



## In This Issue

### [News Briefs](#)

[What's New in Regional Transportation Projects?](#)

[Atwater-Merced Expressway Enters Critical Decision-Making Time](#)

[GIS Dept. Adds New Feature to Interactive Maps Website](#)

[Citizens Advisory Committee Welcomes 6 New Members](#)

[RR Undercrossing Request Moving Down the Track](#)

[Recycling News: "Sharps" Banned from Trash Cans](#)

[Governing Board Decisions Made in June; Decisions To Be Made in August](#)

## News Briefs

### Where Do All These People Come From?

While there are a few folks who think all growth in the San Joaquin Valley comes from the Bay Area, the reality is that the majority of growth comes from natural causes: babies. There are over 1,400 babies born in the Valley every week. By the year 2025, they will be ready

August 20, 2008



Bradley Overhead in Merced is scheduled for replacement in 2011.

### What's New in Regional Transportation Projects?

If you'd like to know the status of your favorite [regional transportation project](#), the MCAG website has a colorful chart showing project name, description, cost, funding source, and status. Below are updates on some of the most-viewed projects.

#### ***Campus Parkway Funding Decision Continued***

For the second month in a row, the California Transportation Commission did not make a decision to provide \$12 million for the Campus Parkway, citing lack of a state budget. Since right-of-way acquisition is now complete, the money would be used for construction. This Merced County project has received significant support from local public agencies and the private sector. The item will appear on a future CTC agenda. If funding is approved, construction will begin in March 2009 and finish in Nov. 2009.

#### ***Los Banos Bypass Project Split Into 3 Segments***

This project, requested by local residents for over 40 years, saw costs rise from \$35 million to \$504 million over the years. Realizing that cost was a barrier, state and local planners opted to break up the project into three segments. Segment 1, between Hwy 165 and east Hwy 152, is farthest along and currently acquiring right-of-way. The segment will have signalized intersections instead of the originally planned over- and under-crossings. However, there still is no identified source of funding for construction. The Project Study Report and Environmental Impact Report are completed for the other two segments. Segment 2 will install part of the bypass between Hwy 165 and west Hwy 152. Segment 3 will eventually construct three interchanges along the route.

#### ***Bradley Overhead Moving Forward***

This fully-funded project to replace and widen a bridge in Merced will begin construction in 2009.

### Atwater-Merced Expressway Enters Critical Decision-Making Time

The Atwater/Merced Expressway (AME) is one the largest transportation projects Merced County and Cities have seen in a long time, outside of the improvements to Highway 99. The draft Environmental Impact Report was circulated to the public and other stakeholders in early March, followed by a formal public hearing on April 1, 2008. In addition, informal sessions have been

for college. By 2030 they'll be ready to enter the workforce.

The 8-county Blueprint project is hoping to develop a vision for the future that will help these children achieve a work-housing balance, while preserving the agricultural and environmental resources residents cherish. The last round of public workshops will begin in October. Stay tuned for times and places so that you can help determine the future.

### Like to Talk Trash? Then This Is For You!

Don't be thrown off by the name -- serving on this committee will be interesting! The Integrated Waste Management Task Force needs 3 members, all citizens-at-large. Two need to reside in the county and one in a city. The group meets only 4-6 times a year to give advice on solid waste issues and recycling. If you're interested, contact Jenny Halpin at Jennifer.Halpin@mcagov.org or 723-3153.

### MCAG Wins Homeland Security Grant

The California Office of Homeland Security has awarded MCAG \$92,985 in Proposition 1B monies for the installation of a video surveillance system for Merced County Transit's bus yard, the fleet division's workshop and fueling facility, and the road division's heavy equipment shop area. This project will serve to reduce transit system vulnerabilities as well as to detect and deter criminal acts and vandalism.

### YARTS Ridership Sets New Record

conducted with the City Councils of Atwater and Merced and the County Board of Supervisors.

Public comments were requested through May 2, and 15 written and 4 oral comments were received. Public concerns included farmland conversion, that the project would encourage growth, impacts to dairies, and relocation of private property.

Two alignments were presented, and, after much analysis, MCAG staff and consultant recommended Alternative IB. ([Map.](#))

At the end of the public comment period, a couple of concerns were brought forward that staff felt needed a closer look, and are requesting that the MCAG Governing Board grant staff more time to discuss the stakeholders' concerns.

So far, the project has been funded through new development fees. The AME will improve access to Castle Airport and create additional north-south capacity to serve existing and planned developments. It will reduce deficiencies on Highway 99 by closing the Buhach Road interchange and constructing a new Hwy 99/AME interchange.

(If you would like more information on regional road projects, [click here.](#))

---

### GIS Dept. Adds New Feature to Interactive Maps Website

MCAG GIS interactive maps have been a popular tool for over a year. Now GIS announces a new feature: the ability to locate regional transportation projects throughout Merced County.

"We get a lot of questions about where regional projects are in relationship to property, and about the status of the projects," says Rich Green, MCAG GIS Manager. "This new feature allows people to pull up any parcel or any regional project and its relationship to the property."

By going to [www.mcagov.org](http://www.mcagov.org), then clicking on GIS and then Interactive maps, visitors to the website can enter in any address in the Cities and County of Merced. A map showing the property will appear. Site visitors can also search by the name or part of the name of any regional transportation project.

Searches for Campus Parkway and the Atwater-Merced Expressway currently top the list.

"Before we had this feature, people wanted to come into our office and see the Caltrans maps and other maps we had. These weren't always available in a printable form," continues Green. "Now, with the online maps, people can see how it affects their or their neighbors' property and how much of the property would be impacted."



Having just set a new annual record for ridership in 2007-2008, the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) set a new one-month record for ridership in July. With 10,173 boardings, the July numbers represent a 12% increase over the previous record month of August 2005. With August traditionally being the biggest month of the year, the likelihood of another record this month seems likely for the bus service. "This could be one heck of a year for YARTS!" said Dick Whittington, YARTS Manager.

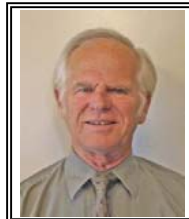
If viewers click on a project, a list appears that allows someone to either bring up a printable map or a link to all of the regional projects and their status. The document also shows funding sources for each project.

The new feature took a couple of months for Green to design, and Natalia Austin to develop. The GIS department says that they will make continual improvements to the website as they get public feedback.

---

## Citizens Advisory Committee Welcomes 6 New Members

A Gustinian, a financial expert, an educator, an engineer, IT employee, Farm Bureau representative, and student are the newest members of MCAG's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).



Dennis Cote

**Dennis Cote**, Delhi, is a retired civil engineer with over 35 years experience in public works and city administration. He will represent engineering interests on the committee.

**Tom Crawley**, Merced, is a vice president at County Bank, and will represent financial interests.

**Kyle Ford**, Merced, is a citizen-at-large committee member. He works for Merced Irrigation District as an Information Technology Specialist.

**Mary Ford**, Gustine, is another citizen-at-large member. She has been a business owner in Gustine for many years.

**Adam Cox** is the student representative to the Committee and currently attends Merced College. He has served on a number of Merced City and County committees.

**Tom Grave**, Merced, is a retired education administrator and represents education interests. He served on the Merced Recycling Coalition and currently serves on the Integrated Solid Waste Management Task Force and the Merced Alliance for Responsible Growth.

**Diana Westmoreland-Pedrozo** is the third citizen-at-large member. She is the Director for the county Farm Bureau. She previously served on the CAC when she worked for the Merced County Chamber of Commerce.



Adam Cox

In their applications for the CAC, the new members listed a variety of transportation issues to work on. Finding funding to maintain existing roads was a common concern. Alternate modes of transportation such as bus, mass transit, and bicycling were other items of interest. Improving safety for pedestrians was also mentioned.

Citizen input is always an important part of government. MCAG's 17-member Citizens Advisory Committee is a group of private sector individuals who are appointed by the Governing Board to serve based on the geographic location of their home or business and their work experience. None can be an elected official in the county.

Members of this committee serve for four years and attend monthly meetings, plus special workshops to learn more about programs, projects, and issues confronting Merced Cities and County. Each month they report their views to the 11-member Governing Board, comprised of elected officials from the Cities and County of Merced.

---

### **Railroad Undercrossing Request Moving Down the Track**

Is there relief from train traffic in Merced's future? Staff of the California Transportation Commission (CTC) recommended the City of Merced receive a \$9 million grant for an undercrossing at G Street and the Burlington, Northern and Santa Fe Railroad tracks. Funds from Prop. 1B would pay half the cost. The project requires a 10%, or \$1.8 million, match by the railroad.

Funds must be approved by the CTC, which meets at the end of August. City portion of funding would come from impact fees and Redevelopment Agency bonds. If the funds are received, construction would begin March 2010 and finish by September 2011.

More than 70 passenger and freight trains travel BNSF tracks daily through the City of Merced. Public safety personnel spend about two hours each day waiting for the tracks to clear.

---

### **"Sharps" Banned from Trashcans**

If you use medical needles at home, you can no longer throw them in the trash. As of Sep. 1, 2008, the California health and Safety Code prohibits home-generated sharps waste from being placed in any container used for the collection of solid waste, recyclable materials, or green waste. "Sharps" are devices used to penetrate the skin to deliver medications.



So how do you get rid of them? Currently, they can be taken to a household hazardous waste facility, to a medical provider who has agreed to accept the used sharps, or placed in an approved medical mail-back container. The Dept. of Environmental Health accepts home-generated, medically-prescribed sharps at their drop off facility at the Hwy 59 landfill in Merced.

The reason for this new law is that sharps have caused disposal workers to be pricked by needles, after which they needed to go for health testing. Sharps can also cause equipment damage in the city and county disposal process.

Later this month the Dept. of Environmental Health will further elaborate on a disposal program.

---

### **Governing Board Decisions of July 17; Decisions To Be Made on Aug. 21, 2008**

#### **In July, MCAG Directors made the following decisions –**

As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:

- Set a Public Hearing for Aug. 21, 2008 to consider adopting, by resolution, the Revised Solid Waste Facility Fee Schedule. This schedule will increase fees 5.2% each year for five years.
- Adopted a resolution to terminate the lease with Mr. Jean Pierre Sagouspe, III, at his request. Mr. Sagouspe was farming land purchased by the county as a buffer around the Billy Wright landfill.

As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:

- Authorized a new 5-year lease with the City of Merced for common area at the Transportation Center
- Adopted a resolution to approve the 2008/09 Disadvantaged Business Enterprise plan and goal.

As the MCAG Governing Board:

- On the State Route 165 project study, approved staff and consultant recommendations for assumptions, risk assessment, and quarterly project team meetings.
- Approved travel for staff and Board members to the National Rural Transportation Peer Learning Conference in Minneapolis
- Approved a letter of support for AB 3034 (Galgiani) – High Speed Rail Bond Act
- Approved a letter of support for the proposed UC Merced Medical School
- Approved a letter of support for AB 2188 (Arambula) – Community Development Block Grants
- Approved the program concept for the San Joaquin Valley National Agricultural Goods Movement and Trade Corridor Program
- Adopted the final draft of the 2009 Interim Federal Transportation Improvement Program by resolution
- Approved the MCAG compensation study and the recommendations for Exempt/Non-Exempt designations

In August, the Directors will make the following decisions --

As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:

- Adopt, by resolution, the Revised Solid Waste Facility Fee Schedule. This schedule will increase fees 5.2% each year for five years.

As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:

- Accept the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise annual anticipated participation level to be 1%.

As the MCAG Governing Board:

- Receive an update on grants available for bicycle programs and projects
- Receive notice of the release of Department of Conservation funds to cities and counties for beverage container recycling and litter abatement
- Review information on Merced County food program rating and inspection procedures
- Review a table summarizing local development fees for Merced County and cities
- Accept the Pavement Management Annual Report
- Approve the 2008/09 One Voice timeline
- Adopt by resolution the Merced County Regional Housing Needs Allocation Plan. This plan includes the number of housing units each city and the county will need in the categories of very low housing, low, moderate, and above moderate.
- Adopt by resolution the Local Transportation Fund claims from the Cities and County of Merced.
- For the Atwater-Merced Expressway project

**The following decisions to be delayed to permit further discussion --**

- Certify the final Environmental Impact Report
- Select Alternative 1B as the alignment
- Request that the Cities of Atwater and Merced and the County of Merced incorporate the selected alignment into their General Plans

[If you would like to unsubscribe from this newsletter, click here.](#)