

## **Terrain hampers fire efforts near Onyx**

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Extremely rough terrain slowed fire fighters' efforts to quell the three-day-old Nicolls Fire in a wilderness area south east of Onyx above the Kern River Valley on Sunday.

A cause had not been determined.

The fire, which started Friday about 1:45 p.m., continued to move at a moderate speed in the Kiavah Wilderness Area in the Sequoia National Forest. No structures were threatened, according to Robert Brady, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service.

A portion of the Pacific Crest Trail was closed. And a popular camping area on Lake Isabella, known as Camp 9, was closed as the Forest Service is using it for a command center.

Nearly 700 personnel from various agencies converged on the fire, which had burned about 1,450 acres by Sunday evening was 55 percent contained. Fire crews had to be ferried into the fire area by helicopter as the terrain is so steep and rocky, Brady said.

There were seven helicopters working to get crews in and drop water on the flames. Six air tankers were on standby at their base in Porterville.

High winds have been a concern, with embers blowing outside the fire lines. The heavily wooded area had also developed an "active crown fire," the Forest Service reported.

The last time this area burned was from a lightning strike in 1997. It was known then as the Jacks Fire, as it came close to a small cluster of homes near Jacks Creek. The Jacks Fire claimed more than 6,000 acres. No structures were damaged.

[Bakersfield Californian Commentary, Monday, July 14, 2014:](#)

## **Local investments will shape region's transportation future**

By Ahron Hakimi

When Kern Council of Governments launched its original ridesharing program in the mid-1980s, the term "social media" had yet to be coined. Nevertheless, that's exactly what it was: a computerized database of individuals looking to connect with each other to share a commute to work or school in order to save money or help reduce air pollution.

Flash forward nearly 30 years and social media's effects on our transportation network are far more widespread. In addition to what is now CommuteKern -- a considerably more sophisticated, web-based ridesharing system -- Kern COG has also developed its phone-operated 511 traveler information system, which also has an Internet presence.

Through CommuteKern ([commutekern.org](http://commutekern.org)), users can enter generalized information about their location, destination and daily commute times to be automatically matched for free with others who are going in the same direction on approximately the same schedule. Through email, they can then contact potential matches to share a ride.

Similarly, by dialing 511 or going to [kern511.com](http://kern511.com), travelers can check road conditions on a real-time basis before they depart in order to avoid traffic hot spots or at least be aware of any incidents that might slow them down.

The most recent innovation, however, comes to Bakersfield in the form of worldwide companies Uber and Lyft, which employ social media mobile applications designed to connect riders with drivers who are willing to transport them for a fee.

While these services may be considered controversial because they compete directly with taxis and remain unregulated, they nevertheless represent the latest leap forward in transportation demand management (TDM), a sweeping term for mostly technological improvements designed to squeeze more efficiency out of our transportation infrastructure. For most commuters in California, greater network efficiency, not expansion, is the siren call of our new transportation reality.

Both public and private organizations are working quickly to leverage new technology and/or introduce older technology to more regions in the fight against traffic congestion.

For example, with the interchange improvements at Highway 99 and Olive Drive and again at Highway 58 and H Street, the Kern region has been introduced to yet another TDM innovation -- the ramp meter. In use for decades in larger urban areas, ramp meters are fast-changing stoplights that regulate the flow of traffic onto a freeway by allowing only one or two cars at a time. Though they haven't yet been turned on, both locations are now fully outfitted as congestion pressures increase.

Even as gas prices increase, both state and federal fuel taxes have remained relatively flat for most of the last 25 years, resulting in inflationary pressures that dampen capital expansion. While the recession was actually a good time for project development and California voters embraced almost \$20 billion of transportation-related projects through Proposition 1B, that money is now spent and the economic recovery has brought with it renewed inflation.

This isn't to say that our roadways won't continue to expand, only that they will do so at a much slower rate and with less funding from the state and federal governments. The expansion that does occur will, almost by default, be limited to greater amounts of freight movement to accommodate our growing population. In particular, the state government has signaled politically that it's no longer interested in paying for wider roads or new highways.

That leaves our region once again on its own to fund the improvements we want to see. Like Fresno, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego and Sacramento before us, what our transportation future looks like will depend largely on what we're willing to invest in it locally. It's the price we pay to maintain our way of life.

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