bad Southern California dairyman Amos DeGroot says he is sick of listening to people complain. He says he is giving up on Kern County. He will take his proposal for a 10,270-cow dairy elsewhere. No one should cry over DeGroot's spilt milk. Kern County residents aren't a bunch of whiners and complainers. They are rightly concerned about their county becoming home to an increasing number of mega-dairies. They are worried about their air and water is being polluted. They are gagging on the odors.

DeGroot wanted to build his Rex Ranch Dairy on 2,200 acres near Wasco. But the county has stalled approval plans for new dairies, while the cumulative environmental consequences are studied, a capacity limit is determined and development rules are formulated.

DeGroot hasn't decided where he will locate his dairy. He has moved many of his cows out of state. "Other parts of the county, they just welcome me with open arms," DeGroot said.

While that may be true, the arrival of mega-dairies in other states is prompting protests and lawsuits. For example, once cow-friendly Waco, Texas, filed suit against 14 dairies for allegedly fouling the ground water.

Today's mega-dairies will not get a free environmental pass anywhere. Some less environmentally sensitive areas of California and the nation may be more suited for dairies. To imply Kern County officials and residents are being too picky is just plain wrong.

David Albers, a Bakersfield attorney who owns a dairy in Fresno County, wants DeGroot to join a "dairy park" he hopes to develop in Kings County, near Corcoran. "Kings County has adopted a permit process that I think makes sense. Kern County hasn't," Albers said.

But like Kern, Kings County had to put the brakes on dairy development to study the cumulative impacts and set capacity limits. While the brakes were on, many Southern California dairymen eyed Kern, where the permitting process was lax.

Kern County simply is catching up to Kings and Tulare counties, where elected officials and regulators finally admitted too much of a "good thing" may be too much.