

Council OKs cleaner-burning buses

Dial-a-Ride bus purchase will cost the city \$600k

By Gerald Carroll, staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2007

Visalia hopes to get a substantial discount on the purchase of six Dial-a-Ride transit buses that run on cleaner-burning compressed natural gas in a deal approved Monday night by the Visalia City Council.

Monty Cox, Visalia transit manager, reported that the city can take advantage of a contract that the state of California currently has with Bus West, a company that specializes in converting the smaller Dial-a-Ride buses to run on compressed natural gas instead of regular fuel.

The conversion, which runs about \$35,000 per bus, will save on fuel costs and produce a cleaner-burning engine, Cox said.

Conversion pushes the cost of each bus to \$100,584, and the Visalia transit system wants to acquire six of these Dial-a-Ride buses for a total cost of \$603,504, Cox wrote in a staff report.

"This [converting from regular fuel to compressed natural gas] is still the best option for the city because the use of natural gas saves over \$5,000 per year in fuel consumption and engine replacements [per vehicle]," Cox wrote.

Leslie Caviglia, Visalia deputy city manager, said Monday that the savings offset the extra cost to convert them to compressed natural gas operation.

"Yes, there is more cost up front," Caviglia said, "but it is worth it, and it does keep the air cleaner."

The buses seat 16 people and are designed for special pickups on variable routes. They are also equipped with wheelchair lifts for passengers with disabilities.

Helping finance the purchase will be various state clean-air grants totaling \$330,000 plus \$273,504 that is needed from the council, Cox said.

In other action:

? Voted 5-0 to provide up to \$23,500 to hire a consultant to help recruit and hire a new city fire chief.

? Voted 5-0 to post a speed limit of 45 mph on a recently completed extension of McAuliff Street between Houston and Mill Creek avenues.

The state would have allowed a 65 mph speed on such a divided multilane road without posted speed limits.

? Recognized the seven-day building project that finished the "1,000 Hands Playground Project" at Visalia Riverway Sports Park.

From Sept. 18 to Sept. 24, 1,634 volunteers helped build the universally accessible playground, which cost between \$175,000 and \$200,000, said Vince Elizondo, director of Visalia's Parks and Recreation Department.

Most of the money for the project was provided by local cash contributions and donations of materials and labor, organizers said.

? Voted 5-0 to accept a memorandum of understanding with the San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization to jointly pursue "technologies, policies, programs and projects" that will improve air quality in Visalia and Tulare County, according to project manager Shawn Ogletree.

Clean Air Kids Calendar artwork due October 15

Tehachapi News, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2007

Calling all student artists - get out your crayons, markers and pens. The deadline has been extended to Oct. 15 to submit artwork for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's 2008 Clean Air Kids Calendar.

The Valley Air District produces the bilingual calendar each year. About 20,000 calendars are distributed free to schools, community groups, healthcare facilities, churches and non-profit organizations in December.

Valley school students in kindergarten through 12th grade who live within the Air District's boundaries are eligible to enter the contest. Artists should place the page sideways, in landscape orientation, so the paper is 8 1/2 inches high and 11 inches wide. Artwork should be in color and contain a written message about how to help clean the air.

Messages for the 2007 calendar included:

- "Save the Future. Spare the Air."
- "Keep our air clean. Ride your bike."
- "Don't pollute the air. Flex your car trips, carpool."
- "Check before you burn."
- "Animals and trees need clean air!"

Fourteen drawings with clean-air themes will be selected for the four-color wall calendar. Students should include their name, address, phone number, age, grade and school on the back of the artwork and mail it flat, not folded, to 2008 Kids Calendar Contest, Valley Air District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726.

Public meetings for the week

Lodi News Sentinel, Late Monday, Oct. 1, 2007

Today

San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors

Key items:

- Approval of three out-of-state travel requests for county employees, including a trip to the West Indies for a residency coordinators workshop, a trip to Pahrump, Nev., for firearms training and one to Hagerstown, Md., for a jail association meeting.
- Appointment of Supervisor Ken Vogel, who represents Lodi, as an alternate on the [San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control](#) District.
- Announcement of one position on the Advisory Water Commission.

When and where: 9 a.m. Board Chambers, 7th floor, Courthouse, 222 E. Weber Ave., Stockton.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Visalia City Council's approval for the purchase of six cleaner burning buses. For more information, contact Maricela \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

Gobierno local sostiene que luchar contra contaminación ayuda al presupuesto

El costo total del proyecto es de unos 600 mil dólares, pero Visalia ahorrará cinco mil dólares en combustible por unidad cada año, y contribuirá a reducir gastos en atención médica padecimientos que origina o exalta la contaminación

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, CA
Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2007

Una pequeña ciudad en una de las regiones más contaminadas en el país ejemplificó una fórmula con la que luchar contra la contaminación del aire ayuda a balancear el presupuesto público.

El Consejo de Gobierno de Visalia, población cercana a Fresno, California, aprobó por unanimidad sustituir seis autobuses públicos que consumen diesel por nuevos modelos accionados con gas natural.

El costo total del proyecto es de unos 600 mil dólares, pero Visalia ahorrará cinco mil dólares en combustible por unidad cada año, y contribuirá a reducir gastos en atención médica padecimientos que origina o exalta la contaminación.

Visalia se ubica en el Valle de San Joaquín, la segunda zona del país más contaminada después de Los Ángeles.

[Modesto Bee Commentary, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2007:](#)

Short-haul rail can improve valley's air, competitiveness

By SHIRLEY BATCHMAN and ROGER ISOM

The Central Valley's agricultural industry has a tremendous opportunity to improve transportation reliability, improve air quality and reduce transportation costs by securing a short-haul rail connection between the San Joaquin Valley and the Northern California seaports.

Valley farmers and businesses that export agricultural products face increased competition with farmers around the globe. The businesses with which we compete in other nations have cheaper labor, weaker regulations and all-around lower costs. We must work together on cost-saving innovations, such as short-haul rail, to achieve a competitive advantage.

The valley has a reputation for producing superior agricultural products. We cannot compete with cheaper labor and will never compromise quality, worker safety or regulations. But we can improve efficiencies, and short-haul rail is key to the quick and efficient transportation of goods.

We currently enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship with the Port of Oakland to export goods, but transportation costs are increasing. Every day, trucks are forced to sit in traffic getting to and from the port. Combined with rising fuel costs, our ability to compete erodes.

In February, the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors took an important step in addressing this transportation challenge. Selecting West Park LLP to develop Crows Landing into an inland port and economic engine gives growers an opportunity to reduce transportation costs through the use of rail.

This is a first step to ultimately serve the entire San Joaquin Valley's agricultural industry. Short-haul rail would provide growers with a more efficient, less expensive and more environmentally sensitive transportation alternative.

Short-haul rail reduces diesel emissions because trucks are intercepted inside the valley and their containers placed onto clean-fuel trains that carry products to our seaports. Diesel emissions account for more than 30 percent of pollutants in the valley and 27 percent of the valley's smog is wind driven from the Bay Area. A short-haul rail system will take a substantial amount of polluting trucks off the highways and reduce congestion.

Since the passage of last November's \$3 billion bond funding, stakeholders, including the agricultural community, have been competitively working to bring those transportation dollars to their own jurisdictions.

As farmers and businesses that export agricultural products, we support short-haul rail's innovative solution that will ensure the valley gets a fair share. The Port of Oakland is interested in collaborating with us to create a comprehensive transportation infrastructure in Northern California. The agricultural community is enthusiastic about short-haul rail as a viable solution to the traffic and gridlock in and out of the port.

Our associations ask that every resident of Stanislaus County join us in support of short-haul rail in the San Joaquin Valley.

Batchman is director of industry relations for California Citrus Mutual, and Isom is vice president, California Cotton Ginners and Growers Associations.

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Tuesday, Oct, 2, 2007:](#)

Open Forum

On U.S. Energy Policy

Clean, cheap energy? Not really

By Mark Leno, Rochelle Becker

Nuclear power is billed by Christine Todd Whitman and other nuclear advocates as the cure for summertime power outages, but that's exactly when nuclear power is the least dependable. Nuclear reactors demand a constant flow of cold water to keep their radioactive core cooled, and any disruption to that flow can cause a catastrophic upset.

In the United States, two-thirds of our nuclear power plants are located on lakes and rivers, which provide the necessary cooling water. However, as temperatures increase and climate change brings longer and more frequent heat waves, the ambient temperature of surface water increases.

Last summer, nuclear plants were shut down in Michigan because the water wasn't cold enough, and plants in Minnesota, Illinois, Connecticut and Pennsylvania were "ramped down" to lower output for the same reason. France is often cited as a nuclear success story. However, during a 2003 heat wave, 17 French reactors reduced their output or shut down due to increasing water temperatures. Electricité d

France was forced to purchase power from other countries at 10 times the normal price. On days when their electricity is needed most, nuclear plants using once-through cooling can't meet the demand.

Nuclear plants such as California's Diablo Canyon and San Onofre, which use billions of gallons of cold ocean water every day, may find that source cut off. A 2007 interpretation of the Clean Water Act by the U.S. Court of Appeals in New York will redefine the ability of power plants to use water for once-through cooling. Although the details are not finalized, the thermal impacts to ocean ecosystems are making many nuclear plants even less reliable.

Regardless of weather or season, there is one thing nuclear energy can be counted on to deliver - tons and tons of high level radioactive waste. This by-product of an industry billing itself as "clean energy" is so lethal that its most hazardous components must be shielded from the biosphere for 300,000 years. This is the same waste debacle that the government promised to solve decades ago, and has failed, despite spending billions of utility ratepayer and tax dollars.

According to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, approximately 55,000 tons of high-level radioactive waste is being stored adjacent to our nation's waterways and, in California this lethal material is sitting on our earthquake-active coast. One radioactive release could devastate our state's tourism and agriculture sectors. The earthquake at Kashiwazaki, Japan, on July 16 was caused by a previously unknown fault and damaged Japan's largest nuclear plant, putting 7,000 megawatts of summer energy offline indefinitely.

The Japan incident has also resulted in massive cancellations in coastal tourism lodgings with roughly 80 percent of tourists citing concerns over a radiation leak. Imagine what that would do to the California economy from Disneyland to Sea World if a similar incident happened at Southern California's San Onofre reactor? A Chernobyl-like incident at the Central Coast's Diablo Canyon plant could spread radiation over California's Central Valley ruining the livelihood of millions and threatening the nation's food supply for decades.

In the 50 years the nuclear power industry has had to prove itself economical, reliable and safe, we have seen construction costs skyrocket to 20 times more than their original cost, shutdowns, new threats from terrorism and no real solution for safeguarding radioactive waste for 300,000 years. By now, a mature industry like nuclear power should be competitive but is instead seeking \$50 billion in taxpayer subsidies in the federal energy bill now awaiting resolution between the House and Senate.

When the hot summer sun blazes down on the Golden State, Californians ultimately must plan for a future based on truly renewable energy such as solar, wind, hydro, geothermal and ocean power. Because saddling future generations with the responsibility to safeguard our nuclear waste or face catastrophe, should not be an option at all.

Mark Leno represents the eastern half of San Francisco in the California State Assembly. Rochelle Becker is the Executive Director of the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility and serves on the Sierra Club's National Radiation Committee.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2007:](#)

New stronger rules in the air State air board's aggressive example should be followed.

State air board's aggressive example should be followed.

The state's air board is moving aggressively to put new rules in place to help clean up California's air, especially in the heavily polluted Valley and Los Angeles air basins. Let's hope some of that energy rubs off on the Valley's air district.

One of the rules adopted last week by the California Air Resources Board will require a massive retrofit and replacement effort for diesel trucks in the South Coast Air Quality Management District. Diesel pollution is a major component of the bad air in L.A. and the Valley. About two-thirds of the dangerous emissions in the state come from vehicles, and about three-quarters of that total comes from diesel engines.

The new rule was submitted to CARB by the South Coast district, which has a history of being very aggressive in cleaning up the air down south. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has promised similar energetic steps, and we hope that promise is kept.

CARB also approved an "expedited strategy" to reduce ozone in the Valley. The strategy includes a partnership with the Valley air district to accelerate the implementation of new off-road construction rules by offering financial incentives to get older, dirtier engines replaced or retrofitted. CARB targeted such engines back in July, but doesn't expect to have specific rules in place until 2009, because it has yet to get a handle on the number of such vehicles and the cost of fixing or replacing them.

A very encouraging development was CARB's decision to review the plans of individual air districts in the state.

Earlier this year, the Valley district decided to move the region from "serious" nonattainment of federal standards to "extreme." The move pushed the deadline for clean air back to 2024. The air district argued -- and CARB agreed -- that it wouldn't be possible to meet those standards by the 2013 deadline. Many argued otherwise, including The Bee.

In the aftermath of that contentious decision, the Valley air district vowed to meet the standards well before the new 2024 deadline. We hope that happens, but we don't think it will unless the district, and in particular, its governing board, get a lot more aggressive. One measure that would help is Senate Bill 719, which would change the makeup of the governing board by adding more

urban representatives and -- for the first time -- scientific and medical experts. The bill is on the governor's desk and we urge him once again to sign it.

Cleaning up our air will be a costly and painful process. Like bitter medicine, it's better to gulp it down as quickly as is reasonable rather than draw out the agony.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2007:](#)

Reform air board

A recent Public Policy Institute of California poll shows that Californians are losing confidence in their elected leaders. One way the governor can restore public trust in the San Joaquin Valley is to sign SB 719.

The Valley is the most polluted area of California. Recently, Stockton was named the most polluted city in the country, above Los Angeles and New York City. One out of every five children in the region suffers from asthma, and there are 1,200 premature deaths each year due to particulate matter pollution.

By reforming the composition of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District's Governing Board, more communities will have a greater voice in the decision-making process by increasing the number of seats reserved for city representatives. Also, for the first time, two seats on the board will be reserved for health experts, ensuring that the health effects of air pollution are front and center during deliberations.

This issue is too important for us to pass up this opportunity at real reform. The governor should sign SB 719 and send a strong message that our elected leaders recognize air pollution is a serious threat and are going to take decisive action to reduce it.

*Steve Westly, Former California state controller
Menlo Park*