

## **Stockton locomotive upgrades picking up steam**

By Alex Breitler

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STOCKTON — The long haul toward cleaner transportation in the notoriously polluted San Joaquin Valley continues with the recent announcement of nearly \$5 million in funding for two new locomotives in the Stockton area.

While locomotives don't account for nearly as much pollution as cars and trucks, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District considers them a "significant portion" of the problem. In total, mobile sources account for about 80 percent of the dangerous pollution.

The air district is contributing \$1.8 million for the new locomotives, which emit about 90 percent less pollution than their predecessors. About \$3 million will come from other sources.

One of the trains will be used by Metropolitan Stevedore Co., a tenant at the Port of Stockton, replacing an engine built in 1984. The second will go to Omni TRAX Inc. on the east side of the city; that engine was built in 1963.

The Metropolitan Stevedore train should help reduce pollution near the port at the Boggs Tract neighborhood, one of the most vulnerable areas to pollution in the entire state. And the Omni TRAX train should help in east Stockton, where the tracks pass through eight miles of residential neighborhoods.

Replacing the locomotives is supposed to reduce annual emissions by 218 tons.

"The incentives in order to improve air quality in that area are, I think, essential," said Stockton City Councilwoman Christina Fugazi, who serves on the air district's governing board.

Jeff Wingfield, a spokesman for the Port of Stockton, noted that "substantial steps" have already been made to clean up train emissions there. The Central California Traction Co., the short-line railroad that connects the port and its tenants to larger railroads, has already converted a handful of locomotives to the cleaner Tier 4 engines.

So last month's announcement of funding is merely the latest step.

"Obviously we're very excited if any of the (port) tenants can leverage this funding to help clean up the air," Wingfield said. "That's a huge bonus."

Valley air officials have said they'd ideally like to replace 76 locomotives across the entire region, a task that would cost \$227 million.

The clean-transportation announcement came the same month that the San Joaquin Regional Transit District launched what it calls the first all-electric bus route in the nation, serving south Stockton. RTD also committed to converting its entire Stockton fleet to electric buses by the year 2025.

## **Smoky skies cancel classes across Mountain Area**

By Mark Evan Smith

Sierra Star, Monday, September 4, 2017

Randy Seals, Superintendent of the Bass Lake Joint Union Elementary School District (BLJUSD), has confirmed that all classes at all four of the district's school sites are canceled Tuesday because of wildfires scorching the Mountain Area.

Diane Adney, assistant principal at Yosemite High School, also confirmed classes would be canceled at the site, and at its alternative education and adult education programs Tuesday. All other schools in Yosemite Unified School District (YUSD), including Rivergold and Coarsegold elementary schools, were scheduled to go on as normal, she said.

Ceceli Greenberg, Superintendent of YUSD, further confirmed shortly before 8 p.m. that the closure would include John Muir North. Raymond-Granite High School and John Muir South

would be open, she said, though students will stay inside and all outdoor sports, whether a game both home or away or practice, would be canceled, same as Yosemite High.

All classes at all sites in Chawanakee Unified School District, including Minarets High School and North Fork Elementary, and all outdoor sports would be canceled as well, Superintendent Darren Sylvia confirmed at 8:10 p.m. Monday.

BLJUSD, which has about 880 students, includes Wasuma Elementary, Oakhurst Elementary, Oak Creek Intermediate, and Fresno Flats Day School.

Seals said not only were hazy skies an issue, but the uncertainty being caused by the fires as they pumped smoke into the sky everywhere from Mariposa to North Fork, and north of Oakhurst.

“There’s very unhealthy air quality we’re being hit with every morning and throughout the day,” Seals said. “But also, we have a number of student and staff whose families have either been evacuated or are under evacuation advisory. There’s no way we can ask folks to come to work or come to school and have them be able to concentrate on education right now.

“What’s most important right now is that they take care of their homes, and of each other.”

Seals added there were concerns about how the fire could change behaviors, and noted buses couldn’t make it past established road closures, which could cause disruptions.

Darin Soukup, director of Oakhurst Community College Center, said classes would run as normal at the campus on Tuesday.

Michelle Townsend, Superintendent of Raymond-Knowles Union Elementary School District, confirmed that the district’s elementary school would be in session Tuesday.

“We will be taking all necessary safety precautions if the air quality levels are unhealthy,” Townsend said.

Officials with Yosemite-Wawona Elementary Charter School, located in Wawona inside Yosemite National Park, also canceled classes from Tuesday through Friday due to health and safety concerns. Three fires continued to burn inside the park through Monday, causing smoky skies.