

S.J. adds 4th air monitor station

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Thursday, May 12, 2011

MANTECA - Students gasping for air as they run the track at Sierra High School can now get hour-by-hour information about exactly how clean - or how dirty - that air is.

Air quality officials have constructed San Joaquin County's fourth air monitoring station, a high-tech and unmanned system of machines in a nondescript building tucked into a corner of the south county campus.

Of all eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, San Joaquin and Stanislaus have the fewest air quality stations per capita. This makes it harder to pinpoint problem spots.

And unlike some other stations, this one was intentionally placed in an urban area. The \$210,000 station, paid for mostly with fees collected from polluting businesses, will help Sierra school officials and the community make good decisions to protect public health, air district chief Seyed Sadredin said.

"We still have days in San Joaquin County when it's not healthy to be outdoors," he said. "Now we're going to be able to give the school real-time air quality information, and the (school) district can make a decision based on the information we send them."

The station monitors how much "particulate matter" - tiny pieces of dust and soot - is floating around.

Steel pipes suck in outside air and shoot it into a machine roughly the size of a microwave oven. Inside that machine, reels of clean paper turn just a tad every hour, with the blast of air leaving a dime-sized mark each time. The darker the mark, the dirtier the air.

The information is processed by computers and posted on the district's website.

The station pretty much runs itself; some weekly maintenance is required. It'll cost about \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year, Sadredin said.

The station does not measure ozone, which is the Valley's primary pollution problem during the summertime.

And it's not clear how the station might affect evaluation of the county's overall air quality.

Prohibitions on fireplace burning during the wintertime, for example, have been decided in part by averaging particulate matter readings from the three existing stations; adding a fourth station provides new data that could influence those averages.

how's the air?

To explore real-time air quality information for your area, visit valleyair.org. Click on "Air Quality Information," then "Air Quality Info" and then "Real-Time data". Use the pull-down menu to sort for location and type of pollution.

Or, to sign up for email advisories about air quality, return to valleyair.org and click on the "RAAN" icon.

Station monitors Manteca air

By Jason Campbell

Manteca Bulletin, Thursday, May 12, 2011

It won't be long before the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District knows exactly what circulates in the air of southwest Manteca.

On Wednesday a new air monitoring station located on the outskirts of the Sierra High School campus was unveiled in a ceremony designed to outline the benefits that the facility will bring to

the district's monitoring efforts and to showcase the tools used to measure particle matter as well as wind speed and direction.

And its location, Chief Communications Officer Jaime Holt, will shed new light on the air quality in the Northern San Joaquin Valley.

"This is a unique location because it's 10 feet from homes and 20 feet from the stadium and the campus," Holt said – noting that two of the three other air monitoring stations in San Joaquin County are located at the two rural airports. "This will help show us what the air quality is like living, working and studying at this location. This is going to help show us what sort of pollutants are making it here up the corridor from other parts of the valley, and we'll be able to input that into our models."

The facility itself cost roughly \$210,000 to outfit and equip and will require another \$30,000 to \$40,000 annually to maintain and operate according to district air pollution and control officer and executive director Seyed Sadredin. Funding come from a multitude of sources with the federal government being the prime contributor, and fees will likely cover the annual operating cost of the site.

Two Sierra High School classes attended the brief ceremony before taking a tour of the small facility and learning what goes into detecting and monitoring both small and large particulate matter in the air. It's the measuring stations like at the one at Sierra High that help the district determine the overall air quality.

According to Manteca Unified Leadership on Green Initiatives Committee – or LOGIC – director Victoria Brunn, giving the students on site the chance to learn about the tools that go into measuring air quality helps provide a direct link to the things that they'll likely become accustomed to as environmental concerns become more an issue for future generations.

"I think it's giving them a real life connection to the things that they hear about," Brunn said. "Tomorrow Mr. Leland will pull the site up in the classroom for the students to actually see what this station will monitor and it'll show them even more about it. I think that green issues are going to be a big part of the future with jobs and this helps give insight to the students that might want to go into this field."

California dairy settles Clean Air Act lawsuit

By Mateusz Perkowski

Capital Press, Tues., May 10, 2011

A California dairy has agreed to pay \$380,000 to settle a lawsuit that accused it of violating the federal Clean Air Act.

The settlement ends more than five years of litigation between the Association of Irrigated Residents environmental group and the Fred Schakel Dairy.

The group filed a complaint against the dairy in 2005, alleging that methanol emissions from rotting manure and cow digestion threatened local residents with lung damage and respiratory disease.

The lawsuit sought an injunction that would prevent Schakel from operating the dairy, and additional civil penalties against the company.

Schakel's dairy is designed to contain more than 10,000 cattle on about 250 acres in Tulare County, Calif, generating as much waste as a city of 275,000 people, according to a court document.

Manure from the dairy is separated into liquid and solid forms, then used as fertilizer on nearby farming operations, the document said.

The Association of Irrigated Residents claimed that Schakel had begun construction of the dairy without obtaining the necessary permits under the Clean Air Act.

A state agency charged with administering the Clean Air Act in that part of California had previously fined the dairy \$110,000 for failing to secure one such permit and ordered the company to buy another \$600,000 in emissions offsets. California allows companies to earn offset credits by reducing emissions and then sell the credits to other firms.

Schakel argued the lawsuit should be dismissed because the company ended up meeting the agency's permitting requirements.

The state agency also found the dairy wasn't a major source of air pollution, which exempted it from having to obtain another permit in question, the company said.

A federal judge allowed the case to proceed, but the parties have now decided that a settlement deal is "the most appropriate means of resolving these actions," according to the agreement.

Schakel has agreed to donate \$130,000 to a medical center in California for treatments of asthma and respiratory illness and to pay the plaintiff's attorneys \$250,000 for the costs of litigation.

As part of the deal, expert reports and data about emissions from the dairy -- which were previously confidential per court order -- will be made public and available online.

Parties and attorneys in the case also agreed not to issue any press releases or comment about the settlement to the media.

Public transit connects but not always to the jobs -- Brookings study

By Robert J. Hawkins

San Diego Union-Tribune, Thurs., May 12, 2011

Most San Diegans are well-connected to public transit, but few of those buses, trolleys and trains connect us well to our jobs, according to a new report from the Brookings Institution.

The report, "Missed Opportunity: Transit and Jobs in Metropolitan America," looks at the top 100 metropolitan areas of the country and finds few that do a good job of matching up where we live with where we work.

Overall, 70 percent of metropolitan residents can easily catch a ride on public transit but it will take them to only 30 percent of the jobs in metro areas in less than 90 minutes.

"Not good enough," said Robert Puentes, a senior fellow at Brookings. "Job Number One is getting Americans to their jobs. This is how we become more productive, more competitive, more successful."

Metropolitan San Diego County residents are pretty well connected to public transit, with 83 percent living near a bus, trolley or light-rail stop. The problem is, only 29 percent of the jobs in the county are accessible by transit.

San Diego County's metropolitan area, described in the report as San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, included transit data from Metropolitan Transit System (buses and trolleys) and North County Transit District (buses, Coaster and Sprinter trains).

San Diego's transit accessibility ranked 25th overall, right behind Los Angeles.

Western cities did well in the eyes of the Brookings researchers. Of the 25 best transit systems, 17 are in the West. The list's Top 5 are in order Honolulu, San Jose, Salt Lake City, Tucson and [Fresno](#). New York's vaunted transit system ranks 13th, ahead of San Francisco (16th), Washington DC (17th) and Seattle (18th).

Older city systems, in which many jobs fled to the suburbs decades ago, didn't fare well--like Boston (34th) and Philadelphia (49th).

In a breakdown of San Diego transit services, the Brookings study found that low- and middle-income residents fair well, with more than 90 percent in proximity to public transit, compared to 67 percent of the high-income residents. More urban residents(86 percent) enjoy access to public transit, compared to 81 percent of suburban dwellers.

However, when it comes to employment access, only 37 percent of the low-income can get to jobs by transit, compared to 29 percent for middle-income and only 20 percent for high income residents.

The wealthy even have to wait longer. Service frequency for high-income dwellers averages 12.8 minutes, but only 6.8 percent for low-income neighborhoods.

In this era of rising gasoline prices and faltering incomes, "we need to get the most bang for our transportation investments," said Puentes.

On Thursday, Brookings launches a web-based tool which graphically mates transportation routes with employment and residential zones for all 100 metropolitan areas, accessed from this link: <http://bit.ly/iAklhx> .

A pair of similarly themed studies released Wednesday by the Center for Transit Oriented Development back up Puentes' assertions.

"Employment sprawl" -- the flip side of suburban sprawl -- "contributes to over \$1 billion dollars in lost time and fuel every year," according to the authors of "Transit Oriented Development and Employment."

"Future transit planning must focus on making the critical connections between home and work trips," concludes Sam Zimbabwe, director of the Center for Transit-Oriented Development.

The second study, of 34 metropolitan transit systems, found that only 23 percent of all employment opportunities were located within a half-mile of a transit stop. However, that study, "Transit and Regional Economic Development," also found that businesses have started growing around transit systems.

Solar power planned for Coalinga aggregate plant

Business Journal Wed., May 11, 2011

A 1.2 megawatt solar installation is expected to supply up to 50% of the energy needs at an aggregate and hot mix facility in Coalinga, according to an agreement reached today.

Solar Frontier, a Tokyo-based provider of thin-film solar technology with its American headquarters in Santa Clara, will provide solar modules for the system at Granite Construction's facility located at 38940 Highway 33 in Coalinga.

The installation is expected to be complete by this summer.

Since their commercialization in 2007, Solar Frontier has hailed its proprietary copper indium selenide (CIS) panels as cost efficient and dependable in a range of applications from large-scale ground-mount to commercial and residential rooftops.

Last month, Granite Construction commissioned one of the nation's first solar projects at its asphalt concrete and aggregate facilities in Indio, California with a 318-kilowatt system expected to generate as much as 75% of the plant's required power.

Residents speak up about revised West Park plan

Patterson Irrigator Wed. May 11, 2011

As developer Gerry Kamilos shared his revised vision for Crows Landing's former naval airfield at a Patterson-Westley Chamber of Commerce forum Monday, May 9, local residents looked for reassurances that they would have pull in the project's development.

About 30 people showed up to the coffee hour at Patterson City Hall, where Kamilos gave his first public presentation on the West Side since altering his plans last year after the courts overturned a lawsuit that the city of Patterson had filed against his project.

Kamilos stressed that the plans are substantially different, adding that he had considered the input of county residents as well as new economic realities. Still, several attendees continued to express pessimism about trains to be used by the project and West Park's potential impact on regional agriculture and air quality. Because of those fears, some residents advocated for the city to be allowed to sign off on the project's future draft development agreement before it receives county approval.

Kamilos said he could make no promises regarding that agreement, as only the county has control over that process. Still, he told attendees he is making the rounds on the West Side and plans to stay in touch with the area's jurisdictions, including the cities of Patterson and Newman, the community services district in Crows Landing and the West Stanislaus County Fire Protection District.

"Our goal here, at the end of the day, is that nobody can say we didn't stay in touch with the key stakeholder groups," Kamilos said.

Most folks in the council chambers Monday conceded that there were major differences between Kamilos' initial 4,800-acre vision and his new plan, which is about half that size, but several said it still had too many unknowns.

Kamilos' revised industrial park vision would take up 2,796 acres in and around the Crows Landing Air Facility, with the prospect of creating 17,000 jobs after it is fully built in 30 years. The project is still slated to serve as an "inland port" for the Port of Oakland, as Kamilos initially planned, but it also would include an 850-acre solar farm run by La Jolla-based Spinnaker Energy that would hook up to a Turlock Irrigation District substation on Marshall Road.

"It's not necessarily a matter of what you want, but what you need," Kamilos said, explaining the changes his group has made to the airfield plans.

Other updates to Kamilos' plans entail two trains traveling to and from the Port of Oakland and the inland port each day, rather than six trains that were initially anticipated. The developer has received letters of support from the Port of Oakland and Union Pacific railroad, the latter of which wants to operate the new short-haul rail line for West Park. The developer says allowing U.P. to run the tracks would save millions of dollars in infrastructure costs.

Kamilos estimates construction costs for the entire project would drop from \$723 million to \$657 million, and financing needs would drop from \$110 million to \$107 million.

Kamilos also discussed the possibility of using one of the two runways at the airfield for general aviation, allowing for aircraft maintenance and repair and small-plane storage businesses, while the tarmac on the other runway could be used to support trains and cranes, he said.

Trains would carry goods from ships docked at the Port of Oakland and then transport farm goods for export from the Central Valley to the port, Kamilos said. A surge in the price of diesel fuel, used by trucks, means train transport is more attractive and the project is more viable than it was in the past, he said.

"A big part of the West Side is agriculture, and a big part of our project is respecting that heritage and their relationship," he said.

Despite the change from six to two trains per day, some residents questioned whether they should be included in the project at all. Fritz Schali, who lives east of Patterson's city limits, said he feared the trains might prevent ambulances and fire engines from getting from one side of town to the other in an emergency. No fire stations now exist on the east side of the rails.

“You need to be responsible if you’re going to do that, and build a firehouse and ambulance services on the east side,” Schali said.

Chamber board director Vivian Ratliff also expressed safety concerns, asking whether Kamilos was in contact with the FBI, as the Port of Oakland has had problems with illegal drug smuggling. Kamilos said he would work closely with law enforcement, noting that the inland port would have to meet federal Homeland Security requirements. He made no promises regarding a new fire station, but he said an environmental impact report would outline everything needed to mitigate the project.