

Tulare board likely to OK reverting nine garbage trucks back to diesel

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2011

It's back to diesel-powered engines for nine of Tulare's 33 garbage trucks.

Tulare Board of Public Utilities commissioners are likely to approve Thursday a \$132,000 contract to revert to diesel the nine trucks that run on liquefied natural gas and install soot filters, following a mandate from the California Air Resources Board.

Porterville's E.M. Tharp submitted the lowest bid for the contract, winning it over three Fresno companies.

The state recommendation, which calls for installing the filter even if diesel consumption is minimal, is a step back from Tulare's environmentally friendly policies that included converting to LNG a decade ago, city officials said. The trucks need a small splash of diesel during the internal combustion process.

"We contacted [the air board] and expressed our dismay at this requirement, which only negatively impacts agencies that did the right thing many years ago by adopting LNG fuel," Tulare Public Works Director Lew Nelson said. "It didn't make sense."

Nelson said state officials didn't provide additional information in ordering the mandate.

"There was no answer," he said. "They just said we've got to do it."

Tony Brazil of the air board did not return calls seeking comment for this story.

Initially, Tulare officials looked to install the filter on LNG-powered trucks, Nelson said. However, there's no valid state certification on the filters for LNG engines.

Commissioner Dick Johnson suggested reverting to diesel engines. Filters for diesel engines are certified, Nelson said.

Johnson's suggestion was a cost-saving move, Nelson said.

The change to diesel will also drive up operating costs, Nelson said, because diesel is much more expensive than LNG. At the pump, diesel is about \$4 a gallon. LNG is about \$1 a gallon, Nelson said.

In cleaning the filters, an oven must be used during the process. Nelson said the city already owns an oven, but the cleaning is yet one more step in the process.

"It'll be more trouble," Nelson said.

Nelson said Johnson made the suggestion after visiting a Tulare store, but the company didn't enter the bidding process.

The deadline to have the filters installed is Dec. 31, a date likely not to be met. Nelson said the conversion must take place one truck at a time, as there are no replacement vehicles. More realistically, the conversion will likely be done by the end of February.

Nelson said the city is working to meet the deadline by having the contract awarded by the end of the year.

The trucks to be reverted are side loaders, front loaders and ones used to carry roll-off containers, Nelson said.

The conversion is necessary because the trucks haven't been used long enough to accumulate adequate replacement funds, city officials said.

Fresno tour impresses high-speed rail official

By Eddie Jimenez

Fresno Bee, Monday, Nov. 28, 2011

Local officials on Monday impressed a California High-Speed Rail Authority commissioner with their pitch to locate the project's heavy maintenance yard in Fresno.

Commissioner Bob Balgenorth said Fresno County officials have put a lot of thought into how the facility would benefit the region and the state.

"This clearly is a community that wants high-speed rail," Balgenorth said.

A site near Highway 99 and American and Cedar avenues just south of Fresno is one of a handful from Merced County to Kern County being considered for the heavy maintenance yard.

Fresno Works -- a group of county officials and organizations -- hosted Balgenorth at a downtown Fresno luncheon Monday. After the luncheon, he took an airplane ride over the proposed sites of the maintenance yard and a downtown rail station.

The aerial tour offered Balgenorth a clear perspective on county officials' plans to accommodate a high-speed rail line, he said. "They put a lot of effort to make sure the environment was protected," he said.

Construction of the first segment of the rail line -- from Bakersfield to near Chowchilla -- is scheduled to begin in late 2012. The line would be expanded to San Francisco and the Los Angeles area by 2033.

Balgenorth said he understands concerns about high-speed rail costs and the effect that a system running through the Valley will have on property owners.

However, the rail line is necessary to ease traffic congestion and improve air quality, he said.

"We are so far behind the rest of the world in moving people around," he said.

