

## **Tulare City Council keeps motor sports complex plan on track**

By Luis Hernandez

Visalia Times Delta, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2008

Whether Tulare residents love or hate the Tulare Motor Sports Complex plan, it's hard to disagree with Tulare City Councilman David Macedo's assessment of the 711-acre project.

"You won't have a project like this in 100 years," he said. "Maybe 200 years."

The project, valued at between \$300 million and \$400 million, was approved Monday by the Tulare City Council. The Tulare County Local Agency Formation Commission is expected to review it within a month.

The complex would include a race track, a drag strip, hotels, condos and shopping space near the International Agri-Center in southern Tulare. While the complex would provide a venue for NASCAR-style racing, NASCAR officials have said they have no plans to race at the Tulare track.

Monday's 3-2 vote followed a 100-minute public hearing, when supporters and opponents, as split as the council, presented passionate views on the project.

Supporters hailed its economic impact, job-creation possibilities and entertainment aspects; opponents said there is no infrastructure to support the project and that the race track would bring pollution and traffic congestion.

Tulare Mayor Craig Vejvoda, Vice Mayor Phil Vandegrift and Councilman Richard Ortega voted yes. Councilmen David Macedo and Wayne Ross voted no.

"We look forward to getting on with this project," said Fresno-area developer Bud Long, who's leading the project.

Despite the council's approval, Long said, there's a long way to go for a project first introduced at a council meeting in November 2006.

Monday's vote was the project's second favorable split-vote.

At a hearing earlier this month, the Tulare Planning Commission approved the project by a 5-2 margin.

Dissenting Councilman Macedo said the drag strip component should be dropped because of the noise factor. An environmental report stated that noise and air pollution would be unavoidable aspects of the complex.

"That [drag strip] seems to be biggest nuisance," he said.

Ross, the other dissenting councilman, said the project's economic predictions are based on estimates Long provided.

"We should proceed with ... caution," he said. "I am not anti-growth."

The positive votes were based on forecasts that the complex could provide thousands of jobs and \$1.4 million annually to the city treasury. Having the complex built next to the home of the World Ag Expo, the globe's largest annual agricultural trade show, is another plus for supporters.

"Tulare was chosen because of the Ag Expo," Ortega said. "This opportunity is once in a lifetime. I am going to support it."

The hotels and entertainment associated with the complex would prove beneficial for World Ag Expo attendees, Ortega said.

Vandegrift said the development of jobs was one reason he voted for the project.

"That's why we're here, to create jobs," he said.

The project received the support of the Tulare Industrial Site Development Foundation for the same reason, said spokesman Lynn Dredge, a retired Tulare city manager.

"It's our belief this could be beneficial for our city," he said.

**Farm bureau objects**

The project still doesn't sit well with the Tulare County Farm Bureau, whose members unanimously opposed it because it takes prime ag land out of production and ultimately could consume more, said Executive Director Patricia Stever. To make the project go, the International Agri-Center is selling 350 acres — all prime ag land.

"We really advocate for ag land," Stever said. "This could really change what Tulare is known for."

Stever said there are no immediate plans to take action against the project.

## **Tulare considers its own motorsports park**

By Eddie Jimenez, The Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2008

TULARE -- Tulare City Council members who support the proposed Tulare Motor Sports Complex say the financial boon that the project could bring to a region in need of jobs and economic development is "off the charts." But a City Council member who voted against the plan isn't so sure.

Council Member Wayne Ross said he isn't convinced that the project can generate the revenues that have been projected.

"I'd love to have job growth as much as anyone else," Ross said.

"I just don't believe the economic numbers that are proposed." A study by a Fresno consulting firm estimated that the project would bring in \$1 billion each year for the area and create more than 16,000 jobs.

A divided Tulare City Council late Monday night approved the proposed 711-acre complex, which will include a race track, a drag strip and commercial and retail development.

The council, in a 3-2 vote, approved the private project after a four-hour meeting.

Bud Long of Fresno is the developer of the project, which will now go before the Tulare County Local Agency Formation Commission. The Tulare Planning Commission had previously approved the project.

"The city has very little to lose and potentially a whole lot to gain," said Craig Vejvoda, Tulare's mayor, who voted for the proposal. "The economic potential for this project is off the charts." A one-mile oval race track and a drag strip, with a combined seating capacity for 92,400 spectators, would encompass about 135 acres. The development also would include hotels, condominiums, an RV park and entertainment.

Long would buy the land -- adjacent to the International Agricultural Center -- and pay for infrastructure improvements such as streets and sewers, city officials said.

City Council Member Philip Vandegrift said the development would help diversify the region's agricultural-based economy and create much-needed jobs.

"Tulare will be a destination as opposed to a spot on the road on Highway 99," he said.

Project opponents say the race tracks would bring excessive noise and contribute to the Valley's air quality problems.

Vandegrift and Vejvoda don't dismiss those concerns, but they say that the development has tremendous benefits.

"No matter what you do, there will be impacts," Vejvoda said. "So you weigh the pluses and the minuses."

Ross said the council should move slowly before approving such a sizable project that could forever change the landscape of Tulare.

"I'm not anti-growth," he said. "I just want (this project) to be something I can believe in." Don Sharp, the director of competition at the dirt track just across town from the proposed Tulare Motor Sports Complex, said the Thunderbowl Raceway would welcome the competition if the project is completed.

"If it does happen, it won't have any negative effect on the Tulare Thunderbowl," Sharp said. "It would help us more than hurt us, frankly." Sharp said the Thunderbowl could benefit from the Tulare Motor Sports Complex much the same way Manzanita Speedway in Phoenix, Ariz., benefits from nearby

Phoenix International Raceway, a track that hosts NASCAR races. Sharp said fans who attend afternoon NASCAR races at Phoenix International often trickle over Manzanita to watch dirt-track races that night.

The project's developer, Long, was sentenced in 2001 to a one-year prison on tax-fraud charges.

He was indicted in October 1999 and charged with evading more than \$1 million in federal taxes while diverting more than \$500,000 of his company's funds to build his expensive river-bluff home, purchase luxury items including furniture and jewelry and make a down payment on a San Francisco condominium.

## **Tulare gives green flag to race track developer**

The Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, December 30, 2008

TULARE, Calif.—Plans for a NASCAR-style race track in Tulare are one step closer to reality.

Council members voted 3-2 to approve the \$400 million, 711-acre project, which includes a banked D-shaped track and drag strip. It survived criticism that it would draw too much emissions-spewing traffic to the farming community.

Fresno developer Bud Long also plans commercial and retail development on his site near the International Agriculture Center along Highway 99.

It's the third time a developer has attempted to build a NASCAR-style track in the San Joaquin Valley. Others succumbed to environmental regulations and high costs.

The next step for approval is the Tulare County Local Agency Formation Commission.

## **Landowners sue TVA for \$165M over coal ash spill**

By Beth Rucker, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2008

KINGSTON, Tenn.—A group of land owners sued the Tennessee Valley Authority for \$165 million on Tuesday over a dike burst that spilled more than a billion gallons of coal ash sludge.

The six-page lawsuit was filed in state court by Jot and Brenda Raymond, owners and developers of North Lake Estates in eastern Tennessee's Roane County.

It claims a creek running through the development has been damaged and is backed up as a result of the Dec. 22 spill from a power plant.

The Raymonds said in the suit that they can't show prospective buyers their property, which they describe as suffering "significant and immediate damage" to its value.

Also named as plaintiffs are Lea Ann Raymond and Chris Raymond, who own property in the subdivision. The lawsuit doesn't say if the four plaintiffs are related.

TVA spokesman John Moulton declined to comment saying the federal utility hadn't yet reviewed the lawsuit.

"Normally we respond through the courts," he said.

The ash sludge from the storage pond at TVA's Kingston Steam Plant spilled over roughly 300 acres and into the Emory River.

The North Lake Estates subdivision is near but not inside the area that has been closed off because of the ash sludge.

A sign at the development says lot prices start at \$20,000. No sludge was apparent from the subdivision road on Tuesday, but the creek at the back of the development wasn't visible.

"TVA possessed or reasonably should have possessed knowledge and data which indicated the retention pond was subject to collapse or breach," the lawsuit says.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs didn't immediately return calls seeking comment on the lawsuit.

TVA, its board of directors, President and CEO Tom Kilgore and other TVA executives are named as defendants. The suit asks for \$15 million in compensatory damages and \$150 million in punitive damages.

The nonprofit Southern Alliance for Clean Energy said it also notified TVA on Tuesday that it intends to sue under the federal Clean Water Act and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.

TVA has said it is investigating what caused the dike to fail and has speculated that cold weather and heavy rainfall were factors.

The deluge destroyed three houses, displaced a dozen families and damaged 42 parcels of land, but there were no serious injuries.

TVA has begun cleaning up the sludge and taking air, soil and water samples because of potentially hazardous materials in the fly ash, the waste from burning coal to produce electricity.

Federal officials have cautioned residents who use private wells or springs to stop drinking the water pending more tests because of high levels of arsenic.

Samples taken near the spill slightly exceed drinking water standards for toxic substances, and arsenic in one sample was higher than the maximum level allowed for drinking water, authorities said.

Officials also are concerned about air quality as the sludge containing the fly ash, a fine powdery material, dries out. The dust can contain metals, including arsenic, that can irritate the skin and aggravate pre-existing conditions like asthma.

A large pile of ash still at the power plant may be covered with mulch or a calcium carbonate spray that would dry like a thin cap of concrete and prevent it from blowing away, Neil Carriker, an environmental official with TVA, said Tuesday.

Knoxville-based TVA supplies electricity to Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia.

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2008:](#)

### **Our View: New focus for stimulus**

More emphasis should be placed in nation on 'green' transportation.

The team planning the incoming Obama administration's stimulus proposal has some very difficult choices to make when it comes to transportation: Should the money be spent largely on conventional projects, such as roads and highways, or should more of it be spent on "green" transportation such as transit and high-speed rail?

The question is vital to the Valley, where the need for both jobs and better transportation is critical.

The problem for the planners is that the stimulus must be geared toward putting people to work as fast as possible. That, many believe, argues for the traditional sort of public works, such as highways.

In many cases, plans are already in place to replace crumbling roads, highways and bridges. By contrast, plans for urban transit systems and intercity high-speed rail are less firm, meaning it may take more time to actually start turning dirt and generating paychecks.

There are strong competing interests at the table.

Environmentalists want to see more transit systems built and fewer highways, and that's clearly the path for America's future. But many unions and their supporters in Congress argue that the greatest economic bang for the stimulus bucks will come from the more conventional sort of projects.

President-elect Barack Obama has come down on both sides of the debate. He has said he wants the package to include "shovel-ready projects," such as highway and bridge construction, but he has also advocated more spending on environmentally conscious projects such as transit and high-speed rail.

Somewhere a balance must be found.

Environmentalists must understand that roads, bridges and highways are going to be an important part of our transportation infrastructure for a long time to come. We have neglected that infrastructure to the point of real danger, and that must be urgently addressed.

But proponents of the conventional wisdom in transportation must also recognize that we cannot build our way out of congestion and air quality problems by simply adding more freeway lanes.

That contributes to urban sprawl, with its attendant environmental damage, and does nothing to reduce our dependence on imports of foreign oil. Also, transit and rail systems are often less expensive to build than more highways to carry similar capacity.

One thing is clear: The time has passed for the heavy emphasis on roads and highway now enshrined in federal policy.

The current federal funding formula sets aside 80 percent of the money for roads, highways and associated infrastructure. A mere 20 percent is normally targeted for transit and other environmentally friendly systems. That imbalance must change.

Another change that's needed is to include local governments and agencies in the planning and funding process.

Typically, federal transportation funds are handed over to state governments, whose transportation agencies are often wedded almost exclusively to the old pattern of building roads and highways. They rarely give much support to transit and other needs.

And so far there's not much to indicate that the thinking is changing. Transportation for America, a coalition of housing, environmental, health, planning and transportation, has studied infrastructure proposals from 15 states. They found that 75 percent of the funding requests are for roads and highways.

That's hardly the sort of innovative thinking that Obama and others have called for.

Perhaps the problem can be solved by phasing in the stimulus spending. The first phase could be repair projects on roads, highways and bridges that are deemed most urgent.

A second phase could focus on transit and rail, giving agencies time to craft plans for those projects.

That's a solution that's getting some discussion in Congress, and could be an effective compromise to meet competing needs.

We're confident that a solution exists that puts people to work right away and also lays the groundwork for a new approach to the nation's transportation needs.

It won't be easy, but it has to happen. We can't continue to simply build more transportation infrastructure on a model that's now more than a half-century old.

A new model for transportation is part of the change we need.

[Sacramento Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2008:](#)

### **Light rail is a success**

Re "No more light rail," (Letters, Dec. 26): As a regular rider of light rail, I must respond to Joan Toomire's argument that light rail in Sacramento is a failure. According to Regional Transit's most recent figures, as of November, RT's year-to-date light rail ridership had increased 14.2 percent over last year, with over 7.4 million rides this year. That hardly sounds like a failure.

On the contrary, public transit provides us with many advantages – reducing greenhouse gas emissions, traffic congestion and pollution, increasing personal mobility, and creating jobs and economic opportunities.

Toomire suggests light rail is destroying business on K Street – but that is not true, either, as the opening of the Cosmopolitan Cabaret earlier this year attests. In reality, light rail provides easy access to downtown entertainment and businesses for everyone (though it would be even better if it were run later). RT unfortunately has an image problem of having rowdy passengers and harassers – and although the problem is not as bad as some people think, RT still needs to fight the image by improving security.

Other cities, Charlotte, Denver, Baltimore and Phoenix, are using light rail to raise property values around stations and to create mixed-use development. Sacramento should learn from their examples.

– Dairl Helmer, Sacramento

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the sky is cleaner in Mexico City. As a result from the “No Driving Today” program, and the restrictions on foreigners with foreign license plates from Monday through Friday from 5 am to 11 am, the air in 2008 has been the cleanest in 22 years. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

### **El cielo más limpio**

Edith Martínez

El Universal, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2008

Como resultado del Hoy no Circula sabatino y la limitación al tránsito de autos con placas foráneas y del extranjero de lunes a viernes de cinco a 11 de la mañana, la Secretaría de Medio Ambiente anunció el 9 de diciembre que el 2008 es el más limpio en el DF en los últimos 22 años.

Hasta la fecha del anuncio se tenían registrados 170 días dentro de los límites de las normas ambientales debido a una reducción en ozono, que es atribuido a varios factores, entre ellos el meteorológico, y a las medidas tomadas por el gobierno de la ciudad.

Durante este año que concluye sólo se declararon dos precontingencias ambientales: la primera el 8 de abril y la segunda el 10 de mayo. La secretaria de Medio Ambiente, Martha Delgado aseguró que después de extender el Hoy no Circula a los sábados, se registraron menores niveles de ozono, pero estos datos aún son preliminares y se requiere esperar los resultados de las mediciones que se realicen en temporada de calor en 2009 para confirmar la tendencia. Además, se logró pasar de un millón 200 mil a un millón 400 mil vehículos incorporados a la restricción vehicular, lo cual además ha motivado que entidades vecinas, como Hidalgo, Puebla, Michoacán, Morelos y Querétaro adopten medidas similares.

Para 2009 el GDF analiza la posibilidad de ampliar las restricciones para la circulación al transporte de carga.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses limiting circulation of automobiles on Saturdays in Mexico City. July 5<sup>th</sup> was the first Saturday where thousands of vehicles older than 2000 had to stay home one Saturday out of the month.

### **Limitan circulación los sábados**

Edith Martínez

El Universal, Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2008

El 5 de julio fue el primer sábado en que miles de vehículos de modelos anteriores al año 2000 tuvieron que quedarse encerrados en el garage.

La razón: el inicio de la aplicación del programa Hoy no Circula sabatino que establece que los autos con holograma dos y con placas foráneas y del extranjero sin verificación dejan de transitar en el Distrito Federal y la zona metropolitana un sábado cada mes, de acuerdo a su terminación de placa y color de engomado.

Luego de que en varias ocasiones se movió la fecha de arranque de esta medida que pretende reducir la contaminación y agilizar la movilidad de las calles, los días previos a su implementación estuvieron caracterizados por la falta de información entre los conductores y la confusión de los mismos sobre su funcionamiento.

Desde 2007 surgió la propuesta de limitar la circulación a estos automotores los sábados a 20% de los vehículos particulares, y aunque enero de este año que termina era la fecha tentativa para el arranque, las adecuaciones al programa retrasaron seis meses su implementación.

Definen fecha de inicio

El 11 de mayo la Comisión Ambiental Metropolitana (CAM) se reunió para definir la fecha del Hoy no Circula sabatino: 5 de julio, decisión respaldada por autoridades del Distrito Federal y Edomex. Ahí mismo se anunciaron las seis medidas metropolitanas para mejorar la calidad del aire, entre ellas, la

auditoría a los verificadores para erradicar la corrupción y la disminución de dos años para otorgar los hologramas cero y doble cero. Así como la limitación a vehículos con placas foráneas y del extranjero, sin verificación, para circular de cinco a 11 de la mañana de lunes a viernes en la zona metropolitana.

Esta última arrancó el 1 de julio de este año, sin embargo, las multas comenzaron a aplicarse hasta el primero de septiembre.

Tanto para el Hoy no Circula sabatino como la limitación a vehículos foráneos las multas son de 20 salarios mínimos en el Distrito Federal y 30 para los que operan en el estado de México.

LUEGO DE VARIOS INTENTOS DE LAS AUTORIDADES, ESTE AÑO ARRANCÓ EL PLAN AMBIENTAL

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses how using wood-burning fireplaces saves an annual average of 80 lives in California.](#)

### **Evitar uso de chimeneas para leña salva en promedio 80 vidas en California**

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, Dec. 30, 2008

Un estudio de la Universidad Estatal de California en Fresno determinó que evitar el uso de chimeneas de leña previene en promedio unas 80 muertes anuales en el Valle de San Joaquín.

Esas vidas se salvan directamente al evitar la contaminación, y eso sin contar con la prevención de incendios, según el análisis del Instituto de Políticas de la Salud del Valle Central en dicha universidad.

En promedio, desde el 2003 en que se limitó el uso de chimeneas de leña se han prevenido unas 50 muertes en las inmediaciones de Fresno, y otras 30 en Bakersfield.