

West Hills hosting free emissions testing

The Business Journal, Wed., June 1, 2011

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and Valley Clean Air Now are jointly sponsoring free emissions tests for select vehicles on Saturday at West Hills College in Lemoore.

Area residents who own a 1995 model vehicle or older and have owned the car for at least six months will be entitled to a free vehicle emissions test.

The free test is only available to the first 525 qualifying vehicles.

If a vehicle does not pass inspection, the owner will get a voucher for up to \$500 in repairs related to emissions at a local Gold Shield-certified smog check station.

Free food and drinks will be available.

For more information, e-mail LemooreEvent@valley-can.org This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it or call (800) 806-2004.

Bullet-train plan back on track

The Valley Voice, Thurs., June 2, 2011

U.S. Department of Transportation officials have rejected recommendations from the California Legislative Analyst's Office and confirmed that the state's High-Speed Rail Authority **must meet the 2012 deadline to start construction** in order to qualify for about \$3.1 billion in federal funding for the project's initial leg, which, contrary to the Legislative Analyst's recommendations, will remain in the Central Valley. DOT officials rejected recommendations from the Legislative Analyst's Office that the first portion of \$43 billion bullet-train system be built in either the Bay Area or Southern California, stating that the decision to construct the initial route through the Central Valley was made after "considerable study." Earlier this month, the California Legislative Analyst's Office released a report that was highly critical of the rail authority's management -- and funding plan. "This shows that we are on the same page as the feds," said Jeffrey Barker, a High-Speed Rail Authority spokesman.

[Merced Sun-Star, Guest Commentary, Thursday, June 2, 2011:](#)

Build Wal-Mart facility? No

After careful consideration, city shouldn't accept just any project that promises jobs

By Kyle Stockard and Tom Grave

Last week the Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth filed an appeal on the ruling to allow construction of the massive Wal-Mart distribution center. We did so because we found the court's decision fell far short of addressing the concerns the public has about the project.

We believe this project to be in serious violation of the California Environmental Quality Act, known as CEQA. The purpose of CEQA is two-fold: 1) to ensure full and complete disclosure of the environmental and planning impacts of a project; and 2) to press decision-makers to use reasonable mitigation measures to alleviate those impacts. Armed with the information provided through the CEQA process, decision-makers can require improvements or reject projects with impacts too great to tolerate in the community.

The original complaint MARG filed with the court arose from the extensive testimony against the project from the public, supported by expert agencies, including the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the California Department of Transportation. Over the course of nearly five years, a number of different environmental and community groups, including the Sierra Club, the Asthma Coalition, the California Teachers' Association and local homeowners associations, cited major concerns with the project.

Our complaint outlines in detail the intolerable impact the project will have on our local air quality. Expert analysis projects that the air quality impacts will increase local respiratory health problems such as asthma, not to mention a substantial increase in airborne carcinogens. These impacts

cannot be eliminated in our community with the measures proposed in the Environmental Impact Report, and Wal-Mart attorneys have already objected to and weakened many of those measures.

The air quality impacts will be generated by the 900 diesel trucks that will come on and off of Highway 99 daily and rumble through a residential neighborhood, past three schools. If the project is built as planned, these homes and schools will permanently be plagued with constant noise, traffic congestion and pollution. There is no limitation placed on the number of trucks that may use the facility once it is built, so there is no guarantee that the pollution and traffic will not get even worse. Property values in South Merced will be further depressed, resulting in diminished property tax revenues and increased difficulties in recovering from the recessive economy.

Impacts to groundwater, urban decay and a number of other issues are also inadequately addressed.

In a breach of process, 4,500 pages of documentation were entered into the public record the day before the public hearing, when neither the public nor the City Council had time to review it before the vote on the distribution center. To date there has been no public review of this material, which contains significant details of how this project will affect Merced.

The proponents of this project focus heavily on the economic benefits of the project, but it is unlikely that the city would actually see all of those benefits. Wal-Mart claims the project will create anywhere from 400 to 900 jobs, but the city did not require Wal-Mart to guarantee any of those jobs would be given to Merced residents — a standard practice for cities considering large industrial projects. They elicited no local impact fees for the air quality problems of the project. Wal-Mart routinely sues to have its property taxes reduced once its facilities are built.

This appeal is driven by the commitment to responsible growth embraced by MARG.

Merced needs jobs, but settling for just any project that will provide jobs means settling for whatever degradation in air quality and quality of life that it may bring. To do so means establishing a reputation as a region where the most undesirable industries are welcome, further risking our health and repelling clean development.

A community where one in five children has asthma and where asthma is the No. 1 cause of school absenteeism cannot become work-force-prepared by adding a large air-polluting industry.

Merced can do better by promoting clean industries and locally owned business.

The authors are members of MARG.