

Vi-Cycle program saves money and air quality

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, May 11, 2012

Since its inception in 2008, the Vi-Cycle program implemented by the city of Visalia has refurbished dozens of bikes so that local businesses can provide a low-cost, environmentally friendly alternative to workday transportation.

The bikes, either unclaimed or recovered bikes from the Visalia Police Department, are refurbished by inmates in the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility at the California State Prison in Corcoran.

For \$25, local businesses can buy them, then make them available to employees.

The idea, said Kim Loeb, natural resource conservation manager for the city of Visalia, was that a program to provide low-cost bikes to businesses to let their employees use for errands or lunch breaks, rather than making short car trips, would go a long way to improving air quality.

But budget cuts at the state prison have reduced the number of bikes that the city can have refurbished, causing a backlog for local businesses.

Still, the program often works to introduce the idea of riding a bike to employees who might not have considered it before.

The bikes, with their fresh coat of green paint and "Vi-Cycle" lettering, coordinate with the city's other downtown amenities, including street lamps, benches and newspaper racks. And since all city buses have bike racks mounted to the front, the bike-lending program works in tandem with the city's other emissions-reducing efforts, including the buses themselves, which are powered with natural gas.

Apart from not adding to the pollution problem, Loeb said, bikes take pressure off traffic and eliminate parking concerns.

It's also good for the waistline.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Friday, May 11, 2012:](#)

High-speed rail system will benefit Valley

By Lee Ann Eager

Last week the High-Speed Rail Authority met in Fresno and approved the final Environmental Impact Report for the Merced to Fresno Section of high-speed rail.

The Fresno Economic Development Corporation was at the meeting to support the EIR. It was developed after years of input and represents the best way to route the rail line between the two cities to have the least impact on people, property and the environment.

But review and approval of the Merced to Fresno leg is one component of the bigger picture effort to build high-speed rail.

The much improved business plan, unveiled in Fresno in early April, serves as the statewide blueprint to guide the bullet train project that will get travelers from the Bay Area to Southern California in about two hours. The plan provides a sound, incremental framework to get a high-speed rail line built and operational.

Last week, the Senate and Assembly budget subcommittees held hearings to review the plan and take public comment. In coming weeks, state lawmakers will be asked to review the plan and approve the initial Proposition 1A funding to begin construction this year.

The business plan has wide support from business, labor, and community groups from throughout the state who believe this funding request should be approved. High-speed rail provides both short- and long-term benefits to our state's citizens.

Once built, high-speed rail will become a vital component of California's transportation infrastructure.

Closer to home, high-speed rail will open up our region to the population centers in the north and south, creating vastly expanded economic opportunities and quality of life benefits.

In response to concerns about relocating businesses along the proposed alignment, the EDC, the city of Fresno, the county of Fresno, and the High Speed Rail Authority have been working together to ensure that our businesses will be kept informed of the progress of the project and that their rights are protected.

In the short term, high-speed rail will create thousands of jobs. Not just in construction itself, but in the ancillary businesses providing materials and services to facilitate construction and development of the project. Jobs will be created in the Central Valley, in the "bookends" in the Bay Area and Los Angeles, and in the Northern San Joaquin Valley.

High-speed rail jobs are desperately needed in the Central Valley. According to March figures from the State Employment Development Department, unemployment remains high in the eight Central Valley counties: Fresno: 17.4%; Kern: 15.9%; Kings: 17.4%; Madera: 16.6%; Merced: 20.2%; San Joaquin: 16.7%; Stanislaus: 17.4%; and Tulare: 18.3%.

In the long term, quality of life benefits also are significant. High-speed rail is needed to accommodate our state's growing population which is expected to hit 60 million by 2050. Our state's roads, freeways and airports are already congested and experiencing delays. Today, people lose time and money sitting in traffic.

In contrast, high-speed rail is a cost-effective, green alternative. High-speed rail is less expensive than expanding roads, freeways and airports to meet the same population demands. It will save money, time and improve air quality.

High-speed rail will mean 320 billion fewer vehicle miles traveled over 40 years. It will save motorists 146 million hours in traffic each year. It will reduce emissions by 3 million tons annually and save 237 millions of gallons of gasoline and 35 million gallons of aviation fuel each year.

Air quality is a top concern of the Central Valley. According to the April 2012 "State of the Air" report by the American Lung Association, six Central Valley cities are in the top 10 nationally of worst cities for year round particle pollution. Further, Fresno, Kern, Merced and Madera counties all had asthma rates significantly higher than that of the rest of the state.

By following the blueprint laid out in the business plan, we'll be capitalizing on our state's existing infrastructure and linking it together with a modernized high-speed rail system. This allows California to build a more efficient, convenient and environmentally sound mode of travel.

Doing nothing in the face of a booming population is simply not an option. Without high-speed rail, the state will face much larger transportation, environmental and economic burdens.

Building high-speed rail will bring untold benefits immediately and for years to come.

Lee Ann Eager is president and CEO of the Economic Development Corporation serving Fresno County and was chief operating officer of the corporation since September of 2009.

Bakersfield Californian Commentary, Sunday, May 13, 2012:

UC President's visit didn't exactly clear the air

By Lois Henry, Californian columnist

I feel snubbed.

I know he said it was just bad timing.

But I can't help feeling it was me. Perhaps something I said?

University of California President Mark Yudof made a quick swing through the valley and stopped at Bakersfield High School last Tuesday to, somehow with a straight face, tell students that UC is still an affordable option for them. Ha! Good one.

Behind the scenes, I'd been bugging Yudof's people to have him meet with The Californian's Editorial Board after his gig at BHS. He was meeting with the Fresno Bee's edit board, after all. What are we? Chopped liver?

OK, fine, they finally told my boss. We'd get a half hour, from 2 to 2:30 p.m.

I let Yudof's front man know that I had some specific questions about his nominations to a certain state board.

You can imagine my disappointment when I got word last Friday, May 4, that Yudof wouldn't be popping in, not even for a measly half hour. He wanted to get to LA before traffic closed in. Oh, come on.

This dude hauls down more than \$800k a year in taxpayer loot including his housing allowance and pension. Plus he's a lawyer, for cripes sake. I'm pretty sure he could handle a pipsqueak like me.

All I wanted to know was why Yudof keeps nominating the same guy -- John Froines -- to the Scientific Review Panel despite Froines' 28-year run on the panel. Not to mention that Froines and several others were booted off the panel in 2010 after a lawsuit pointed out they hadn't been properly reappointed in decades.

And why, I wanted to know, does Yudof's nomination letter this last go-round say he's putting Froines on the list at the behest of Assembly Speaker John Perez?

As background, the Scientific Review Panel is a state board that has provided the underpinning for much of California's air pollution regulation by declaring which substances are toxic air contaminants.

It consists of nine scientists who are supposed to provide a strictly scientific basis for the regulations. No politics allowed, or at least that was the intent of the original law under which it was created. Which is why nominations have to come from Yudof's office, supposedly beyond the reach of politics.

My contention, however, is that this panel has been polluted by politics for years and now it's happening with Yudof's complicity.

Although Yudof ditched me, the UC bigwigs did have Provost Larry Pitts speak to me by phone about my questions and concerns.

Though he doesn't have anything to do with the nomination process and hadn't read Yudof's letter, he assured me that "as far as I can tell, the UC's roll has not been corrupted."

Uh huh.

He initially said that the nomination process, as outlined in California Health and Safety Code 39670 and 39671, allowed for incumbent panel members to be renominated at the request of the appointing authority, such as Speaker Perez.

No, it doesn't. It also doesn't say it's cool for the appointing authorities to suggest who Yudof should put on his nomination list.

I would assert, as I did to Provost Pitts, that the spirit of the law establishing the Scientific Review Panel clearly intended to remove politics.

Since Perez, and the other appointing bodies -- the California Environmental Protection Agency Secretary and Senate Rules Committee -- are politicians (i.e. full o' politics) Yudof shouldn't be taking direction from them. Sheesh!

As for Froines, the former "Chicago Seven" member has made no bones about the fact that he believes science should be used to alter society. He's an admitted activist who has dedicated his life to coming up with the "science" to promote an agenda.

Part of that agenda, according to the mission statement of his Southern California Particle Center, is to prove that PM2.5, tiny particulate matter from dust and exhaust, is a rampant killer that must be eradicated.

That means clamping down ever harder on diesel truck exhaust and other industry emissions, regardless of the economic impacts or the diminishing, if any, benefits.

Numerous studies have surfaced in recent years showing PM2.5 isn't killing anyone in California; the California Air Resources Board has been forced to lower its death estimates several times. But with his de facto lifetime position on the Scientific Review Panel, Froines has been able to ignore those facts and pursue his agenda.

He couldn't do that without the support of Perez, a powerful member of the Democratic caucus who's reliant on liberal environmentalist support for reelection. Supporting Froines makes Perez a "green" candidate.

And, of course, Perez happens to be one of the politicians holding the purse strings to the UC budget, a fact I'm sure Yudof is keenly aware of.

Ah, the circle of life.

While Yudof wouldn't confab with me on these topics, Provost Pitts did his best.

"I would argue strongly, definitively, that we are unaware of any political pressure with regards to who goes on the nomination list," he said. "Whether there are politics once the list leaves the office of the president, I can't tell you one way or the other."

Oh, believe me, it's not the PM2.5 making it hard to breathe, it's the politics.