

Fresno Unified rolls out 30 clean-air buses

Business Journal, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2010

The Fresno Unified School District this week unveiled 30 new compressed-natural-gas buses thanks to more than \$5 million in federal, state and local air quality grants.

The buses replace 30 diesel-powered buses built in 1977. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District estimates that the new CNG buses will emit 98% less particulate pollution over their lifetimes. The old buses emitted over 330 tons of particulates in their lifetimes, while the new buses will emit less than seven tons.

The buses meet 2010 emissions standards, and also have lap and shoulder belts.

The \$5,033,814 in funding for the buses came from four different sources: the California Air Resources Board's (ARB) Lower Emission School Bus Program, which is administered by the Valley Air District; from federal stimulus money (ARRA), through the US Environmental Protection Agency; from state Department of Motor Vehicle fees and from Fresno Unified.

"This is a great example of a project that has far-reaching benefits for not only Valley schoolchildren but the air basin in general," said Seyed Sadredin, the Valley Air District's executive director, in a statement. "Incentive funding such as this is critical to cleaning up our air."

Latino families take clean air concerns to Capitol

By Rebecca Plevin / Vida En El Valle

Vida En El Valle, Wednesday, Aug. 18, 2010

SACRAMENTO -- Latinos from across the San Joaquin Valley gathered in the cool, air-conditioned offices of the State Capitol last week to inform legislators about the smog, asthma, and other environmental health hazards that are suffocating their families and communities in the heavily polluted Valley.

"I come from the most contaminated city on the planet," Roberto García, a member of the community group Committee for a Better Arvin, said in Spanish to Raúl Bocanegra, chief of staff for Assemblyman Felipe Fuentes, as they squeezed into a non-descript room in the assemblyman's office.

Arvin was ranked the smoggiest city in the country in 2007. It is located about 15 miles southeast of Bakersfield, which this year was ranked one of the most polluted cities in the country by the American Lung Association.

García's wife, Estela, told Bocanegra that the air quality is so bad in their Kern County city, which is 87.5 percent Latino, that she is afraid to go outside. She told the story of how one of her friends contracted Valley Fever while riding her bicycle outside, and she fears she might also have the viral infection.

Rocío Lucio, of Fresno, told Bocanegra how her four-year-old grandson's quality of life is compromised by his severe and repeated bouts of asthma and pneumonia.

"He spends all his life in the hospital, or in commercial centers, or in the house," Lucio said in Spanish. "If you bring him outside in hot weather, he has to go to the hospital. If you bring him outside in cold weather, he has to go to the hospital."

Lucio and the Garcías were three of about 100 people who visited lawmakers' offices last Tuesday to share their personal experiences living in and fighting for better quality, and to advocate for environmental health-related legislation as part of Clean Air Action Day 2010.

The action day is an annual event, coordinated by the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition and the Environmental Health Legislative Working Group, that is intended to drum up support for legislation that cleans up the air and environment across California, and especially in the San Joaquin Valley, said Catherine Garoupa White, director of the coalition.

Many Valley communities, including Bakersfield, Visalia, Fresno, Sacramento, and Hanford, have received the dubious distinction of crowning the American Lung Association's lists of the country's most polluted cities.

"The San Joaquin Valley has been a neglected region for a very long time, and the more unified we can be in our voice, and the louder that we can speak, the more attention we'll get," Garoupa White said.

In the Valley, the Latino and farmworker communities tend to be the ones that suffer the brunt of air pollution, from sources like agricultural pesticides and industrial facilities, she said. She said these are also groups that have been typically underrepresented in Sacramento, and whose stories have not been heard in the state capital -- until now.

"Our residents know how bad the air is, because they see the symptoms in the health problems that they suffer, and the asthma attacks, and the increased heart attacks and the emergency room visits," Garoupa White said.

"We know what the reality on the ground is, but unfortunately we don't have the power to change the circumstances that have created dirty air in the San Joaquin Valley. Legislators and decision makers do, so it's very important that they hear from the people suffering the impacts."

Assemblyman Kevin de León, D-Los Angeles, helped kick off Clean Air Action Day Tuesday morning.

During a motivational talk over coffee, pastries, and fruit, de León said the urgent need for clean air and water in all California communities is both a public health issue and a civil rights issue.

He encouraged women and people of color to continue standing up for the health of their communities.

"Historically, the movement to clear our air, and to have pure water, has never really been moved forward by people of color," he said. "That's why you're part of this process where you're changing the paradigm when it comes to advocacy for clean air and clean water."

After breakfast, the participants split into groups and met with legislators or their representatives. They told their personal stories, and then advocated for environmental health bills currently making their way through the legislature.

They pushed for AB 1963, the Farm Worker Health Act; AB 1405, the Community Benefits Fund Bill, which would direct a portion of the revenues generated through climate change bill AB 32 toward disadvantaged communities that are disproportionately impacted by the harmful effects of dirty air and pollutants; and SB 1157, the Healthy Schools Act of 2010, which would require public schools to avoid spraying the most toxic chemicals and pesticides, among others.

After spending the morning meeting with legislators or their staff, María Arevalo, of the Fresno-based group Latinos United for Clean Air, sat on a bench outside the Capitol.

She explained that she was inspired to fight for clean air after feeling frustrated and helpless as two of her four children suffered from asthma attacks. Now, she said, she feels like she is making a difference in the health of her community.

"I feel like I am the voice of those who could not come to share their problems," Arevalo said in Spanish. "I feel like I'm the voice for those who don't have one," she said.

Grant to fund Sacramento-area project to cut diesel train emissions

By Rick Daysog

Sacramento Bee, Thursday, August 19, 2010

The California Air Resources Board has awarded a \$502,865 grant toward the development of a cleaner diesel train serving the Sacramento area.

The board said the two-year grant will be used to develop high-tech filters and other devices that will cut a diesel train's carbon emissions by up to 85 percent.

"Testing the latest technologies will mean residents living near railyards and ports can reap the benefits of cleaner air and a better quality of life," air board Chairman Mary Nichols said in a news release.

Earl Landberg, a pollution specialist with the board, said the new device will be installed on an existing Union Pacific cargo train that will make regular runs between the Port of Oakland and the Roseville railyard.

LaGrange, Ill.-based Electro-Motive Diesel Inc. will develop the filters, or soot traps, that will be attached to the 3,200-horsepower locomotive.

"It probably will look like any other train. It's a regular locomotive," Landberg said.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality District will administer the grant and could provide additional funds for the project.

The train grant is one of four totaling \$2 million awarded by the air board Tuesday.

The grants, funded by smog abatement, vehicle and vessel registration fees, are part of a state program spearheaded by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to develop the next generation of clean vehicles and emission control devices.

According to Landberg, the Union Pacific train will be retrofitted with a diesel particulate filter that will absorb some of the train's emissions.

A diesel oxidation catalyst will trap the bulk of the emissions and will burn them, Landberg said.

The air board currently is funding two other demonstration projects in California seeking to build cleaner trains, Landberg said.