

Electric-vehicle workshop set for Modesto

Central Valley Business Times, Tuesday, July 10, 2012

- July 21 event is free to the public
- 'Imagine never having to buy gas for your vehicle again'

State-of-the-art electric vehicles will be on display in Modesto on July 21 at a free workshop about electric cars and trucks.

The public is invited to learn about the latest in electric-vehicle technology, talk to EV owners and find out about rebates for the purchase of an electric-vehicle.

The rebate workshop is sponsored by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the California Center for Sustainable Energy.

The free workshop runs from 10 a.m. to 1p.m. at the Valley Air District's Modesto office, 4800 Enterprise Way. On the agenda are presentations by representatives of the Valley Air District, CCSE, the Modesto Irrigation District and a drivers' panel to answer questions and share their experiences as electric-vehicle owners.

"Besides the obvious benefits of cleaner air for the Valley, imagine never having to buy gas for your vehicle again," says Todd DeYoung, manager of the Air District's grants program.

During the workshop District representatives will provide information about the new rebate program, which offers up to \$3,000 for the purchase of selected electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles.

Additional rebates are available through the California Air Resources Board's Clean Vehicle Rebate Project, administered by CCSE, a San Diego-based nonprofit organization that conducts workshops throughout the state to educate the public about the benefits of electric-vehicle ownership. Even further incentives are available through federal government and electric vehicle buyers could qualify for up to \$13,000 in incentives.

Lunch will be provided after the presentations, and attendees will have the opportunity to test drive some of the electric vehicles on display, including the Nissan LEAF, Mitsubishi i-MiEV and Chevy Volt.

Local reaction to high speed rail vote mixed

Residents wary of cost, but excited about possibilities of high speed transit

By Kyle Harvey, staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wed., July 11, 2012

The California state legislature passed a bill Friday that approves \$8 billion in funding for the initial construction of the nation's first high speed rail train. The project will begin this year in the San Joaquin Valley, north of Fresno. Votes in the Assembly and the Senate were cast largely along party lines.

The next stage of the high speed rail saga of particular interest to valley residents is the review of the environmental impact report (EIR) governing the proposed line between Fresno and Bakersfield. The EIR is expected sometime before the end of the month and will include the fiercely contested Kings County portion of the line.

Once the EIR is published and approved, Tulare and Kings County residents will know the exact route of the train as well as more precise construction timelines and budgets. Until then however, residents of Tulare and Kings Counties are left to speculate about what is to come.

Local reaction to the vote that officially begins the project was mixed, with elected officials and citizens' opinions all over the political spectrum.

Assemblywoman Connie Conway (R-Visalia) voted no on the bill.

"Today's vote by the majority party shows once again how misplaced their priorities are. They have put taxpayers on the hook for up to \$4.7 billion in annual debt service for a project that we simply can't afford. Every dollar spent repaying debt is a dollar that won't go to classrooms, police and other vital priorities." Conway, along with other Republicans, pushed for amendments that would put the issue before voters again, but their amendments failed. "The Democrat majority didn't want voters to have the final say," Conway said.

Senator Jean Fuller (R-Bakersfield), who represents Tulare County, also voted no on the funding.

"I am extremely disappointed by today's vote in the senate," Fuller said. "High speed rail is a luxury California can't afford. While costs have skyrocketed over and above what the voters approved in 2008, there has been no private sector investment and federal funding has dried up ... If California begins construction on this project, it's unlikely it will ever be completed. Considering all the other pressing infrastructure needs in the state, this would be a calamity."

Tulare County Supervisor Vice Chairman Pete Vander Poel says he's not surprised at all by the latest turn of events.

Despite it being sold as something that would be all inclusive, the High Speed Rail Authority is not taking into consideration the interests of those in the Central Valley, Vander Poel said.

City Councilman Warren Gubler still has reservations about the financing of the train, but has taken an optimistic view of the situation.

"Take the lemon and make lemonade out of it," Gubler said, "This is a major investment in the Central Valley. If the financing works out, it'll be a plus for the state of California... This could pull the valley out of this economic down spiral."

An unofficial poll in downtown Visalia netted a variety of ideas about the train. While financial concerns weigh heavy on the minds of most polled, many say that they look forward to using the bullet train service.

George Sanchez, 40, who is a regular rider of the bus system, would love for there to be a train to speed up travel to Southern California. He is also among the many who hope to someday be employed by the High Speed Rail Authority.

Dora Martinez, 55, of Tulare, is in favor of the train for environmental reasons. She pointed out that nearly every car in this day in age only carries one passenger. Distracted driving, crowded freeways and high fuel prices are among the reasons she would choose to ride the train.

Frank Serpa, of Serpa Automotive, is also for it. ["It reduces emissions;](#) they do it all over the world. It's great for people who don't like to fly. I would use it every time I go to L.A. I'm not too crazy about driving – there's too much congestion."

Brett McAndrews, 47, is a commuter who would love to have a more efficient way to get to work.

"I'd like to ride it. I work in Bakersfield. It'd be nice to pay a flat monthly rate and ride the train to work," McAndrews said.

Suzanne McClure, 63, a nurse at the Tulare Regional Medical Center, would so much like to see the train come to the Central Valley that she would not mind shouldering part of the large cost.

"If my taxes went up a little to pay for it, I'd do my fair share," McClure said, "I'd ride it to the Bay Area. I would love it to come to Visalia. We're growing, we're prosperous and we're a force to be reckoned with in the future."

Still, many others feared the economic implications of the costly project as well as the impact the train would have on local agriculture.

Lincoln Hall, former College of the Sequoias President and Superintendent, and his wife Gerry, also a former C.O.S. educator, are not in favor of the train.

"Considering California's finances, it should be very carefully considered. It wouldn't have a significant impact on our lives, but I understand the concerns of those who have land that will be negatively impacted. I feel for them." Gerry Hall said.

Chris Petty, 50, a registered nurse at Kaweah Delta, likes the idea but not the cost.

"I think it would be great, but we don't have the money - debt reduction first," Petty said.

Still other residents cited California culture as a reason the train is not a good idea.

Joe Vaccaro, a small business owner on Main Street, says that even putting aside the well-documented financial concerns, a train would never work in California. But there are other forms of renewable energy that could be implemented.

"I think Californians are too used to their cars. They're not going to spend money on the train ... Take all the money and help convert cars to natural gas which California has an overabundance of," Vicarro said, "We already have a shortage of electricity. Those brownouts come from somewhere. If we don't have enough electricity to power our homes, how will we have enough for this train?"

Frank Gild, 59, agrees that Californians are car-first people.

"It's a waste of money and time. I just don't agree with it. This is California, people love their cars - it's our lifestyle. It's what we're about," Gild said.

Gild also noted that he is a regular user of Amtrak trains and is satisfied with the service he receives.

California's bullet train faces new challenges after funding approval

By Mike Rosenberg, staff writer

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Wed., July 11, 2012

As California secures the riches needed to start building a high-speed rail line, some longtime bitter foes of the bullet train are beginning to back off -- yet from the courtroom to the boardroom, other opponents are preparing for one last shot at blocking the historic project.

The hoopla over the Legislature's dramatic approval Friday of Gov. Jerry Brown's \$8 billion plan to begin building the \$69 billion bullet train is now giving way to many less-scintillating challenges remaining before the state can break ground in the Central Valley early next year.

"The legislative aspect is over, we lost that round. So now it's going to be the litigated phase," said state Sen. Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale, who led the charge against the project in the Senate. "I don't think there's a complete 'give-up' view yet out there, but it does look tougher."

Two opponents said for the first time Tuesday they are close to reaching settlements with the state: Union Pacific, which for years threatened to stall the project by withholding pivotal rail property along the bullet train route, said it hopes to have a deal with the rail authority "finalized soon." And Peninsula opponents said they're close to settling a four-year court battle over the rail line.

Even proponents of an initiative to put the project back on the ballot are now conceding their effort is likely to fail.

But a lot of work remains before the state can begin building the first 130-mile segment of the biggest public works project in California history. It must:

- Fight off five current lawsuits against the project, with future suits expected.
- Complete high-stakes negotiations with property owners along the route, including powerful groups like big farm businesses.
- Convince investors to buy more than \$500 million in state bonds this fall to kick off construction.

- Fill the holes atop the project's leadership staff by hiring a team of senior executives.
- Clear several bureaucratic hurdles posed by government agencies, including the state's strict environmental laws.

"There is going to be real opposition at every little step," said Santa Cruz environmental attorney Gary Patton, who is representing opponents on the Peninsula and Central Valley. "There are so many things still to be decided that it's unclear what will actually happen."

The California High-Speed Rail Authority maintains it is "close" to reaching agreements with the freight railroads and making progress on the lawsuits, but declined to go into specifics, citing ongoing closed-door negotiations. Bullet train leaders also say the Legislature's passage of project funding will open the floodgates for a slew of applicants who want to work on the San Francisco-to-Los Angeles railroad.

Five remaining lawsuits -- two in settlement talks on the Peninsula and three in the Central Valley -- against the train are perhaps the project's most formidable challenge. A judge could issue an injunction to halt construction, a worry that prompted Brown last month to propose fast-tracking environmental suits through the courts. While the governor has since backed off in the face of stiff opposition from environmental groups, he's indicated that plan may resurface later.

"(It) is something that still needs to be looked at," Brown spokesman Gil Duran said.

Central Valley groups argue under the California Environmental Quality Act that the project was rushed through the planning stages and would negatively impact things like [air quality](#) and noise, and that the current plan is too different from the bond measure voters approved to launch the train in 2008.

"If the Legislature doesn't have the guts (to kill the project) than we better make sure the court system will carry that forward," said Aaron Fukuda, a community leader in Kings County, ground zero for opposition in the Central Valley. "We're committed to the very bitter end."

Still, even Patton acknowledged that judges typically side with the state on big projects. And Stuart Flashman -- the attorney for Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Atherton, which have been battling the project in court since 2008 -- said he's "keeping his fingers crossed" for a settlement that would allow construction to move forward on a two-track project to electrify the Caltrain line between San Francisco and San Jose -- instead of four tracks. That could pave the way for Bay Area high-speed rail service next decade.

Finally, Republicans led by LaMalfa are circulating a petition to put the rail line back on the ballot, though he said the effort will die soon unless unlikely donors step forward to fund the signature drive. And even if they collect at least 505,000 signatures by Oct. 15, the measure wouldn't reach the statewide ballot box until November 2014, more than 18 months after construction is scheduled to start.