

## **Tulare Motor Sports Complex up for comment again Missing water study included in new draft of impact report**

BY LUIS HERNANDEZ

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, July 17, 2008

The draft Environmental Impact Report on the proposed Tulare Motor Sports Complex is up for public comment - again.

Tulare City Manager Darrel Pyle said the report referred to a water supply study that wasn't included in the lengthy document, making it incomplete. This puts the draft up for public comment, this time including the water study, but slightly delaying when the project will come up for a vote.

Pyle said not including the water study was a mistake, which was uncovered by a reader.

"We've got some smart people," he said. "They were not just flipping through pages."

No new comments have been turned in since the report was placed on "public notice" status, July 2. Tulare Planning and Building Director Mark Kielty said he doubts any more comments will be turned in by Aug. 15, when the 45 days are up.

At two public hearings and through the initial 45-day period, city officials received hundreds of comments, most strongly opposing the project.

Pyle said city administrators expected such a turnout. He also praised those who turned in comments for taking part in the decision-making process.

"There is respect for the process," Pyle said. "That's what the process is all about."

All comments made will be addressed in the EIR, city officials said. Addressing the comments will only add to a document Pyle describes as the most complex report ever produced in the Central Valley.

Placing the report on public comment status will delay when the project comes up before the Tulare Planning Commission and the Tulare City Council, Kielty said. Originally, the project was scheduled to come up for vote in the fall. Additional public hearings will be held before the project is voted on.

As proposed by Bud Long, a Fresno-based developer, the complex will encompass 711 acres off South Laspina Street and will include a 50,000-seat racetrack, a 35,000-seat drag-racing strip, hotels and retail space.

The complex would create 16,359 new jobs and bring an estimated \$1 billion each year to the area, according to the report.

But opponents point to increased pollution, noise and additional traffic as reasons to oppose the project.

Joining those who oppose the sports complex is the Tulare County Farm Bureau board, whose members said the project wouldn't be compatible with surrounding agricultural land use.

"[The] Farm Bureau opposes the conversion of prime farmland to non-agricultural uses," a newsletter editorial stating the bureau's position reads in part.

### **Committee invite**

For those willing to be involved in the process, the Tulare Industrial Site Development Foundation Board is still looking for people who are interested in serving on the Tulare Motor Sports Community Advisory Committee.

The committee will serve as a citizens oversight committee, acting as a liaison between the developer of the proposed Tulare Motor Sports Complex, the community and the City of Tulare.

For more information, call 741-6025.

## **Bicyclists urge preservation of bike path stretch**

BY JAMES GELUSO, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, July 17, 2008

A phalanx of bicyclists Wednesday urged the Bakersfield City Council to preserve a section of the Kern River Bike Path.

A Kern County Superior Court judge last month ruled that the city must install a dirt road along the future Morning Drive alignment. That could mean tearing up the 1.4-mile section of the bike path between Paladino Drive and Alfred Harrell Highway.

"I just can't believe that this can't be solved in a way that's good for the community," said Bill Cooper.

Bicyclist Arin Resnicke said the property owners who sued already have access to their parcels from Alfred Harrell Highway. He doesn't see why the city needs to give access to them.

The owners, John and Joseph Tarabino, plan to develop their now-vacant property. Their site plan calls for roads that connect to the future Morning Drive.

If the city does tear up the path, it would have to return \$550,000 in federal funding used to build the path, warned Peter Smith, a planner with the Kern Council of Governments who helped secure the money.

"What is the point of tearing up a perfectly good paved road and putting in a 24-foot dirt path?" asked Lauren Franconi, executive director of Bike Bakersfield. That's not a good move for [air quality](#), she added.

Councilman Ken Weir said he has been trying to settle the dispute between the city and the Tarabinos, and he supports keeping the bike path.

"Nobody on this council wants to waste \$600,000 in funding," he said. "But we do need to meet our obligation to the landowner in that area and to meet our obligation to the court."

The court ruled that the city had worked out a deal during a land swap with the Tarabinos, and that deal required vehicle access.

Franconi said the Tarabinos have access, because they have keys to the gates, which allows them to drive up the canyon.

"I will be working diligently to preserve that pathway," Weir promised.

## **Galgiani takes ag reins**

### **Lawmaker appointed to chair Assembly Committee on Agriculture**

By Jennifer Wadsworth  
Tracy Press Thurs., July 17, 2008

Assemblywoman Cathleen Galgiani, D-Livingston, was this week appointed as chairwoman of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture.

Since her election in 2006, the lawmaker, who represents San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties, has been a member of the committee, which directs legislation and policy that affects the nation's agricultural industry.

To farm-rich Central Valley, it's arguably the most important of the 52 Senate committees.

It's also one that took high precedence during Galgiani's freshman term when the U.S. Farm Bill was up for passage.

Galgiani, a Stockton native, will be the third consecutive San Joaquin Valley Assemblywoman to lead the ag committee. She will replace Bakersfield Democrat Nicole Parra, a successor to Barbara Matthews, D-Tracy, who termed out in 2006.

Galgiani also served as chief of staff to Matthews during her tenure as ag chairwoman.

"I am very honored to be appointed," Galgiani said in a statement. "We have the safest food supply in the world, yet California farmers face many challenges relative to an inadequate water supply, meeting the most stringent [air and water quality standards](#) in our global economy and remaining competitive in the face of increasing production costs."

She said today that one of her main goals leading the committee next year will be to work with farmers and grocers to come up with ways to instill confidence in the public about locally grown produce.

When federal regulators told grocers to pull tomatoes from the shelves in response to nine reported illnesses from salmonella-tainted tomatoes earlier this year, people got scared, and many stopped buying the fruit all together, Galgiani mentioned today.

But the reports were in other states and the tomatoes grown in another country, she said. As ag committee chairwoman, she said she wants to work on ways to market California produce, which she said "is the safest food in the world."

## **Highway 50 carpool plan snagged in court**

By Tony Bizjak

Modesto Bee Wed., July 16, 2008

Caltrans' plans for a carpool lane project on Highway 50 in Sacramento stalled in court this week.

Ruling on an environmental lawsuit, Superior Court Judge Timothy Frawley said the state didn't adequately analyze the project's impacts, including potential greenhouse gas emissions.

The state Transportation Department has planned to build seven miles of high-occupancy lanes in each direction on Highway 50 between Sunrise Boulevard and Watt Avenue. Carpool lanes exist on the freeway between Sunrise and El Dorado Hills boulevards.

The Environmental Council of Sacramento and others sued, arguing they believe carpool lanes increase car usage, and contending that Caltrans failed to present analyses that showed otherwise.

Caltrans said its environmental review was sufficient.

Greenhouse gas emissions have become a hot issue in California the last few years as the state seeks to fight global warming by cutting emissions. But agencies planning new projects have been uncertain when and how to measure and mitigate for those emissions.

The governor's Office of Planning and Research and the state Air Resources Board say they're working on guidelines.

"This is new territory," said Lisa Page, a Governor's Office spokeswoman. "We are learning as we go."

Caltrans officials declined to comment Wednesday, saying they just received the ruling.

Environmentalist Eric Davis said the ruling was a step in group's efforts to halt freeway expansion in Sacramento.

"We want an honest discussion of the value of this project," he said.

## **Carson awards \$8.4 million bus deal**

By Gene Maddaus, Staff Writer

LA Daily News Thurs., July 16, 2008

The city of Carson has awarded an \$8.4 million contract to its existing bus operator, First Transit, reversing an initial recommendation to switch to a rival company that had been involved in the city's corruption scandal.

Transportation Concepts, an Irvine-based company, was the initial low bidder with an offer of \$8.9 million. The company had operated the city's buses for several years until 2004, when it was forced to give up the contract to Laidlaw Transit in a settlement of corruption-related litigation.

Laidlaw Transit was purchased last year by First Transit, which will now continue to operate the Carson Circuit bus system for the next five years.

The bid process was not without its quirks. After the bids were made public last month, the council ordered a round of follow-up interviews. That allowed First Transit, which had initially bid \$9.3 million, to slash its offer by \$900,000 to underbid Transportation Concepts and win the recommendation of the city's staff.

Transportation Concepts also lowered its bid, but only by about \$100,000. The company argued that disclosing the bids was a violation of Federal Transportation Authority guidelines, but it is not clear whether the company would have grounds to sue.

Transportation Concepts was caught up in the city's corruption scandal in 2000, when it hired Keith McDonald to lobby for a contract renewal. McDonald was later found to have bribed three council members \$5,000 apiece to award the contract to Transportation Concepts and is now serving time in federal prison.

The bus company was never implicated or charged in the case, and officials have steadfastly maintained they knew nothing of McDonald's actions. Transportation Concepts paid the city \$115,000 in an out-of-court settlement in 2004 and gave up the contract, but was also promised the opportunity to bid on future contracts without prejudice.

Despite the tarnished history, the unusual circumstances of the bid this time around prompted Rita Boggs, a city watchdog, to urge the council to support Transportation Concepts because it was the initial low bidder.

Councilman Harold Williams also supported the company, but at Tuesday's council meeting he was outvoted by Mayor Jim Dear, Councilwoman Lula Davis-Holmes and Councilman Elito Santarina, who opted to go with First Transit. Councilman Mike Gipson voted against First Transit, but also did not support Transportation Concepts.

[The contract calls for the operator to buy six new compressed natural gas buses to comply with state clean air regulations. The city has already missed one Air Quality Management District deadline to phase out its old buses and is unlikely to be granted another extension in January.](#)

Sandi Schmidt, a Transportation Concepts vice president, argued that First Transit will not be able to provide reliable service for its bid price - and may not be able to obtain its new clean buses by the AQMD deadline.

A First Transit spokesman did not return a call for comment.

## **Poll finds gas prices alter habits**

By Peter Hecht

Sacramento Bee Thurs., July 17, 2008

In a state long characterized by traffic-clogged freeways and residents' devotion to their cars, surging gas prices are forcing cash-strapped Californians to change their spending and driving habits.

"We don't go anywhere," said Elizabeth Campbell of Placerville. "We don't take vacations. We've cut down on just driving to Folsom" because of gas prices.

A new Field Poll of state voters shows two out of three Californians are cutting back on spending as a result of rising gas prices.

Yet despite hardships at the pump, slight majorities of state voters oppose opening the California coastline and public lands to new oil drilling. And seven in 10 say they won't support lower air pollution standards to achieve higher gas mileage.

Typical of the trend are people such as Suzy King. The Loomis resident said fuel prices prompted her and her husband to switch to a discount grocery store and cut down on going to the movies.

King said her sport-utility vehicle "drove like a dream." But she couldn't justify getting a mere 17 miles per gallon "when I was driving downhill with a stiff wind behind me." So she and her husband sold their cars to buy vehicles with smaller engines.

But King said the last thing she wants is more oil drilling – particularly off the California coast – in hope of lowering gas prices.

"I think what we need to do is find alternative methods," King said. "With fossil fuels, you can drill all you want. But there's no more dinosaurs. It's not infinite."

The polls showed people are increasingly worried about fuel costs. Forty-seven percent said gas price increases in California are a "very serious" concern and 34 percent said the situation is "somewhat serious."

Concern mounts among poorer residents. Among households earning less than \$20,000, 70 percent said rising gas prices are a very serious matter and 87 percent said they are cutting back on food, clothing or dining.

Even among families earning between \$80,000 and \$99,000, 65 percent report curbing spending due to gas prices.

"With two-thirds of the public saying they're cutting back on expenses, that can't be good for the economy," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the Field Poll. "The sticker shock is real. People are hunkering down in their day-to-day purchases."

Campbell said she and her husband are now rehabilitating a small car they own to replace the sport-utility vehicle she uses to drive her kids to gymnastics.

She favors stepping up oil exploration in the hopes of lowering fuel and energy costs.

"I'm more for let's drill for oil than I am for let's try to go green," she said. "It's silly to force people to spend \$10,000 on solar panels when a lot of people can't afford that. I'm for drilling. I'm for offshore drilling."

By 51 percent to 43 percent, voters in the poll opposed allowing more oil and gas wells along the California coast. By 52 to 44 percent, they also opposed drilling on government park lands and forest reserves.

Republican voters support more drilling by a 2-to-1 ratio. Democrats and nonpartisan voters have nearly opposite views. Half of all voters said they support building more nuclear power plants in California.

Roderick Celoni, a Yolo County Republican who works as a delivery truck driver, said he favors more nuclear power, and his frustration with gasoline costs outweighs his concerns over drilling.

Celoni said he is putting off some service calls and consolidating routes to save gas money. He is not eating out. But he said, "Every time you turn around something else is going on. Whether it's the cost of the food you eat or the tires you put on, inflation is hitting real hard, real fast."

Celoni said California should promote reformulated gasoline by emphasizing increased mileage over "concerns about the pollution" from emissions. And he wants more offshore oil drilling, saying he believes it is now safe.

In contrast, Shasta County resident Michael Wickland, a Democrat, said his memories of the disastrous 1969 Santa Barbara oil slick are too vivid to fathom more petroleum rigs.

"I think depending on fossil fuels is a mistake both domestically and internationally," Wickland said. "The reasons for staying the course seem to make less and less sense all the time."

The Field Poll indicated that two in three Californians are changing fuel habits by buying cheaper grades of gasoline. Another 59 percent say they drive fuel-efficient vehicles more often.

But most Californians say they'll remain in their own cars.

Only 17 percent say they take public transit more often and 28 percent say they are carpooling to work.

"We're pretty much a society that was built around the automobile," DiCamillo said. "If Californians had their druthers, they would like to change the mix to hybrids or electric cars or something else. But I don't see any evidence Californians really want to get out of their vehicles. It's just too impractical."

## **Richmond approves upgrade at Chevron refinery**

AP State

In the Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, July 17, 2008

The Richmond City Council has approved a controversial plan by Chevron to upgrade equipment at its Richmond refinery.

After two nights of heated debate, the council voted 5-4 early this morning to approve the project.

Council members also approved a separate agreement for Chevron to provide \$61.6 million for public safety, low-income health care and other services.

Chevron officials say the improvements will allow them to refine a wider range of oil.

Environmental groups and some Richmond residents opposed the upgrades, saying it will increase pollution in the area.

## **VW's choice eases Chattanooga's past auto snubs**

By BILL POOVEY, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, July 17, 2008

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. -- When Volkswagen said yes, a city that shed its reputation for dirty air to become a top outdoors destination forgot years of frustrating rejections by automakers.

Volkswagen's plans to build a \$1 billion assembly plant and create 2,000 jobs in Chattanooga had radio listeners rejoicing on call-in shows, businesses hanging welcome signs and U.S. Sen. Bob Corker declaring the city "will never be the same again."

University of Tennessee economist Bill Fox said spinoff jobs in Tennessee and neighboring corners of Georgia and Alabama would probably total more than 10,000. That economic impact doesn't include the publicity from a global company planning a new sedan and seeking to boost its share of the U.S. market.

"The cachet of having the firm come there is something that will be talked about through much of the world," Fox said. "It gets the name of Chattanooga and the state of Tennessee in the media across the globe."

It's a welcome blast of attention for a city that once had the dirtiest air in the country. In 1969, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare ranked it No. 1 in particulate air pollution, thanks to smoke-belching foundries trapped by surrounding mountains.

Chattanooga and surrounding Hamilton County responded by creating an air pollution control bureau and in 1989 the Environmental Protection Agency took Chattanooga off its dirty air list.

In 2005, Chattanooga dedicated its redeveloped riverfront and Outside Magazine rated the Scenic City as one of America's Top 10 Dream Towns with hiking, camping, hang gliding, rock climbing and nearby whitewater rafting where 1996 Olympic competitions were held.

Hamilton County Mayor Claude Ramsey, who has worked for more than a decade to attract an automaker to Chattanooga, said the announcement answered "all those naysayers who said it would never happen."

"I can remember when the pollution was bad," Ramsey said. "The times have changed and manufacturing has changed and all that is for the better ... This is a community that can do about whatever it wants to once it makes up its mind."

Volkswagen's plans for the new plant would complement Chattanooga's environmental revival, company officials say.

It will be built on the site of a former Army ammunition plant, near a pair of interstate highways and rail lines. Volkswagen has heavily marketed its fuel-efficient cars and says it strives to make all of its operations environmentally sustainable.

And it will be an employment boon for a city still coping - like many industrial centers in the South - from the loss of manufacturing sites that sustained them for decades.

Jonathan Hood, a Chattanooga State Technical Community College freshman studying electronics, said he will be applying at Volkswagen.

Hood, a 39-year-old former Marine, said he works in construction but has always wanted to work in an auto plant. Hood said he has an aunt who works at a Chrysler plant in Ohio.

"She really makes good money," Hood said.

Dale Smith, general manager of Village Volkswagen of Chattanooga, said the company's choice of a plant site "is probably the biggest thing to ever happen to this town."

## **Many vacant hotel rooms remain ahead of Olympics**

By Stephen Wade, AP Sports Writer

USA TODAY, Thursday, July 17, 2008

BEIJING — There are plenty of rooms available for the Beijing Olympics with domestic visitors being counted on to make up for an apparent absence of foreign guests.

Xiong Yuemi, deputy director of the Beijing Tourism Bureau, said Tuesday that 45.5% of Beijing's four-star hotel rooms had been booked for the Olympic period. Bookings in hotels with three-star ratings or below were also under 50%, though Xiong didn't offer specific numbers.

She declined to tie the vacant rooms to new visa controls and bad publicity surrounding the games, which open in 3 1/2 weeks. The games are supposed to showcase a new China, but they are also exposing facets of the authoritarian state that has run the country for almost six decades.

"This is within our expectations," Xiong said of the occupancy rate.

She said the rate at five-star hotels, many of which are booked by Olympic officials, sponsors or national delegations, was 78.1%. All occupancy rates were calculated at the end of June, Xiong said. She said the five-star rate for the same period a year ago was 69%.

About 500,000 foreigners are expected to attend the games.

"There are still many domestic ticket holders who haven't booked hotels yet," Xiong added.

"When the games start, the actual occupancy rate will be higher than the current reservation rate."

The Aug. 8-24 Olympics have been beset by negative publicity for months, beginning in February when Steven Spielberg declined to work as artistic adviser for the opening ceremony, citing China's policies toward Sudan and Darfur.

This was followed in March by deadly rioting in Tibet, subsequent chaotic pro-Tibet rallies on international legs of the Olympic torch relay, and a deadly earthquake in Sichuan that killed just under 70,000. [In addition, concerns about Beijing's chronic air pollution has prompted many athletes to train outside the country and enter just before their events begin.](#)

Shaken by the rioting and protests, China has ratcheted up security for games. The communist government has reported breaking up plots to attack the games by Islamic radicals in the western

province of Xinjiang. In a show of force, China's military has stationed a ground-to-air missile battery just 300 meters (yards) from one Beijing Olympic venue.

Sun Weide, a spokesman for the Beijing organizing committee, said security measures followed past Olympic practice. He said the same was true of new visa rules, which have particularly targeted students and made it difficult for some people with tickets to stay in the country.

"Chinese authorities have made some arrangements on issuing visas to foreigners, which is in accordance with the practice of past games and Chinese law," Sun said. "The aim of the visa policy is to guarantee the safety of participants in the Olympics. We'll take all necessary measures to host safe games."

Sun was echoing China Vice President Xi Jinping, who is expected to eventually succeed Hu Jintao as president.

"A safe Olympics is the biggest indicator of the success of the games," Xi said earlier this month in a speech at the Great Hall of the People, seat of China's legislature. "A safe Olympics is also a key indicator of the positive reflection of our nation's image."

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses automobiles in California will be identified as contaminating and emitting less, beginning with 2009 models. The Drive Clean program is the first in California that presents this type of rating in the country. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

### **Identificará California autos con menos contaminación y emisiones de gases**

*El programa de conducción limpia de California es el primero que se presenta en su tipo, en el país*

Manuel Ocaño

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, July 17, 2008

Un programa de una agencia del gobierno de California para reducir el daño al ambiente informó que tiene listas calcomanías que colocará a los vehículos a partir de los modelos del 2009.

Las calcomanías estarán visibles al público en los vehículos y calificarán del cero al diez, como el más alto nivel de contaminación del vehículo que contribuye al sobrecalentamiento terrestre, o en su defecto, el vehículo más recomendable para preservar el ambiente.

El programa de conducción limpia de California es el primero que se presenta en su tipo, en el país, y pretende ayudar al público a escoger con conciencia ambiental sus nuevos vehículos.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses OCDE insists a positive impact that Brazilian ethanol from sugar cane will have on the environment, as it reduces at least 80% of emitted pollutants.

### **OCDE destaca impacto positivo del etanol brasileño en el medio ambiente**

*La OCDE destacó el impacto positivo del etanol brasileño, a base de caña de azúcar, en el medio ambiente, ya que reduce en al menos 80% las emisiones de gases contaminantes, y aseguró que en Estados Unidos y Europa la eficacia de los biocarburantes es mucho menor.*

Terra, Thursday, July 17, 2008

"El etanol de la caña de azúcar -la principal materia prima utilizada en Brasil- reduce los gases con efecto invernadero en al menos 80% en relación a los combustibles fósiles", indicó la Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos (OCDE), que nuclea a 30 países industrializados, en un informe.

"Pero la reducción de emisiones es mucho menor cuando se utilizan los biocarburantes basados en las materias primas utilizadas en Europa y América del Norte", añadió.

Estados Unidos, que lo destila a partir del maíz, es el primer productor de etanol (alcohol carburante), con un 48% del total mundial en 2007. Brasil le sigue el paso, con 31% de la producción mundial de etanol, fabricado a partir de la caña de azúcar.

La Unión Europea representa un 60% de la producción mundial de biodiésel, extraído de aceites vegetales.

Las políticas gubernamentales de apoyo a los biocarburantes en los países de la OCDE -sobre todo los elevados subsidios- son costosos e ineficientes a la hora de proteger el medio ambiente, concluyó el informe.

"Son costosas, tienen un impacto limitado en la reducción de gases con efecto invernadero y en la mejora de la seguridad energética, y un impacto significativo en los precios mundiales de los alimentos", estimó.

Los biocarburantes producidos a base de trigo, remolacha azucarera, aceites vegetales o maíz, "raramente reducen las emisiones más de 30% a 60%, mientras la reducción (de emisiones) del etanol de maíz es generalmente inferior a 30%", indicó la OCDE.

"La continuación de las políticas actuales de apoyo a los biocarburantes reducirían las emisiones de gases con efecto invernadero derivadas del transporte en no más de 0,8% para 2015", añadió.

Los subsidios a los biocombustibles en Estados Unidos, Canadá y la UE se elevaron a 11.000 millones de dólares anuales en 2006, y esta cifra subiría a 25.000 millones por año para 2015, sostuvo la OCDE. Esos subsidios están reforzados por elevados impuestos a la importación.

El informe aconseja a los gobiernos de la OCDE centrar sus políticas en la reducción de energía, sobre todo en el sector del transporte, y abrir los mercados a los biocombustibles y sus materias primas "para mejorar su eficiencia y bajar los costos".

El impacto de las actuales políticas sobre los biocarburantes en los precios alimenticios "es significativo pero no debe ser sobrestimado", indicó la OCDE.

El informe calcula que las actuales medidas de apoyo a los biocombustibles aumentarán los precios del trigo en un 5%, del maíz en un 7% y del aceite vegetal en un 19% en los próximos 10 años.

Un reciente informe del Banco Mundial indicó que la explosión del cultivo de productos agrícolas destinados a la producción de biocarburantes es responsable en un 75% del alza del precio de los alimentos.

Terra/AFP