

Kern COG Quarterly

BETTER PLANNING. BETTER TRANSPORTATION.



SUMMER 2011

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Summer's the season for high-speed rail in the Kern region

Kern County hosted two separate events in June and July designed to familiarize California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) officials with our region and showcase the support local businesses and civic leaders have for the massive infrastructure project.

Former CHSRA Chairman Curt Pringle was invited to speak to an invitation-only luncheon gathering of more than 150 business, civic and transportation leaders on June 16 at the Downtown Marriott Hotel in Bakersfield. Pringle summarized the proposal to link his home city of Anaheim to San Francisco via trains that will travel at top speeds of up to 220 mph through the San Joaquin Valley.

He also defended the decision to begin construction in the Valley as opposed to a more heavily populated metropolitan area, calling the Bakersfield-to-Madera section of the project its backbone. Pringle was joined via videolink by CHSRA Chief Executive Officer



California High-Speed Rail Authority Chief Executive Officer Roelof van Ark, left, and Kern COG Executive Director Ron Brummett tour a variety of local transportation facilities, including the 7th Standard Road widening project; the International Transportation and Trade Center; and potential sites in Shafter and Wasco for a proposed high-speed rail heavy-maintenance facility.

Roelof van Ark, who said he wanted to ensure support in the Valley continued as the project moves closer to construction.

Then, on July 14, the Kern County Board of Supervisor's chambers played host to a full CHSRA Board meeting, marking the first time the agency has ever met in Bakersfield. A conglomeration of local business and stakeholders worked to get Authority members to consider the amenities that the Kern region has to offer for the system itself, as well as for the planned heavy-maintenance facility that would service trainsets statewide.

Please see Rail, page 4

High-speed rail picking up speed toward construction

High-speed rail is closer than ever to becoming a reality, with construction set to begin in Kern as early as next year.

The draft environmental document on the Fresno-to-Bakersfield section is scheduled to be released Aug. 15, with final approval in spring 2012. As each section gains environmental clearance, the Authority

plans to issue construction contracts for \$1 billion segments at a time.

Twenty-five percent of these projects are required to be built by small contractors. Construction is already under way at San Francisco's Transbay Terminal, while right-of-way for the HSR terminal at Los Angeles' Union Station has been acquired.

By October 2011, the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) expects to release the first request for qualifications on five "construction contract packages" covering on the system's "backbone" between Kern and Madera counties.

Please see Speed, page 4

Bakersfield opens Mohawk Street extension, first phase of Westside Parkway



Bakersfield Mayor Harvey Hall cuts the celebratory ribbon opening phase 1 of the Westside Parkway to traffic on June 30 with help from Bakersfield City Councilmember Sue Benham, center, and former Congressman Bill Thomas along with several other officials.

In June, the City of Bakersfield celebrated its newest infrastructure project with a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Mohawk Street bridge over the Kern River, opening the first phase of the long-anticipated Westside Parkway.

Work began on the project in spring 2009 and wasn't scheduled

for completion until spring 2012, opening nearly nine months ahead of time.

The new 1.2-mile roadway has three lanes in each direction plus bike lanes and a sidewalk. Construction included three major bridge structures – across the Kern River, the future Westside Parkway alignment, and the BNSF Railway. A new box culvert was also built at the Cross Valley Canal. The facility offers access to the Kern River Bike Path, which was rerouted beneath the new Kern River Bridge.

The Mohawk Street Extension adds a critical link to the local transportation network by extending Mohawk Street from Truxtun Avenue to Rosedale Highway. The new connection provides an additional north-south crossing over the Kern River and railroad, facilitating travel between northwest and southwest Bakersfield.

A future Mohawk Street interchange will provide ready access to the Westside Parkway, which is expected to become the future alignment for State Route 58. Funding for the \$29 million construction project was made possible through a State Transportation Improvement Program allocation by the California Transportation Commission in 2008. Project Design: Dokken Engineering; Project Construction: Security Paving Company; Construction Management: Nolte Vertical Five. ■

Transit Quarterly Report

GET's Commuter Express Route a success

On its one-year anniversary, records show that Golden Empire Transit District's Commuter Express Route from Bakersfield to the Tejon Ranch Industrial Complex is on its way to success. The route has attracted 20,840 boardings since July 2010, with 89 percent of riders using GET's monthly Express pass. The route is performing at a 32 percent operating ratio, 12 percent higher than required for an urbanized transit operator. That ratio is expected to grow over the next several years. GET staff has worked carefully with Tejon employers to ensure bus arrivals and departures match work shifts. GET has also added a stop to ensure restaurant employees and patrons have the same convenient access to the Tejon Complex. By reducing vehicle emissions, GET uses compressed natural gas buses for this route, reducing single-use automobile use on Interstate 5, and potentially reducing single-vehicle accident rates along the corridor, the Commuter Express has become a model for future employer locations.

Kern County transit operators seek \$7.2 million in funding

Over the last month, Kern COG has worked directly with city and county staff in developing transit projects to meet more

than \$7.2 million of Proposition 1B regional funding. Projects discussed include: transit bus replacements; multi-modal park-and-ride facilities; vehicle maintenance equipment; parking shelters; bus shelters and a variety of other transit-related capital improvements. The projects are scheduled to be brought for adoption at the Kern COG Board of Directors' September meeting.

Amtrak San Joaquin meets the million passenger milestone

One lucky passenger was surprised with a round-trip ticket to anywhere Amtrak services for being the one-millionth rider on Amtrak's San Joaquin route, which services Bakersfield to Oakland and Sacramento. In 1992, annual ridership for the Amtrak San Joaquin service was 277,748. Last year, ridership was just under \$1 million. This year, Caltrans Division of Rail staff announced that the San Joaquin's had reached its million-rider record. The passenger chose a round-trip ticket to Denver, CO via the California Zephyr. Amtrak will also pay for hotel and meals. The San Joaquin's service is the fifth busiest in the Amtrak system and the third busiest in California behind the Pacific Surfliner and Capitol Corridor. ■

U.S. 395 widening alternative chosen for eastern California

Inyo County – A combined alternative that will take U.S. 395 west of Olancha and then cross the Los Angeles Aqueduct and continue through Cartago has been selected as the preferred route for the four-lane widening project in the eastern Sierras.

The June 29 decision by Caltrans District 9 Director Tom Hallenbeck has been anticipated by residents along the U.S. 395 and State Route 14 corridors, including Ridgecrest residents in Kern County who routinely travel the route. The alternative for the Olancha / Cartago 4 lane project is a combination of Alternative 3 and Alternative 4.

Hallenbeck reviewed the initial study/environmental assessment, project documents, comments received, survey results, public meeting results, and considered the recommendation of a project development team.

Combining the alternatives takes advantage of the best that each had to offer. The final choice will reduce environmental impacts, residence relocations, direct impacts to businesses and increase safety while best meet the purpose and need of the project, according to a Caltrans press release. “We have an opportunity to save lives,” Hallenbeck said.

The combined alternative is a controlled access divided expressway that would begin south of Olancha and pass west of Olancha and the Los Angeles Aqueduct (Alternative 4). Once the alignment crosses Olancha Creek, the route would then cross the Los Angeles Aqueduct and continue north through Cartago along the existing highway to meet up with the previously constructed Ash Creek Four Lane Project (Alternative 3).



District 9 Director Tom Hallenbeck reviews the presented alternatives for the Olancha/Cartago 4 Lane Project in Bishop on June 26, 2011.

2009 Estimate for Olancha-Cartago		
Agency	MOU %	Amount
Inyo County	40%	\$53,256,000
Mono County	10%	\$13,314,000
Kern	10%	\$13,314,000
Caltrans	40%	\$53,256,000
Total	100%	\$133,141,000

Based on a 2009 construction estimate, construction programming commitments would be shared by several regions and agencies based on a Memorandum of Understanding among Caltrans, Inyo and Mono counties and Kern Council of Governments. The MOU leverages scarce state highway dollars through a partnership that commits future regional formula-share highway dollars. The Kern region is already a beneficiary of this agreement with the completion of the State Route 14 four-lane widening and interchange project at California City Boulevard. Several State Route 14 widening projects north of the California City interchange will use this programming agreement to leverage construction dollars in the future. Project construction for the Olancha-Cartago widening project is anticipated to begin in 2016. ■

Kern COG Hosts Economic Census Training

Kern COG hosted a recent public workshop for its member jurisdictions to address how U.S. Economic Census data can be retrieved and the information used to better understand local and regional economies.

As part of Kern COG’s Affiliate Data Center program, specialists are invited to provide training in data accessibility and uses. On June 15, 23 people gathered at a workshop on the 2007 Economic Census. Led by Jerry Wong, Information Specialist with the US

Census Bureau’s Los Angeles Regional Office, the workshop covered the basics of how to retrieve information and how the information could be used.

Participants took away a better understanding of the regional and local economy to help them serve their customers. In the workshop were residents and local government staff from Boron, Tulare County, the Kern River Valley, Tehachapi, Wasco and Delano, along with the United Way and the Kern County Department of Health. They all learned about the programs offered by the US Census and what information is available through the Economic Census. ■

Kern COG forms Regional Planning Advisory Committee

In June, Kern COG held its first Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) meeting, bringing together land-use planners from each of the region's 11 incorporated cities, Kern County, Caltrans, and Golden Empire Transit District.

Committee members will focus on the relationship among climate change, land-use, and transportation issues mandated by recent state and federal regulations. In addition, the group will review Transportation Modeling Committee recommendations on future land-use scenarios, including those that address state climate change goals. Recommendations will be sent to Kern COG's elected Board of Directors for approval.

The Committee has the option to add up to three at-large members representing varied geographic and socio-economic sectors including business, non-profit, and tribal interests.

The Regional Planning Advisory Committee joins Kern COG's other advisory committees, which comprise city managers, public works directors, civil engineers, transit operators, stakeholder groups and other transportation professionals who help guide how federal, state and local transportation funding are spent throughout the region. ■

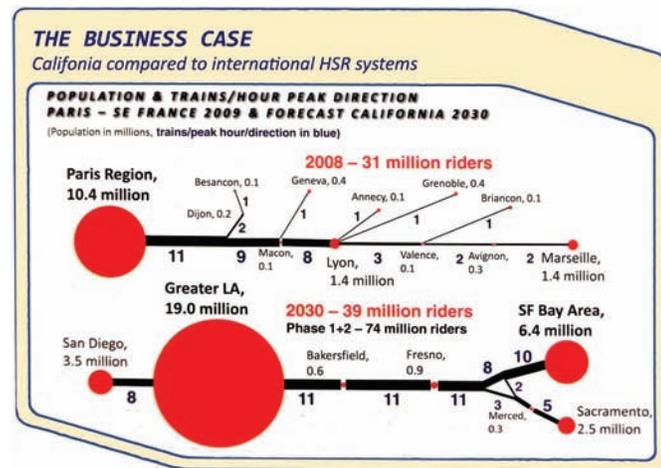
Rail: Local support showcased

(continued from page 1)

One phase, valued between \$500 million and \$1 billion, covers approximately 14 miles from Dresser Avenue south to Allen Road, including two grade separations and one major viaduct.

The Valley Area Strategic Team, comprising contractors from the entire San Joaquin Valley, has been working to help local small business to ramp up for this activity. In July, an event held by Kiewit/Granite Construction in Bakersfield received interest from approximately 100 small businesses in Kern that were interested in serving as contractors.

The California High Speed Rail Authority has \$6.3 billion in the bank and plans to begin awarding contracts by the end of 2012. An updated business plan for operating the HSR is scheduled to be released in October 2011 that will include an interim operational plan while the system is under construction. ■



Source: CHSRA 2006 Business Plan

Speed: Construction set to begin in Kern early next year

(continued from page 1)

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