

## **Valley air alert may be extended**

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said an Air Alert for the valley could be extended to Friday.

Conditions such as high temperatures, a high-pressure system and stagnant wind patterns are contributing to a buildup of smog over the next several days.

The Air Alert includes the counties of Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

Air Alerts are called when conditions may lead to ozone formation that results in exceeding health-based ozone standards of 125 parts per billion and triggering substantial federal monetary penalties.

About 80 percent of the valley's ozone-forming emissions are produced by vehicle use.

## **New air alert issued in San Joaquin Valley**

The Associated Press

In the Stockton Record, Hanford Sentinel, Tri Valley Herald & other papers Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2011

FRESNO, Calif. — The San Joaquin Valley is under a new air alert as high temperatures, a high-pressure system and stagnant wind combine to trap smog.

Air pollution officials are asking residents to limit driving and not idle cars while waiting for students after school or at drive-thru windows.

It's the third air alert of the year issued by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District.

The district is under a three-year federal fine for violating ozone standards set by the Clean Air Act. So far this year, no violations have occurred.

The district must record three consecutive years without a violation for the \$29 million-per-year fine to be lifted. Drivers are the biggest source of poor air quality and help pay the fine through a \$12-a-year assessment.

Officials say the latest alert could last through Friday.

## **Weather conditions lead to Air Alert**

Turlock Journal, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District initiated an Air Alert Tuesday that will continue through Thursday, and may be extended to Friday. During these times residents are asked to curtail practices that increase smog-forming emissions. The alert is for the entire Central Valley.

The district said the Air Alert was issued because conditions such as high temperatures, a high-pressure system and stagnant wind patterns are contributing to a build-up in ozone (smog) over the next several days.

Air pollution can cause respiratory and heart problems, especially among children, the elderly and those with existing health concerns.

Eighty percent of the Valley's ozone problem is caused by vehicle use. When an Air Alert is declared, residents and businesses are urged to put into place measures that reduce vehicle miles traveled, including carpooling, vanpooling, using alternative transportation, avoiding the use of drive-through services and refraining from vehicle idling. All of these actions produce emissions that lead to ozone formation. Businesses are asked to offer flexible scheduling to reduce commute-time traffic and allow telecommuting. Additionally, residents and businesses are encouraged to shift ozone creating activities, such as lawn maintenance, to early mornings or after the Air Alert episode is over.

In addition, a large composting fire in Lathrop is producing areas of localized smoke which may impact Manteca in San Joaquin County. Smoke contains particulate matter, small pieces of airborne material such as soot and ash, which is dangerous to human health. High levels of PM can cause serious health

problems, aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks and acute bronchitis, and increase risk of respiratory infections.

In the event of exposure to smoke, the district recommends people with heart or lung diseases should follow their doctors' advice for dealing with episodes of unhealthy air quality. Additionally, older adults and children should avoid prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion. Everyone else should reduce prolonged exposure, strenuous activities or heavy exertion.

The district has incorporated the use of social media and texting to spread the Air Alert. To sign up for Air Alerts visit <http://valleyair.org/lists/list.htm>.

### **Air Alert In Effect For Valley District** **Alert Includes Counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus** Kcra.com, Late Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2011

FRESNO, Calif. -- A new Air Alert will be in effect starting Tuesday for counties in the San Joaquin Valley.

The Air Alert includes the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and portions of Kern.

Air Alerts are put into effect when conditions may lead to ozone (smog) formation that results in exceeds health-based standards. This can trigger financial penalties from the federal government.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said that a compost fire in Lathrop is one of the reasons for the alert. The fire is producing areas of localized smoke that may impact Manteca in San Joaquin County, officials said.

The Air Alert will be in effect through Thursday.

People are urged to reduce their driving and instead carpool, use alternative forms of transportation, avoid drive-through windows and refrain from idling in their vehicles. They are also asked to cut back on use of gasoline-powered landscape equipment and barbecues until the alert expires.

Air Alerts are only expected to be called in late summer and early fall.

### **Lodi Unified School District seeks \$100,000 grant to replace passenger vehicles** By Jennifer Bonnett Lodi News Sentinel, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011

Lodi Unified School District plans to apply for a \$100,000 grant to cover roughly two-thirds of the cost of purchasing five new alternative fuel vehicles.

The balance would come from the district's transportation equipment replacement budget and will not cost the district more than \$45,000.

The grant application is through the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which stretches from San Joaquin County south to Kern County. Funds will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

The district is seeking to add five compressed natural gas passenger vehicles to its regular fleet, according to Tim Hern, chief business officer. They will replace aging vehicles, some of which are not currently operating.

"If we get the grant, it will cut our fuel savings in half," Hern said, adding that the money will be returned to the general fund.

The grant application process was approved at Tuesday's regular school board meeting with a 6-0 vote. Trustee Ken Davis was absent.

The district opened its CNG fueling station seven years ago as a joint venture with the city of Lodi. The first environmentally friendly buses arrived in 2002 and drivers filled up at a different site elsewhere in the county.

When gas prices first shot up to more than \$3.50 per gallon in 2009, the transportation department combined routes and used its CNG buses for longer trips. At the time, natural gas cost roughly a third of diesel.

## **SJV Air District seeking student artists for 2012 healthy living calendar**

Sun-Star staff

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air District is looking for student artists to enter the 2012 Healthy Air Living Kids' Calendar contest. Artwork is due by Monday, Oct. 3, 2011. Valley students in grades K-12 who live within the Air District's boundaries are eligible to enter.

The Valley Air District produces a four-color, bilingual wall calendar each year. Some 20,000 calendars are distributed free to schools, community groups, healthcare facilities, churches and nonprofit organizations in late December.

Artists should place the page sideways (landscape orientation) so the paper is 8½ inches high and 11 inches wide. Artwork should be in color and contain a written message about how to live a healthy air life. Bilingual messages and messages in Spanish are encouraged. The calendar serves as a great reminder to Valley residents that even though our air quality is improving, we all need to do our part by making one change for healthy air.

Air-quality messages from previous years and possible messages for the 2012 calendar include:

- Make one change to live a Healthy Air Life! • ¡Vive con air limpio!
- Check before you burn wood.
- Healthy air starts with me!
- We can all help clean the air!
- Make one change. Walk instead of driving.
- Haz un cambio. Camina en lugar de manejar.
- Avoid using leaf blowers. Use a rake or broom.
- Barbecue with a propane or gas grill.
- Walk to school.
- Carpool or ride the bus.
- Ride your bike to work or school.
- Plants and animals need clean air too!
- Use an electric lawn mower instead of gas.

Fourteen drawings will be selected for the calendar. Artists must include their name, address, phone number and/or e-mail contact, age, grade and school on the back of the artwork. Please mail art flat, not folded, to 2012 Kids Calendar, Valley Air District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726, or turn your drawing in at your nearest air district office.

The winning drawings for the 2011 calendar and more information on the 2012 contest are on the District's website at [www.valleyair.org/kids/clean\\_air\\_calendar\\_contest.htm](http://www.valleyair.org/kids/clean_air_calendar_contest.htm). Or call the nearest office: Northern Region (209) 557-6400, Central Region, (559) 230-6000 or Southern Region, (661) 392-5500.

## **High-speed rail hearing rehashes pros, cons**

**Many speakers focus on economic factors.**

By Tim Sheehan, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Sept. 20, 2011

Fresno residents gave California High-Speed Rail Authority planners an earful of both support and opposition over a proposed 220-mph passenger train through the San Joaquin Valley.

Tuesday's five-hour public hearing at the Fresno Convention Center was intended as an opportunity for people to comment on a pair of environmental impact reports for the Merced-Fresno and Fresno-Bakersfield sections of the high-speed rail project.

The Valley sections are planned to be the first pieces built, starting next fall, for a 520-mile system of trains between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Some of the 50 or so speakers discussed how the anticipated path of the tracks would affect their businesses or property, or how the electric trains would mean fewer cars on the freeways to pollute the Valley's air.

But many took the opportunity to range far afield from environmental effects. Supporters proclaimed the train's prospects for economic development and job creation, while detractors decried its potential to be an expensive waste of billions of dollars.

Marie Elena Ramirez, the first speaker of the afternoon, came in search of one of the many jobs promised by the authority. "I brought my résumé, and I brought letters of recommendation," she said. "I'm ready to start today if you can give me a chance."

John Prichard, a representative of the International Union of Operating Engineers local chapter, said the high-speed rail project "is the only big job generator in the works right now" for people who are out of work and "a gift to the Central Valley."

Among those who addressed the rail line's physical effects was Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin, who encouraged the authority to build underpasses to connect streets from one side of the tracks to the other. "It's always better for the city to have underpasses as opposed to overpasses," she said.

She also said the city wants to make sure the authority lives up to its commitment to provide enough financial support to businesses that might have to be relocated to make way for the tracks.

Larry Thompson, who manages a Church & Dwight livestock-supplement plant in Madera County, said one of the potential routes north of Fresno would slice through his facility – something he said he didn't learn until last month. Before that, he said, "no one from the authority or any of the agencies had visited the plant nor did anyone contact me to find out about the possible effects to our facility."

Thompson said the environmental report fails to address "the economic and social impacts of losing a business such as ours."

"These must be addressed. ... The authority must do a much more extensive review of the businesses, farms and homes along each of the routes," he said.

Several other property and business owners complained that the tracks would disrupt or destroy their businesses.

Authority representatives took the critiques in stride.

"This is part of the process," said Dan Leavitt, the agency's deputy director for planning and environmental work. "These documents are intended to attract comments so these impacts, and the additional impacts that are brought up to us, can be addressed in the final version."

The authority's vice chairman, Fresno developer Tom Richards, said the agency's hearings are supposed to let them know "what we've done right and what we still need to do additional work on."

"And the only way we know that is by listening to the comments from the public," Richards added.

Before the hearing, a gathering of rail boosters including county supervisors, union representatives and clean-air advocates touted the project's potential to generate tens of thousands of construction jobs in the Valley and thousands more permanent jobs, as well as reducing traffic, congestion and air pollution from automobiles.

On the other side of the Exhibit Hall, protesters from the Central Valley Tea Party rallied on the M Street sidewalk, unfurling a banner that proclaimed, "There's no \$ for high-speed rail."

Tea party organizer Steve Brandau said the project's cost in the state's current economic condition is only one of the group's concerns.

When California voters approved Prop. 1A, a \$9.9 billion bond measure for high-speed rail, "they told us it was going to be along a transportation corridor," Brandau said. "Now it's going across agricultural land. To us, that's a huge environmental concern. We're destroying some of the world's best agricultural land to put a train track in."

## **Visalia city buses get GPS tracking, offer up-to-date schedules**

By Eric Woomer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011

Danny Joseph has missed the bus more than a dozen times since he started using Visalia's transit system. Whether it's a lunch gone long, class out late or doddling out the front door, he needs help catching the bus.

With the help of his Blackberry Torch smartphone and a new website, he may get just the help he needs. Beginning Tuesday, Visalia's bus riders got a new tool to help them find their way, on time. A website created by a North Carolina technology firm allows riders the opportunity to track all 44 of the city's buses, on all 11 routes throughout Visalia, Exeter and areas of Tulare.

"This is amazing. This is going to encourage more people to ride the bus," said Councilman Don Sharp, who approved the new tracking system at Monday's council meeting. "It's futuristic and high-tech. I am glad I lived long enough to see it happen."

It took the city and the technology firm about six years to create the system just the way they wanted. At a cost of more than \$600,000, it's a system that costs nearly \$1.5 million less than other systems.

The new GPS system was funded by federal stimulus money and various grants.

### **How it works**

A modem and cellular SIM card located on each Visalia bus and trolley transmit the location of the vehicle to a website. Updated every five seconds, riders and transit dispatchers can track the buses or trolleys up and down Visalia's streets. With one click the user can narrow a search to a specific route and two more clicks will get you updated arrivals and departures.

With another click, the user can set an alarm on the tracking website and be notified when the bus is nearing a specific bus stop.

So, as Joseph waited at the College of the Sequoias bus stop Tuesday, he knew his bus was four minutes away.

"This is going to come in handy. I guess I won't have any more excuses," Joseph said. "Riding the bus is getting more fun."

### **Increased ridership**

More buses, more advertising and better schedules have equated to an increase in ridership.

More than 1.6 million riders took advantage of Visalia's transit system last year, the highest numbers have ever been, city officials said.

Monty Cox, the city's transit director, is hoping that this new GPS technology will further increase ridership. This year has already proven prosperous for the transit division with increases for the Sequoia Shuttle and Dial-a-Ride programs.

For the transit division, with an annual operating budget of more than \$6 million and funded solely by ridership, grants and state and federal money, the signs for the future look good.

"Transit in Visalia has become a more viable option for people," Cox said. "We are attracting a lot of students and have a good problem to have — we have standing-room-only."

