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## News Briefs

### Hwy 99 Atwater Project Ahead by 8 Months

At the MCAG Governing Board meeting in Sep., Caltrans Planning Director for District 10 Ken Baxter, announced that the Hwy 99 widening project north of Atwater to Arena Way is eight months ahead of schedule and should be

Sep/Oct 2009

### Valley Councils of Government Partner to Press for High Speed Rail Money

With \$4.5 billion at stake, the 8 San Joaquin Valley Councils of Government, which includes MCAG, joined forces with The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley to ask for a portion of the funds for the Bakersfield to Merced corridor of the proposed High Speed Rail (HSR).

It wasn't always easy as Valley governments came up against organized and well-financed groups from the Bay Area and Southern California. Even within the Valley counties differed on placement of stations or where to locate a proposed maintenance facility before putting individual agendas aside and presenting a united front.

On Sept. 23, Kern Supervisor Michael Rubio, Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingen, and Merced City Councilman Bill Spriggs represented the Valley group at the HSR Authority Board meeting in Sacramento. They were given the opportunity to present their case first during public comments. Among the points they made was that building the Valley route would be less expensive



*Merced City Councilman Bill Spriggs*



*Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingen*

than in other more-developed areas of the state and that the Valley was the only place in the U.S. where true HSR, moving at 220 mph, could be tested.

The comments were well-received and the HSR staff recommendation for the Valley remained intact. An application for California was submitted by the Governor on Oct. 2 which asked \$1.28 million for the San Francisco-San Jose corridor, \$466,000 for Merced to Fresno, \$819,500 for Fresno to Bakersfield, and \$2 million for Los Angeles to Anaheim. The Valley route had to be split in two sections because all areas had to prove "independent utility", meaning that, if the HSR rail project was never completed, the construction to that point could have other uses. That independent utility did not exist across the City of Fresno.

Due to the unexpected number of applications throughout the U.S. for the ARRA money, the Federal Railroad Commission has delayed awarding of the funds until later this year.

### Landfill Hours Decrease to Avoid Rate Increase



*Kern Supervisor Michael Rubio*

open July 30, 2010. A frontage road to replace the at-grade crossings will open this November. The 2.7 mile project includes a new interchange at Westside Blvd.

### **AME Stakeholders Group Learns About Public-Private Partnerships**

A stakeholders group for the proposed Atwater-Merced Expressway will hear a presentation on public-private partnerships for road projects Oct. 28, 10:00 a.m., Castle Commerce Center. The group was organized to support this new road which is part of a future loop around Merced City. The project will provide better transportation access to Castle and to the UC as well as relieving congestion through and to Merced.

Several large-scale retail and light industrial developments hinge on building the AME. The stakeholders are trying to find creative ways to fund the multi-million dollar project.

### **Regional Transportation Plan Needs Your Input**

Every four years, regions update transportation plans. Public comments and suggestions are important to this process.

Upcoming meetings will be

The distressed economy has some interesting and dire ripple effects. One of them is a reduction in garbage. That reduction led to significantly reduced tipping fees, which ultimately resulted in layoffs.

“When people don’t have extra disposable income, they aren’t buying things. And when they aren’t buying, they aren’t discarding the packaging, so we’ve had a tremendous drop in loads being brought to the landfill,” explains Sam Chandler, Deputy Director of Merced County Public Works. “To balance the budget, we either have to increase fees or reduce our operating costs. Unfortunately, this meant we had to lay off a few people, which has caused a lot of anguish for them and for us.”

Chandler recommended, and the Regional Waste Management Authority Board approved, the option of reducing costs rather than raise fees.

On Sep. 27, the two landfills, on Highway 59 and near Los Banos, began closing on Sundays. On Mondays, the landfills are closed each day a half hour earlier, from 4:00 p.m. to 3:30. Both landfills will keep the same opening hour, 7:00 a.m. for Merced, and 8:00 a.m. for the Billy Wright landfill.

In addition, Saturdays are only open a half day, from 8:00 a.m. until noon. However, the landfills will stay open on Saturdays when there is a local community cleanup. Following holidays, when haulers have to use Saturday to make up for the weekday holiday, the landfills will be open, but only to the haulers.

Without these and other changes in daily operations, homeowners would have seen a \$2.50/month increase in their garbage collection bills.

### **GIS Dept. Finalizes Work for 2010 U.S. Census**

MCAG’s Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Department recently finished a first review of all current new roads, streets, and parcels in the cities of Merced and Dos Palos as part of the preparation for the 2010 U.S. Census. The review found 825 road and street segments that needed to be corrected on Census Bureau maps.

Merced City accounted for 84% of those corrections, with 690 newly added road/street segments. (These are not full roads, but parts that had not previously appeared on Census maps.) While almost all parcels were up to date, in Dos Palos 193 parcels were missing and have now been corrected.



To perform this intricate search, Brent Bennik, MCAG GIS technician, used the Census Bureau’s proprietary software and received online training. He then began a road-by-road check. Most of the missing road segments were around new subdivisions, but a few older road

held Oct. 19, 6:30 p.m., Merced City Council and Oct. 22, 7:00 p.m., McSwain Municipal Advisory Council. If you would like to have a meeting in your community, contact Matt Fell, MCAG, 723-3153, ext. 320.

## Blueprint Planning Receives Funds

The San Joaquin Valley COGs have been awarded 4<sup>th</sup>-year grant funding for the Blueprint Planning Process. For the first three years, MCAG had been the lead agency. Fresno COG has now taken over that role. During the 4<sup>th</sup> year, city/county planning models will be adjusted and planners trained to use more advanced modeling techniques.

## Celebrate GIS Day

On behalf of the San Joaquin Valley Regional GIS Committee, MCAG and the City of Merced will co-host a day of GIS events on Nov. 17, 8:30-4:00 p, Merced City Hall, 678 W. 18<sup>th</sup> St. The event is open to the public. In addition to practical applications of GIS, plus tips and tricks, a new camera with built-in GPS will be introduced. For more information, contact Rich Green at (209) 723-3153, ext. 305.

segments in Dos Palos and southwest Merced didn't show up.

"It was very interesting to learn more about how the Census is conducted, how they use the information we provide, and how they use GIS," said Bennik.

MCAG GIS was able to perform this project for the cities because, unlike many other counties in California, MCAG, the County, and its cities use a uniform Geographic Information Systems program. In 1990, MCAG was given the task of collecting parcel and planning data from all of the cities and county and creating a centralized database.

The database is online at <http://www.mcagov.org>, where it shows parcel maps, roads, and general plans throughout the county online. Visitors can look up the boundaries of any parcel in Merced County, including their own property, and see what value the tax assessor puts on that parcel.

## Man with a Mission Recycles 38 Tons

Atwater's Mitchell Senior Elementary School began recycling in 1992 due to the efforts of then science teacher Tony Shukle. Shukle, now retired, collects recyclables such as cardboard and newspaper from eight schools in the Atwater Elementary School District. Mitchell Senior Elementary serves as the base to gather all the recyclables.

Since 1992, Tony has worked with five different recycling agencies as recyclers either went out of business or stopped offering particular services. Last year, he helped the District recycle 38 tons (76,000 pounds) of recyclables. This year he hopes to do even better. With all of that tonnage being diverted from the regular solid waste bins, Tony has saved the District money in disposal costs since the tons of recycling would otherwise go into solid waste bins.

In 7<sup>th</sup> grade in 1967, Tony was "bit by the recycling bug." Between his school and home there was an irresistible dumpster. He would find things that he could put to good use, such as tricycle tires that he put on his and his brother's hot rod, and a transistor radio that just needed batteries.

Throughout the week, Tony efficiently piles the (hopefully) already flattened cardboard boxes and the other recyclables into a 40-foot roll off container. On Saturdays he drives to the District's six other schools to collect their recyclables and brings them back to his recycling base. But, sadly, he comments, "I hope I'm not saving a tree so that someone else can waste it."

Once the container is full, American Recycling replaces the full container with a new one,



weighs the recycling load, and reimburses the school district for the amount of cardboard and paper that Shukle helped collect.

Even though Tony is retired, he continues to make his recycling rounds. "I like the physicalness of it. It's my therapy!"

### **Varela's First Elected Office: Mayor of Livingston**



Daniel Varela smiles when he tells people that being the Mayor of Livingston is the first public office he's ever held. But he has years of community service that brought him in contact with almost every organization in his city.

"I wanted to get involved because people were getting a bad impression of our community," says Daniel. "Livingston is small, but there are many intricate cultures mixed together. I felt that the city was teetering on the edge, and I was worried which way we would go."

As Mayor, his biggest challenges are building a safe community and "getting people to focus on the younger generation" instead of living in the past.

In addition to his duties in Livingston, Daniel is also one of 11 directors on the MCAG Governing Board. He admits that tackling regional issues is a learning process, but he appreciates the help from the other cities and the county. "The camaraderie is very nice. I like it that all the cities and the county can have open discussions and help each other."

Daniel was born in Fresno, but grew up in Livingston, when his dad, pastor of a Pentecostal church, was transferred in 1965. Daniel graduated from Livingston High and immediately went to work. He began working for Foster Farms 17 years ago, and is now a supervisor. Always active in youth organizations, Daniel was a coach and currently serves as a minister to youth groups.

Daniel has two brothers who live in the Bay Area and one sister, a teacher at Hilmar Elementary. His wife, Martha, works in the early development program at Delhi Unified School District. Daniel and Martha have three sons and one daughter.

### **MCAG Governing Board Decisions of Aug/Sep; October Meeting Cancelled**

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

**As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:**

- Approved a Highway 59 easement authorization

- Approved the Solid Waste deficit reduction budget

**As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:**

*There were no transit items this month.*

**As the MCAG Governing Board:**

- Accepted the Coordinated Transit Services Plan
- Approved the Anna Fuentes Memorial Scholarship program
- Approved an amendment to the Federal Transportation Improvement Program
- Directed staff to issue a Request for Proposals to prepare a 10-year plan to prevent chronic homelessness
- Accepted the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter work program report for MCAG
- Approved new procedures for the One Voice legislative advocacy program
- Approved sending a letter of support for AB 934
- Approved sending a letter to Caltrans regarding their definition and use of “economic distress” when applying for federal funds
- Denied a hardship acquisition request from a private citizen with a home near the proposed Los Banos bypass
- Approved a letter to Curt Pringle, Chairman, High Speed Rail Authority, supporting inclusion of the Merced to Bakersfield corridor in the application for the ARRA funds being administered through the Federal Rail Administration.

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

**As the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority Board:**

- Authorized contract negotiations for the Hwy 59 Landfill Gas Utilization Project
- Requested staff review Phoenix Energy’s proposal for a Biomass plant
- Approved a resolution granting a public utilities easement deed to Pacific Gas & Energy

**As the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced County:**

- There were no items for this month.

**As the MCAG Governing Board:**

- Approved the revised San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Memorandum of Understanding
- Approved MCAG becoming a participating agency on the San Jose to Merced section High-Speed Train Project Environmental Impact Report
- Adopted a resolution re-determining conformity for the 2009 Federal Transportation Improvement Program Amendment #3 and 2007 Regional Transportation Plan Amendment #2
- Concur with the San Joaquin Valley COG Directors to submit one application from the San Joaquin Valley to the Strategic Growth Council for Proposition 84 Funds
- Approved staff’s request to scale down the county population forecast
- Approved the final Annual Pavement Management Report
- Approved out-of-state travel for those attending the National Rural Transportation Peer Learning Conference in Savannah, Georgia

**As the Merced Data Special Services Board:**

10/19/2009

- Approved the MDSS policy and procedures.

**The October meeting has been cancelled.** The Board will meet again on Nov. 19, 3:00 p.m., at the Merced City Council Chambers.

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