

## **Lindsay tackling clean air issues**

By Roger Phelps, The Porterville Recorder

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Lindsay is keeping pace with other local agencies in planning new air-quality-control practices.

A regional air-quality board requires new plans to be filed by cities and counties to match the local region's recent change in status from "severely" out of compliance with air regulations to "extremely" out of compliance, a harsher designation. Because the harsher designation acknowledges a more difficult task, it gives the region until 2010 instead of 2005 to meet federal air-quality regulations.

"This gives us more years," said Vice Mayor Pam Kimball. "Hopefully, by that time, state and federal governments will (set stricter) engine emission standards. That will help us."

Agencies must use air-quality-control measures chosen from a list published by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Lindsay City Council members last week approved a list of 31 measures in a revised air plan for the city.

"Only one other region has 'extreme,'" said Planner Tom Richey. "That's Los Angeles."

Keeping people out of cars and keeping cars moving instead of idling are two main themes relating the dozens of separate measures.

In addition to encouraging bicycling, walking and carpooling to work, the city during summer months could choose to go to a mandatory four-day work week, further reducing commutes. The commitment Lindsay makes is that it "will consider" the four-day week for all employees during summer months.

"It would be a four-10 schedule (four 10-hour days per week)," Richey said.

The measure would cost about \$500 annually, Richey estimated. The city commits to considering the measure each summer through 2010.

An item on which the city could spend up to \$35,000 is construction of park-and-ride lots for commuters to leave cars and board public transportation.

As part of discouraging the ferrying of school children by car over walkable distances to and from school, Lindsay plans to add sidewalks in stretches of approximately 12 streets, Richey said.

Two of the city's more ambitious projects earn credits for multiple anti-pollution measures. Sweet Brier Plaza, nearing completion downtown with wide pedestrian-oriented expanses that will link residences, entertainment areas and shops, gives Lindsay credit for such measures as removal of on-street parking, sustainable development, establishment of auto-free zones and transportation for livable communities.

The proposed Lindsay Wellness Center will earn credits in such categories as teleconferencing and satellite campuses.

Groundbreaking should come soon on the 61-unit Lindsay Family Apartments on the west edge of town, near Hermosa Street. Richey said that is among several foreseen areas of development that could speed installment of additional bus stops along Hermosa.

"We commit to create new ones as needed, and we're not certain they won't accrue sooner than we think," Richey said. "It's been striking how the work we've been doing with sidewalks has

promoted an interest in development."

## **Officials quick to find favor with rail plan**

By Mark Grossi, the Fresno Bee

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FRESNO -- A statewide high-speed rail system linking Southern California to the Bay Area might offer the San Joaquin Valley more than quick trips. How about some of 450,000 jobs the system would create?

Those details haven't been worked out, but many eye-opening numbers are coming out of an environmental impact report the California High-Speed Rail Authority made public last week.

The authority board met Wednesday in Fresno to present the report.

The valley's portion of this \$33 billion project would include 270 miles of the 700-mile system. In places, trains could reach 220 mph, using technology that has been common for decades in Europe.

"High-speed rail makes sense for this region," said board member Fran Florez of Shafter, the valley's only representative on the authority's nine-member board.

Activists who have followed the high-speed rail process for many years complained last week that they were not allowed to speak. Some wanted to support a controversial, discarded route -- the Altamont Pass -- as a valley connection to the Bay Area.

The authority instead is considering two other alternatives, Pacheco Pass in Merced County and a tunnel through part of the Diablo Range northwest of Newman in Stanislaus County.

"There has been very little public process for this draft EIR," said Ken Gosting, director of a Central California group called Transportation Involves Everyone.

But officials said they will hold five meetings, including one in the valley to hear comment on the report.

Officials from Merced, Fresno and Bakersfield made some general comments Wednesday.

They said the valley has some of the highest unemployment in the country and wondered whether the board would consider the valley as a hub for train repair and maintenance.

"I'm sure this could help turn things around here," said Merced County Supervisor Gloria Cortez Keene.

The high-speed rail proposal is not detailed enough to answer employment questions yet.

Among many other analyses, the study compares high-speed rail with commercial flights and driving. It concludes that the state would have to invest \$82 billion in the next 17 years to build enough roads and airports for the growing California population.

"High-speed rail is less than half of the cost," said Mehdi Morshed, authority executive director.

If voters approve a \$9.9 billion bond measure on the November ballot, the plans would become far more detailed.

High-Speed Rail Authority staffers outlined two possible valley corridors, the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe and Union Pacific rail lines. But the corridors are too congested in most cities to include nonstop train service.

Modesto, Merced, Stockton, Fresno and Bakersfield are all envisioned with a bypass loop so nonstop trains can roll without pause toward metropolitan centers.

In Fresno, such as bypass would cost an extra \$700 million.

"To avoid Fresno, we had to pull way out around the west side of the city," said authority deputy director Paula Pourvahidi.

Some cities, such as Merced and Bakersfield, have several station options. Fresno has settled on one proposed train station, the old Southern Pacific depot downtown.

The train stations should improve business in the nearby areas, officials said.

An electrified rail system also would not pollute nearly as much as more freeways, board members said.

A Merced orthodontist, Lee Boese, reacted by saying, "How can this not be built? With the amount of cancer and asthma we see in this valley, our air problems are only going to get worse."

[Fresno Bee editorial, Feb. 3, 2004:](#)

### **Wake-up call**

Toll road proposal for Highway 99 should shake up indifferent state.

Fresno Mayor Alan Autry has offered an intriguing proposal for Highway 99, the San Joaquin Valley's blue-collar freeway that gets little respect from the rest of the state. Autry wants to make it a toll road, with drivers paying at both the north and south ends of the Valley.

The idea is to make mostly nonresidents of the Valley pay what essentially would be a mitigation fee for using the freeway through the Valley. The 10,000 trucks that use Highway 99 contribute to the region's air-quality problems.

While Autry's plan will spur debate on the future of Highway 99, there are many legal and political obstacles to it becoming reality. Its value could be in focusing attention on a freeway that has been neglected for too long by the state Department of Transportation.

Highway 99 is a beaten-down roadway that carries far too much traffic for its capacity, has little in the way of attractive landscaping and has become another symbol of how the Valley is shortchanged when it comes to state funding.

Valley leaders have yet to get the full attention of Caltrans officials, who have long favored Northern and Southern California freeway projects over those in the Valley. Some Valley representatives want Highway 99 to become part of the federal interstate system so it would get the funding it deserves.

Autry's toll road proposal, which has the support of Fresno County Supervisor Bob Waterston, would require state approval and would face opposition from the highway's heaviest users, especially the trucking industry. Autry and Waterston say they are trying to come up with new ideas to help pay for the cleanup of the Valley's air.

The proposal will be useful if it dramatizes Caltrans' historic indifference to this region and encourages the state to upgrade the dangerous freeway that's been called the Valley's main street.

We continue to appeal for action by our elected representatives on the Highway 99 funding question. If the toll road proposal wakes up Caltrans, then it will have been helpful to the debate.