

\$750,000 grant to help pay for 8 clean-air Fresno buses

By Pablo Lopez
The Fresno Bee

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Fresno will get nearly \$750,000 in federal funds to help pay for eight clean-air buses, Rep. Devin Nunes said Tuesday.

Two buses will serve fixed routes that meander through the city; the other six buses will serve people with disabilities. The buses will use compressed natural gas, or CNG, for fuel, which burns cleaner than diesel.

"Cleaning up the Central Valley's air is a high priority, and this is a significant step in that direction," Nunes, R-Visalia, said of the \$742,522 grant from the Department of Transportation.

Fresno has 20 municipal buses that use compressed natural gas; five more buses are on order, said Bruce Rudd, the city's transit general manager. In addition, the city has two hybrid electric-diesel buses.

The Valley ranks among the nation's three dirtiest air basins.

Rudd credited Mayor Alan Autry for taking Fresno's case for clean-air buses to Washington, D.C.: "He has been actively lobbying on the city's behalf and asking our representatives to pony up money for Fresno."

Nunes also is co-sponsoring legislation to provide a tax credit to Valley businesses that improve air quality by reducing emissions from diesel engines. A business would receive tax credits for up to 25% of the cost of replacing high-pollution diesel engines with cleaner technology. The credit is capped at \$15,000 per business each year.

The proposal applies to heavy-duty, on-road diesel engines and off-highway diesel engines. The new equipment would have to be 50% cleaner than the old engine. The legislation would sunset after 2009 to encourage compliance by the Clean Air Act deadline of 2010.

Public previews Westside Parkway project

By MISTY WILLIAMS, Californian staff writer
The Bakersfield Californian

Thursday August 28, 2003, 10:40:17 PM

Cardboard signs with enlarged maps, timelines and statistics lined the walls of the room as people milled about and Bakersfield city staff waited patiently to answer questions.

City officials held an informal community meeting Thursday night at the Bakersfield Convention Center, allowing residents to voice questions and concerns about the Westside Parkway project. In the final stages of environmental study, the project is designed to relieve congestion on major arteries such as Rosedale and Stockdale highways.

Assistant Public Works Director Jacques LaRochelle said he hopes to have the final environmental document, which includes studies on air quality, noise, water quality and traffic, approved by federal and state agencies by August 2004.

"That is the absolute key thing in this whole process," he said. "Once you have that, it gives us the ability to start design."

But not all residents are eager for the project to take shape.

Louanne Crank thought she would be living in the country when she moved into her northwest home with her daughter and granddaughter almost two years ago. With the thought of the

parkway directly behind their back yard, Crank and her daughter, Jennifer, are considering moving.

"That's just going to kill the country feeling I enjoy so much," said Crank's daughter, Jennifer, 23.

While concerns such as noise, light and air quality loom in her mind, Crank is also worried about the value of her home, which her real estate broker said would likely diminish.

Carmen Varela and her family, who live in the Fox Creek development south of Brimhall Road between Coffee Road and Calloway Drive, are facing a similar situation. Varela came to Thursday's meeting to see if the parkway would obstruct the view from her yard.

"I can see the mountains and everything," Varela said.

Despite the concerns, Varela said the parkway would be a definite benefit to the city, hopefully alleviating congestion on Rosedale Highway, where she often travels.

"Rosedale's a nightmare to drive down," she said.

The eight-mile-long parkway, expected to be completed in 2010, would extend from either Oak Street or Truxtun Avenue to Heath Road in the west and could reach up to eight lanes.

While it will take about 12 months to design the parkway, preliminary design work has already started on the extension of Mohawk Street from Truxtun Avenue to Rosedale Highway, where an interchange will allow access to the parkway, said consultant Jeff Chapman, with URS Corporation. Construction could start on the extension as soon as June 2005, Chapman said.

Construction on the parkway could begin as early as summer 2006, said engineer Ted Wright, with the public works department. Roughly \$175 million in federal and state funds has already been earmarked for the project, Wright said, but costs could rise depending on what mitigations may be required.

Although Thursday night's meeting was an initial chance for residents to become familiar with the project, public hearings will be held in January after the release of the final environmental report to the public in December, Wright said.

"This is a big enough project that we want to inform the community," he said. "We're just trying to get ahead of the game."

Spare the Air Day scheduled for today

By Hanford Sentinel Staff, September 2, 2003

FRESNO - The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has scheduled a Spare the Air Day for at least today throughout all three regions of the Central Valley.

The Central Region, which includes Kings and Fresno counties, as well as Southern and Northern Regions are expecting high pollutant air levels today and Wednesday as a result of triple-digit temperatures.

Residents can help reduce and control air pollution levels by a variety of actions including:

€ linking trips;

€ using an electric briquette starter instead of lighter fluid when barbecuing; and

€ avoiding long periods of unnecessary idling in your vehicle.

[Letters to the Editor-Fresno Bee:](#)

Not since Harding

By Kevin Hall
Air Quality Chair
Sierra Club-Tehipite Chapter
Fresno
(Published Wednesday, September 3, 2003, 4:25 AM)

In his letter Aug. 29, Bill Hunter suggests the Sierra Club has been silent on the environmental record of Gov. Gray Davis, particularly air pollution. He asks, "Do they really care about the environment or who's governor?"

The answer is yes. We care very deeply about the environment or who's governor. They're closely linked. That's why last March we announced our opposition to the recall.

Gov. Davis has signed the first legislation in the nation to curb greenhouse gases that increase global warming, has established strong incentives for the manufacture and purchase of alternative-fuel cars and has committed to passing legislation this year that will restore federal air quality protections eliminated by the Bush administration.

Never in our nation's history has a president launched such an all-out attack on the basic safeguards of human health and safety. As journalist Bill Moyers recently observed, "You have to go all the way back to the crony capitalism of the Harding administration to find a president who invited such open and crass exploitation of the commonwealth."

And never in our state's history has it been more important to have a governor and Legislature who will work to protect the citizens of California and the environment on which our very survival depends. Gray Davis is that governor.

'Unbalanced' coverage

By G.L. Thurston, M.D.
Avenal
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State Sen. Dean Florez's "hearings" on "clean air," parading asthmatic children before members of the Legislature, are pure melodramatic hype and political hacksterism. I have been in private medical practice in the Valley for 37 years and the incidence of asthma in Valley kids is nowhere near 1-in-6. Sen. Florez's data is inaccurate and flawed. Sen. Florez is a shameless hustler, bully and showman. Why is The Bee in bed with him?

I strongly object to The Bee's unbalanced news coverage of the Florez Clean-Air Bill, SB 700. The Bee and Sen. Florez have failed to adequately disclose the costs of his bills to the voters, including \$4.6 billion in bonds (debt) and many new layers of bureaucrats, paper shufflers, code enforcers and regulators.

Everybody wants clean air, but SB 700 is not the way to achieve it.

[Los Angles Times editorial, September 3, 2003:](#)

EPA Rulings Choke States

To counter the damage that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is doing to air quality regulation, states need to fight furiously to retain their own authority over clean air. That goes double for California.

The rule-burning in Washington doesn't even have internal logic. During the 2000 presidential campaign, President Bush specifically promised to regulate greenhouse gases, particularly

carbon dioxide, which are blamed for global warming. He didn't do it, and last week the EPA gave him an excuse, declaring that Congress never gave it specific authority to regulate such gases.

On the other hand, just one day earlier, the EPA, without consulting Congress, radically changed one of the key rules of the federal Clean Air Act, known as "new source review." That means power companies and others in big industries will no longer have to reduce emissions when they upgrade their plants. Power companies had identified the regulation as one of their chief gripes.

The Bush administration boasts that it makes decisions on the basis of "sound science," but these EPA rulings are not reasonable except in the context of pleasing the energy industry.

Just as backward-looking is the administration's decision last week to support a lawsuit aimed at killing local rules that have cut toxic diesel pollution and fostered improved natural-gas-engine technology. The South Coast Air Quality Management District's rules, passed in 2000 and 2001, require local governments and private operators in four Southern California counties to replace their soot-belching diesel trash trucks, street sweepers, transit buses and school buses with clean-burning models when the old ones wear out. Diesel exhaust is a known carcinogen. The rules — and a state subsidy that helps to defray the cost of natural gas vehicles — have put nearly 7,000 cleaner new vehicles on the road.

To counter this clean-air backsliding, California will have to fight for its own standards, starting with a bill to maintain the state's stricter new source review. The measure, SB 288 by Sen. Byron Sher (D-Stanford), is expected to come up for a vote on the Senate floor this week. Gov. Gray Davis has endorsed it.

The EPA ruling that only Congress can authorize regulation of greenhouse gases may threaten California's first-in-the-nation program to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse emissions by cars and trucks beginning with the 2009 model year. The state environmental agency says it will sue to demand that the EPA regulate carbon dioxide as a contributor to global warming.

California has long had the right to maintain air pollution control rules that are stronger than the national ones because the state had uniquely bad air problems.

Far from harming the state's business climate, better air quality is a requirement for any business hoping to compete for quality employees. The administration's favors to the energy industry do the overall economy no good at all. Whatever California's elected officials can do to keep the state from backsliding is a favor to both families and most businesses.