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## News Briefs

### **We Need You on Our Citizens Committee**

The Citizens Advisory Committee meets the first Friday of every month at 8:30 a.m. at the MCAG office, 369 W. 18<sup>th</sup> St., Merced. This lively group discusses issues of regional importance and makes recommendations to the MCAG Governing Board, which consists of one elected representative from each of the six cities and one supervisor from each of the five unincorporated districts.

May/June 2009

## **Atwater Hwy 99 Project Moves 582,692 Tons of Dirt, Uses 172 Tons of Steel**

As travelers have motored along Highway 99 over the past two years, they often comment on the enormous size of the road construction projects. The latest project is in Atwater, where Caltrans is converting 2.7 miles of Hwy 99 from 4 lanes to 6.



In March 2009, Caltrans permanently closed the southbound at-grade intersection at Central Avenue/Westside Boulevard. In May, the remaining at-grade crossings were closed at Cressey Road, Stein Road, Central Avenue, and Grove Avenue.

(Photos courtesy of Caltrans)

A new interchange will be constructed at Westside Blvd. Construction should be completed in the Spring of 2011.



Even though the \$43 million project is "only" 2.7 miles, the tasks involved are mind-boggling.

Approximately 266,979 tons of dirt have been excavated and another 315,713 brought in, for a total of 582,692 tons. Over 846,230 cubic yards of various forms of cement have been used. To date, the project has used 343,921 pounds of steel.

Starting a large public project is a daunting task. Even though construction takes 2.5 years, the environmental clearance process is even longer. This is followed by the design phase and then right-of-way acquisition.



Once the Atwater portion of Hwy 99 is complete, the next construction project will begin June 2010 to convert 5.9 miles from Buchanan Hollow Road to McHenry, eliminate at-grade crossings, and construct a new interchange at Arboleda Road. At the same time,

We need representatives for Commerce and Construction. We also have an opening for one Citizen-at-large. If you would like to make recommendations on projects that affect our quality of life in Merced County, please contact Lori Flanders at 209-723-3153, ext. 318 or [click here](#) to fill out an application.

### Follow THE BUS on Twitter

This week Merced County transit started tweeting. That's what you do on the popular social networking site Twitter, where posts and responses are known as tweets.

By registering at [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com), you can follow THE BUS on your mobile phone or computer and immediately hear about route delays, service changes, or special announcements. After registering, go to [www.twitter.com/mercedthebus](http://www.twitter.com/mercedthebus) to read messages.

### YARTS Launches New Website

Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) announces a new website that's "more attractive, has more information, and is more useful to the public," according to YARTS Transit Manager Dick Whittington. The site, designed by Tracy

Caltrans will convert 4.6 miles from Madera County line to Buchanan Hollow Road, eliminate at-grades, and construct a new interchange at Plainsburg road, beginning Feb. 2011. Both of these projects are fully funded through Prop. 1B, passed by the voters in 2006.

## MCAG Citizens Committee Talks About Challenges of Their Role

While those we elect make decisions that guide regional issues, there are two groups who influence the process. One is the city and county managers board, and the other is the 17-member Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).

To be on the CAC, a person must fill out an application (at [www.mcagov.org](http://www.mcagov.org)) and be approved by the MCAG Governing Board. A CAC member cannot be an elected official. Meetings are on the first Friday of every month at 8:30 a.m. in the MCAG conference room.



l to r:: Tom Grave, Dan Hultgren, Adam Cox, Dean Wilson, Mary Ford, Richard Jantz, Tom Crawley, Kyle Ford

Meetings are spirited and members aren't shy about speaking up, even when they don't agree. CAC members work hard to achieve recommendations that are, in the end, satisfactory to most members.

The Governing Board tries to balance the committee so that all areas of the county are represented. Members also are

chosen, based on work experience, to represent specific areas. Current committee members are:

Richard Jantz, Delhi - Economic Development  
 Dan Hultgren, Merced - Real Estate  
 Dianna Westmoreland-Pedrozo, Merced - Agriculture  
 Mary Ford, Gustine - Small Business  
 Scott Neal, Merced - Goods Movement  
 Tom Grave, Merced - Education  
 Tom Crawley, Merced - Finance  
 Hicham Eltal, Merced - Water/Irrigation  
 Dennis Cote, Delhi - Civil Engineering  
 Adam Cox, Merced - Student  
 John Price, Merced - Citizen-at-large  
 Dean Wilson, Los Banos - Citizen-at-large  
 Kyle Ford, Gustine - Citizen-at-large  
 Melissa Kelly-Ortega, Merced - Citizen-at-large  
 Vacant - Citizen-at-large

McMahan, MCAG Web Operations Officer is “definitely easier to use”.

YARTS runs buses from Merced, Mono, and Mariposa counties to Yosemite National Park. MCAG administers the transit agreement and manages the operations.

The new website features a map of the service area, a schedule of stops, and numerous trip-planning links. Visit [www.yarts.com](http://www.yarts.com) to plan your next visit to Yosemite National Park.

Vacant - Commerce  
Vacant - Construction

The MCAG Reporter visited a recent CAC meeting to hear what members felt about their role and the challenges they faced:

***Q. How would you describe your role as a member of the CAC?***

**Richard Jantz:** Recently, we’ve been talking about the requirements to receive federal funding. I learn a lot as a result of our discussions because various interest groups are represented here.

**Kyle Ford:** This is a well-represented group. And, while our interests are diverse, we make recommendations based on the good of the community.

**Dean Wilson:** I’m from Los Banos, so represent the west side of the County. Also, I’m a commuter, so can bring that perspective to our transportation discussions.

**Dan Hultgren:** We also have a responsibility to take what we discuss and learn here to our different groups. I take things to the Board of Realtors. It’s difficult to comprehend the money issues and challenges of getting projects done.

***Q. What have you learned from being on this committee?***

**Tom Grave:** The different funding sources. It’s challenging to keep it all straight. I’ve learned to appreciate the paid staff and the way they lobby for our interests.

**Mary Ford:** I’m amazed at how much more it involves than I thought. It’s fascinating. Sometimes it seems hopeless.

**Richard Jantz:** Sometimes we learn the hard way that we’re all in this together. We do things that defeat the overall objectives, such as not passing the transportation measure, even though there’s a desperate need for it.

**Dan Hultgren:** The issues are hard – the way we’re going to grow, the price of permits, how to divvy up funds.

***Q. What is the hardest decision you have made as a member of the CAC?***

**Dean Wilson:** When, after three years, MCAG was not going to be the lead agency on the regional Blueprint. I was afraid the project would suffer.



Dan Hultgren and Adam Cox share a light moment during a meeting.

**Tom Crawley:** Growth and development decisions. Are some organizations less into developing and more into keeping things the

way they are?

**Richard Jantz:** Many decisions are positive. I feel good about the decision-making process, especially after we've had considerable discussion.

***Q. What are challenges you see facing Merced County?***

**Mary Ford:** More businesses so that we can have more local employees. Get more commuters off the road.

**Dean Wilson:** Water. We haven't looked that long and hard on water distribution. 75,000 jobs have been lost in the Valley that are related to ag, which is related to water.

**Richard Jantz:** The transportation measure. If we don't find a way to fund roads, a lot more will go to gravel.

Currently, the CAC has three open positions. If you would like to be considered, go to <http://mcagov.org/meetings/cac/app.pdf> to submit an application.

## Hazardous Waste: Where to Take Items This Summer

Community cleanup days ended in Spring and won't start again until October. So where do you take old electronics in the meantime? Remember, you can't throw them away with the regular trash OR blue can recycling because of toxic materials in the items, such as cadmium, lead, and mercury. In a landfill, these eventually seep into the ground where it can get into the water system.



The following places will accept E-waste for free:

**Best Buy** accepts the following electronics from California customers (limit 2 units per day, per household): TV's and computer monitors up to 32," computer CPUs and notebooks, computer accessories such as keyboards, mice, and remotes, small electronics, VCR and DVD players, and phones. The following can be placed in the collection kiosks between the sliding doors: cell phones, CDs & DVDs, inkjet cartridges, PDA/smart phones and rechargeable batteries.

**Billy Wright Landfill**, Los Banos, accepts electronics, up to 3 car/truck batteries per resident, CFL bulbs and fluorescent tubes, used motor oil and used oil filters. Drop off facility is located to the right of the scale house. Hours: Mon.-Sat. 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.; Sun. noon-4:00 p.m.

**Diamond C. Enterprises** accepts all electronics such as cell phones, computers, office machines, DVD and VCR players, microwaves, stereos, and TVs. Call 209-261-8646 to make appointment.

**Goodwill Industries** accepts computer monitors and other computer equipment.

**Merced County Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facility** takes all electronics from households. Businesses need to call to pre-register and pre-pay before visiting the facility on Highway 59 in Merced. This site also accepts antifreeze, non-empty aerosol cans, car/truck batteries, CFLs and fluorescent tubes, fertilizer, household batteries, paint, used motor oil, and oil filters. Maximum amount of HHW accepted per vehicle is 15 gallons of liquid or 125 pounds of solid. Hours Mon.-Fri. 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Sat. 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

**Universal Service Recycling**, Merced, accepts (and offers payments) for all electronics, including appliances. Universal also accepts car/truck batteries, tractor batteries, and metal.

**Unicor Federal Prison Industries**, Atwater, accepts all electronics. Call 209-386-4861 before dropping off E-waste.

## Tracy McMahan: MCAG's First "Employee of the Quarter"

Last year an energetic employee suggested that MCAG organize an Employee Recognition Committee to provide some fun low-key activities but, more importantly, to raise awareness of exceptional service. After receiving the go-ahead, this employee held an open meeting to see who would be interested in serving on the committee, asked for some guidance from management, and launched the Employee Recognition program.



That employee was Tracy McMahan, who, through secret ballot nominations, became the first MCAG Employee of the Quarter. Tracy is the agency's Web Operations Officer, responsible for the maintenance of MCAG's seven websites. She also designed four of

the sites.

Tracy works with other San Joaquin Valley counties on the fledgling 511 traveler information system, arranges for the taping of Governing Board meetings, and is the sole manager of [www.yosemite.com](http://www.yosemite.com), where she sells ads, handles customer service, updates information, and answers questions about traveling to Yosemite National Park.

Here's what those who nominated her had to say:

"Tracy always assists others, even when it has nothing to do with her job."

"Tracy has consistently shown initiative and excellence in her web development, innovation, and maintenance."

"Beyond just doing her usual excellent job, she is interested in the welfare of all employees. It takes courage to recommend a big concept, such as the Employee Recognition Committee, to your

employer and determination to move it along without becoming discouraged.”

Congratulations, Tracy!

## **MCAG Governing Board Decisions of Apr/May; New Decisions for June 2009**

**In April, the Directors made the following decisions –**

As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:

*There were no agenda items.*

As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:

- Considered a Resolution to file a grant application for operating funds for THE BUS

• Set a public hearing on proposed use of stimulus funds for transit, then adopted two Resolutions to apply for \$649,000 and \$2,485,982 to replace six older buses, rehabilitate the automated bus washer, and purchase a NextBus system that will show passengers in real time when to expect the next bus arrival at the stops

As the MCAG Governing Board:

- Considered amending MCAG’s Federal Transportation Improvement Program to allow a list of projects eligible for American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA)
- Approved the Draft Local Transportation Fund Apportionment to the cities and county
- Approved revised State Transit Assistance schedule
- Delegated certification responsibility under ARRA to the MCAG Transit Join Power Authority Executive Director
- Authorized MCAG Executive Director to send a letter of support to Congressman Cardoza for the Campus Parkway project
- Considered providing funding support for the remainder of the fiscal year to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley
  
- Accepted the FY 2007-08 Financial Audit for MDSS, the nonprofit arm of MCAG

**In May, the Directors made the following decisions --**

As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:

- Revised the fee schedule and set a public hearing for July 16

As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:

- Directed staff to prepare, within 90 days, a draft update of the Transit Joint Powers Agreement

As the MCAG Governing Board:

- Adopted Social Services Transportation Advisory Committee bylaws
- Approved the MCAG FY 2009-2010 Work Program and Budget, via Resolution
- Approved a contract with the County of Merced for MCAG to provide coordination services for the Continuum of Care program
- Approved a new MCAG purchasing policy
- Authorized a new agreement for services between the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) and MCAG for one year
- Approved the Smart Growth Principles and Scenario B+ adopted by the San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council
- Directed staff to perform tasks related to the exchange of Regional Surface Transportation Program funds with Caltrans
- Took no action on revising the "reasonable to meet" definition of transit unmet needs

**In June, the Directors will consider the following –**

As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:

*There are no agenda items.*

As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:

- Since funding has run out that allowed young children to ride free on the bus, direction will be given as to setting a public hearing to raise fares for children under 5 years.
- Accept the 2007/08 Countywide Transit Enterprise Fund Audit

As the MCAG Governing Board:

- Approve an amendment to the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) for modifications to Campus Parkway, Los Banos Bypass, and Hwys 99/165 Project Study Report
- Approved re-determination of air quality conformity to accommodate a change in San Joaquin Council of Governments' regional and federal transportation plans
- Approve the San Joaquin Valley Express Transit Study
- Approve the Purpose and Need for the Hwys 99/165 Project Study Report
- Review status of regional road projects

- Review Regional Transportation Impact Fee Report
- Approve new One Voice procedure and timeline
- Elect a new Chair and Vice Chair

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