

SFO wins grant for hydrogen refueling station

David R. Baker, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, April 7, 2009

San Francisco International Airport won a \$1.7 million state grant Monday to build a refueling station for cars and buses that run on hydrogen.

The station will serve the small collection of Bay Area vehicles powered by fuel cells, which create electricity by combining hydrogen and oxygen. The vehicles give off no pollution, just water vapor.

Interest in hydrogen as a transportation fuel soared earlier in the decade, only to be eclipsed by advanced biofuels and electric cars. Still, the airport has made a point of testing different fuels - from biodiesel to compressed natural gas - and sees the hydrogen station as the latest example.

"We're happy to be part of the process of determining what the fuel of the future really is," said Tryg McCoy, deputy director of operations at the airport.

The station will be built near the Millbrae Avenue interchange, along the airport's southern edge. The state grant, awarded by the California Air Resources Board, will cover roughly 70 percent of the project's cost, said Roger Hooson, senior planner at the airport. The rest will be supplied by Linde North America, the U.S. wing of a German company that specializes in the use of gases.

The station, which should open next year, will not generate its own hydrogen, as some other hydrogen refueling stations do. Instead, the hydrogen will be trucked in from Southern California, Hooson said.

The air resources board on Monday also awarded grants to three other hydrogen station projects, all in Southern California.

According to the California Fuel Cell Partnership, the Bay Area already has two hydrogen stations, one in Oakland and one in San Jose.

Several local mass transit agencies, including AC Transit and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, have experimented with fuel-cell buses. San Francisco's Municipal Transportation Agency plans to do the same next year, fueling its buses at the airport, Hooson said. The station also will serve automakers such as Daimler and Toyota that are testing fuel cell vehicles in the Bay Area, Hooson said.

In addition, the airport will build a second station next door dispensing hythane, a mixture of hydrogen and natural gas. The airport plans to use that fuel in some of its many vehicles that now run on compressed natural gas.

Two routes for subway to be studied

By Sue Doyle, Staff Writer
L.A. Daily News, Tuesday, April 7, 2009

The long-awaited, multi-billion dollar subway link from Mid-Wilshire to the sea inched forward Monday when county transportation officials said they would begin an 18-month environmental study of two proposed routes.

Flush with cash from a 30-year, half-percent sales tax voters approved last year, Metro, the Los Angeles County's transportation agency, announced plans to analyze plans for a 12.5-mile line to run below Wilshire Boulevard. The line is expected to cost \$6.1 billion.

Also being studied is a longer line that would start at Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Avenue and run below Santa Monica Boulevard through West Hollywood before linking to the Wilshire Boulevard line - a 17-mile route. That line would cost \$9 billion.

Neither plan would be complete before 2034.

The renewed focus on the two plans is possible thanks to last year's voter-approved Measure R, which gives the Westside subway \$4.1 billion - enough to start the project but not enough to build it to the ocean.

"Now with Measure R, there is really a substantial amount of funding for this," said Jody Litvak, Metro community relations manager for the Westside extension project. "It's a huge change from where we were several months ago."

The line will be built in segments, as the agency seeks additional money to continue tunneling to the beach.

Beginning next week, the agency will host several public meetings to discuss routes, hear passenger preferences for station locations and parking and hear concerns about vibrations, noise and air quality during construction.

Under one plan, the line would start at Wilshire Boulevard and Western Avenue, today's terminus for the Purple Line subway. It would continue below Wilshire, zip around Century City and Westwood and end at Fourth Street in Santa Monica.

A second plan includes the Wilshire route, but would start at Hollywood and Highland, a major station for the Red Line subway.

The route would run south on Highland and then head west on Santa Monica Boulevard before turning south on either La Cienega or San Vicente boulevards - to be decided in the environmental impact report.

Either way, the line would connect to Wilshire Boulevard and then head to the ocean.

The environmental report should be completed next spring and be available to the public within months. Metro's board expects to review the study during summer 2010.

If a plan is approved, construction could begin in 2 to 3 years.

Metro is counting on federal money to pay for half of the cost of the subway construction. To receive federal money, Metro must complete the environmental report.

When the economy rebounds, the agency will seek public-private partnerships and money from Sacramento, said David Mieger, Metro project director.

"Hopefully the state economy won't be in terrible shape forever and it will come back," Mieger said.

New law provides for higher jobless benefits

By Barry Massey, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, April 7, 2009

SANTA FE, N.M.—Unemployed New Mexicans will see an increase in their jobless benefits during the next two years under legislation signed into law by Gov. Bill Richardson.

The measure will boost payments of unemployment benefits by an estimated \$26 million in the next budget year, which starts July 1.

The new law calls for weekly jobless benefits to be increased by 6.5 percent. The higher benefits will run from July 1 through June 30, 2011.

Currently, the average weekly unemployment benefit is \$213, according to Carrie Moritomo, a spokeswoman for the Department of Workforce Solutions. Payments range from a low of \$67 a week to a maximum of \$359 weekly.

Richardson on Monday also signed legislation that will create a searchable, online database of state contracts starting next year. The new law requires administration agencies to create a database of contracts valued at more than \$20,000.

Lt. Gov. Diane Denish said the new ethics law will provide more transparency in the operations of state government.

"New Mexicans deserve to know who is doing business with their government," Denish said in a statement. "This law will enable all citizens to track state government contracts, follow the flow of public money, and understand how it is being used."

The database is to be available to the public by Jan. 1, 2010 and will list contracts with terms starting that year.

Also signed into law by Richardson was a measure to establish state licensing requirements for mortgage originators and regulate certain lending practices, including adjustable rate home loans.

Denish and Attorney General Gary King said state regulation will protect home buyers from predatory lending practices. They helped develop the legislation, which was approved by lawmakers during a 60-day session that ended last month. The law takes effect July 1.

"Licensing of mortgage originators will certify the many reputable New Mexico players in the business and remove the few bad actors, assuring consumers that getting a mortgage from a New Mexico mortgage broker will be a safe and honest transaction," Denish said.

Other bills signed by Richardson will:

- Allow the state Environmental Improvement Board to implement air pollution controls for ozone that are more stringent than federal standards in areas with high ozone concentrations.
- Allow non-resident veterans and their families to pay lower, in-state tuition rates at New Mexico colleges, universities and vocational centers.
- Help victims of identity theft by having the attorney general's office issue an "identity theft passport." The document can help individuals, who were a victim of identity theft, if they are stopped by police. The new law allows victims of identity theft to have police and court records expunged. The provision is to help people who were arrested for crimes committed by someone using their name and personal information.
- Remove state taxes from fuel made of at least 99 percent vegetable oil. An Albuquerque company sells the alternative fuel.
- Permit home school students to participate in more athletics at public schools in their attendance area.
- Allow court fees to be charged for costs of a statewide system for filing and accessing court documents electronically. The state Supreme Court will establish the fees.
- Establish a commission to deal with issues involving New Mexico and the Mexican state of Sonora.
- Designate a state bilingual poem.

The unemployment benefit bill is HB20. The contract database bill is HB546. The mortgage originator bill is SB342. The veterans' tuition bill is SB136. The identity theft bill is HB279. The fuel tax bill is HB554. The home school student bill is HB704. The court fees bill is SB277. The New Mexico-Sonora Commission bill is HB295. The bilingual poem bill is HB674.

EIB makes decision on greenhouse gas emissions

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, April 7, 2009

SANTA FE, N.M.—New Mexico Environment Secretary Ron Curry is calling a decision by the Environmental Improvement Board to allow the state to regulate greenhouse gas emissions a historic step.

Curry says the EIB concluded Monday that greenhouse gas emissions qualify as air pollutants under the state Air Quality Control Act and are subject to rulemaking by the board.

The decision gives the board authority to establish regulations that allow for the trading of the greenhouse gas emissions credits. It also allows the board to hear a petition filed by New Energy Economy that calls for limiting those emissions in the state.

John Fogarty of the New Energy Economy says the board can lead the way by setting science-based limits on greenhouse gas emissions.

Utilities and energy producers have opposed the petition.

Push for deeper cuts in greenhouse gases

Arthur Max, Associated Press

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, April 7, 2009

Amsterdam - -- Negotiators at U.N. climate talks, buoyed by U.S. promises to lead the fight against global warming, are demanding that industrial countries pledge deeper cuts in greenhouse gases over the next decade.

Environmental activists said Monday that the talks in Bonn, Germany, have made little progress on two key issues: the carbon emissions targets to be adopted by rich countries and how to raise an estimated \$100 billion a year needed to help poor countries adapt to climate change.

The two-week round of talks concludes Wednesday and is to reconvene in June.

But delegates from 175 countries are likely to decide to add more sessions to an already hectic calendar of negotiations leading up to a decisive meeting in December in Copenhagen, Denmark, which is to adopt a new international climate change accord.

Developing countries want industrial nations to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases by at least 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020. Some countries said even that cut won't eliminate the threat of rising sea levels and disastrous weather shifts affecting agriculture and water supplies, and suggested a 45 percent cut, said Antonio Hill, who monitors the talks for Oxfam International.

That is an increase from the range informally adopted in earlier negotiations, which called for a total cut of 25-40 percent by wealthy countries, leaving room for a deal near the lower end of that range.

Hill said the group of more than 130 developing countries, led by China, was "converging on the upper end of the range" at 40 percent, which environmental groups thought was fair and achievable.

The environmental group Greenpeace said the specific pledges from industrial countries so far add up to a 14 percent cut at most - and possibly as little as 4 percent - by 2020. That figure "is nowhere near enough what the science says is necessary to avert runaway climate change," the group said in a statement.

Greenpeace activist Kaisa Kosonen said the collapse this weekend of an ice bridge linking the Wilkins Ice Shelf to Antarctica was an "extremely alarming" warning that the climate is changing faster than predicted by U.N. scientists just a few years ago.

"We cannot change the science. We have to change the politics," she said.

The Copenhagen agreement is to succeed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which required 37 countries to cut emissions by a total 5 percent by 2012. The United States refused to take part in the Kyoto agreement, calling it unfair because it made no demands on rapidly developing economies like China and India.

The Bush administration stayed aloof from talks on a successor accord. President Obama, however, reversed the Bush policy and pledged to become "fervently" engaged in the talks.

"The developing countries say the U.S. is listening to them for the first time," Hill told reporters in Bonn. But delegates from the poorer countries also have cautioned that "the fresh air can go stale quite soon," he said.

The Worldwide Fund for Nature says that by 2020, about \$145 billion a year will be needed by developing countries: \$100 billion to help them build defenses and shift their economies against the effects of climate change; \$40 billion to help them slow the growth of their own emissions; and \$5 billion to insure themselves against disasters.

**Ports' clean-rig program puts truckers in more comfortable driver's seat
Dumping exhaust-spewing rides for new trucks that offer comparative luxury is one
advantage of complying with the L.A. and Long Beach harbor complex's lower-emissions
effort.**

By Ronald D. White

L.A. Times, Monday, April 6, 2009

The cargo is pretty much the same -- a rusty 40-foot container filled on a recent morning with 50,000 pounds of Asia-bound hay cubes. The trip on a recent Saturday also was unchanged: the few miles between the 51-year-old Los Angeles Harbor Grain Terminal and the TraPac Inc. terminal at the Port of Los Angeles.

But that's where the similarities end.

Heriberto S. Perez Jr. used to drive an exhaust-spewing 1988 Freightliner that lurched through the streets on the strength of air-polluting diesel fuel. The truck had no air conditioner, a broken window and only a fraction of its original power.

Now he travels to and from the local ports in a sparkling new 2009 Kenworth T800 liquefied natural gas truck with a drive train that derives 95% of its power from natural gas.

Such a truck never would have been seen at the harbor before October, when the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach launched an ambitious plan to replace 16,800 older rigs by 2012 with the nation's lowest-emissions fleet.

The Kenworth required just one smooth try to latch on to a container and its chassis, and it pulled away as if the 250-ton load weighed almost nothing. Inside the quiet, almost stylish, air-conditioned cab, there was no hint that 5% of the truck's power came from diesel fuel. The only odor: the familiar organic compounds known as new car smell.

"After my old truck, which was banned from the ports in October, this feels like I'm driving a Cadillac," said Perez, of Fontana, who is leasing the rig and at first had to deal with suspicion

from his wife when he was no longer coming home smelling like a tailpipe.

"She wanted to know where I had been," Perez said. "She figured I wasn't going to work."

The truck wasn't an easy call for Perez, an independent owner-operator responsible for his own rig. If he wants to continue driving to and from the Port of Los Angeles, he's been told, he will have to become an employee of a certified trucking concession under stipulations of the clean-truck program. That requirement has been challenged in federal court by the American Trucking Assn. and the Federal Maritime Commission.

Last month, the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ordered a lower court judge to reconsider her refusal to block the provision requiring all independent owner-operators to become employees. Perez was pleased, preferring the freedom of being his own boss and setting his own hours and rules.

"I have a seven-year truck lease, and what happens if I'm not an employee in five years like they said I have to be? I can't drive the truck?" Perez said.

In the meantime, Perez drives exclusively for the Los Angeles Harbor Grain Terminal.

The terminal handles exports -- grains, mostly -- from Midwest farms, transferring them from rail cars to traditional cargo containers for the trip across the Pacific. Pound for pound, however, like most U.S. exports, they are worth only a fraction of the finished-goods imports bound for U.S. store shelves. That makes it difficult for shippers to pay the \$70-per-container clean-truck fee that the ports require for cargo hauled by trucks that don't meet 2007 pollution limits.

Grain terminal Vice President Dwight Robinson had already begun hearing from customers who were considering a switch to the Port of Oakland, which does not yet have a clean-truck fee. Robinson and Grain terminal President Howard Wallace had been huddling with drivers, brainstorming on how they might acquire trucks new enough to be exempt from the fees.

Enter Perez, with a personal credit rating so far north of 700 that he would be the envy of most Wall Street bankers. Armed with a \$105,000 grant from the ports' clean-truck program, Perez came back to Wallace and Robinson with hard numbers on just how much hauling he would need to do to pay off the lease and handle the much higher insurance on the \$185,000 Kenworth.

It works out that Perez needs to get more jobs than the other truckers, who drive older rigs. On Saturday, for example, with 13 available drivers, at least three of the 10 jobs scheduled were being held for Perez. So far, it hasn't caused any friction with the other truckers, Grain Terminal officials say.

Back at the ports, Perez's rig doesn't stand out much among the other trucks. At the TraPac terminal and the nearby SSA Marine terminal, about half the vehicles have that dull primer paintlike finish and faded chrome look typical of older port trucks suffering from long exposure to diesel exhaust and salty air. The other half are an assortment of gleaming new Macks, Sterlings and Kenworths, with the occasional new Volvo sprinkled in.

The difference between old and new is something that can be sensed almost immediately as trucks line up at terminal gates.

When they are new enough to be certified as clean idlers, the fumes are barely perceptible or nonexistent. When the vehicles are older and dirtier, the gunk accumulates in the nostrils, throat and lungs.

"I don't come home nauseous from all those diesel fumes anymore," Perez said.

Although he now sits apart from that in a climate-controlled cab, Perez still has stresses to deal with.

Valid radio frequency identification tags on his truck, which identify him as a qualified driver and note the status of his truck, sometimes show up as invalid on terminal gate scanners. That kicks him out of the line. Delays at the terminals put him perilously close to missing that crucial number of jobs he has to reach to cover the costs of the new truck.

But he'll take them, given the benefits he would have never expected at this time last year. Among them, a new truck suspension that means his back no longer feels as if his vertebrae have been rearranged by the end of the day. And the new truck filters out quite a bit of the headache-producing noise of other truck engines, air brakes, rail crossing signals, rail car clanking, locomotives and yard cranes.

"I almost don't mind waiting anymore -- almost," Perez said.

[Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, April 7, 2009](#)

Our View: A sobering look at state's climate future

Californians will have to change way we farm, protect coast and deal with water supply.

The latest report from California's Climate Action Team contains some sobering conclusions from a broad collection of new research on global warming's likely effect on the state.

Dozens of studies completed in the past two years have projected the effects of climate change on California's snowpack and water supply, sea level, agriculture, forestry, air quality and electricity use.

The results suggest that quite apart from the state's controversial attempt to slow or reverse global warming, Californians and their government almost certainly will have to adapt to changing conditions by changing the way they farm, protect the coast and deal with a more fickle water supply.

If the current temperature trends persist, these changes will be necessary whether the warming is caused by man, as most climate scientists now believe, or simply represents a broad and inevitable turn of the meteorological cycle.

Starting from a foundation of international research on average temperature increases and likely scenarios for the 21st century, the new research reports look in fine detail at how life in California would change under those projections.

Some key points:

Temperature. Summer high temperatures are expected to climb by 2.7 degrees to 10.7 degrees by the end of this century.

The lower end of that range probably would not present huge challenges. But if high temperatures gravitate toward the upper end of that spectrum, California will see longer summers with more frequent and more intense heat waves.

This has implications for emergency response and electricity demand, as air conditions would be cranking around the clock through most of the state.

Precipitation. Interestingly, the projections here are not all in one direction.

While both Northern and Southern California can expect reduced rainfall through the middle of the century, the consensus is that rainfall in the north would increase again by the end of the period, while it would continue to decrease in Southern California.

Snowpack. Even if precipitation increases again in Northern California, the warmer temperatures will affect the snowpack, the research says.

An earlier peak in the water content of the snow and an earlier snowmelt would mean a reduction in the water supply later in the year and would force water managers and consumers to rethink the way they store and use the resource.

Sea level. Measured over several decades, sea level in California has been rising at a rate of about 7 inches per century.

The latest studies suggest the sea level will rise by 11 to 18 inches by 2050 and up to 55 inches by 2100.

This would have implications for coastal property and public beaches and could lead to more damage when winter storms combine with high tides to flood low-lying property.

The research includes a few nuggets of good news: Some crops would grow better in the warmer temperatures, and commercially planted pine forests might boom in the new Northern California climate.

But for the most part, the implications are difficult, if not bleak. They require serious evaluation and, if heeded, difficult policy choices.

See the report for yourself at <http://climatechange.ca.gov>.

[Sacramento Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, April 7, 2009](#)

House energy bill needs support

Re "House Dems unveil green power plan" (Page A6, April 1): I thoroughly support this environmental legislation and think it is the first of many steps needed to bring out society around to a clean-energy economy.

It takes effort to ignore the problem that has been building for generations. From the melting of our polar ice caps, to pollution rising up the food chain and poisoning our largest and most majestic animals, and ultimately ourselves, to air pollution levels causing harm to all who breathe, global warming leaves no one unharmed.

Furthermore, our planet's natural resources are not infinite. This bill is a sight for sore eyes. Yes, let's cap pollution and use the revenue to fund the furthering of clean, renewable energy.

Let's stand up against the dirty and polluting industries and create a future worth having for our upcoming generations.

Please, take action, call or e-mail your representative and urge them to support the Waxman and Markey clean energy bill.

Owen Young, Sacramento

[Capital Press Ag Weekly, Editorial, Thursday, April 2, 2009](#)

Field burning ban can wait

When you take away all of the overstatement, the fear-mongering and the rhetorical what-ifs, there's really only one argument against field burning: Some people don't like it.

And that's OK. There's no law that everyone in the world needs to like everything that goes on. Field burning is like that. Some folks see the plume of smoke - short-lived though it may be - and decide that it shouldn't be allowed.

Why? They simply don't like it. To them, that's justification enough. Unfortunately, they also cause the most noise in the Legislature. To listen to them, no other issue matters.

To the vast majority of other people - such as the farmers who must use field burning - the practice is necessary. If it's an inconvenience at all, it's minor.

Currently before the Oregon Legislature is a pair of bills. One would ban field burning immediately, and the other would reduce it by half the first year and ban it the second year.

Either one of those bills is unacceptable. Field burning is a tightly regulated, needed agricultural practice. Only when the weather conditions are right, and only when the farmers have met all of the criteria, can they burn a grass seed field.

It takes only a few minutes, and the smoke dissipates rapidly. There is no lasting impact on the air quality - or on anything else, for that matter.

Farmers use field burning to clean their fields and reduce stubble and pests. Over the years, the practice has been reduced to a fraction of the acres that once were burned.

In fact, overseas markets have been developed for straw from perennial ryegrass seed and tall fescue seed. A study is weighing alternatives for annual ryegrass seed straw, such as converting it into pellets for boiler systems, using it as a feedstock for cellulosic ethanol and converting it to methane for electricity.

With time and continued research, one or several of those options may prove economically viable as a means of reducing field burns even further.

In the meantime, the Legislature is tangled up in the worst budgetary crisis in decades. Economists predict a revenue shortfall of \$3 billion during the next biennium - equal to about 20 percent of the state budget.

Legislators would be wise to set aside issues such as field burning for debate another time and concentrate their effort on keeping the state's schools and universities open and state police officers on the streets.

Just as we suggested previously about the proposal to rewrite the state's land-use laws, legislators must devote their attention to the bigger issues facing the state.

Damaging the grass seed industry by banning field burns can wait - forever, if need be.