

Kern COG Quarterly

BETTER PLANNING. BETTER TRANSPORTATION.



SPRING/SUMMER 2012

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Caltrans engineer Hakimi appointed as COG's new executive director

Kern Council of Governments' Board of Directors appointed Ahron R. Hakimi as the agency's seventh executive director, replacing Ronald Brummett who retired in December. Hakimi will assume his new position on Monday, June 18.

Hakimi is the lead Caltrans official for the Thomas Road Improvement Program (TRIP), a unique multi-agency coalition comprising the City of Bakersfield, County of Kern, Caltrans and Kern COG.

Kern COG is a joint powers authority whose Board comprises a mayor or councilmember from each of the 11 incorporated cities in Kern County and two county supervisors. The agency is responsible for continuous, coordinated and comprehensive transportation planning among local governments, Golden Empire Transit District, the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and other stakeholders.



Ahron R. Hakimi

A colonel in the Army Reserve's Logistics Corps and a supervising transportation engineer with Caltrans,

He came to Bakersfield in 1991, working in the local Caltrans office and reporting to District 6 officials in Fresno. In 2003, he began working on joint projects with the city of Bakersfield. He has been personally accountable for delivering several high-profile, politically sensitive federal highway projects valued at more than \$1.5 billion, including auxiliary lanes installed at the State Route 58/99 interchange in 2007, which eased traffic flow for thousands of drivers. Hakimi has served as a TRIP liaison among Bakersfield City Council members, Kern County supervisors, and state and federal legislators to ensure projects are completed on schedule and within budget, including the Westside Parkway now under construction.

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New transportation projects added to federal program



Kern COG's Board of Directors in April approved a list of 73 new transportation projects over the next three to four years, ranging from road maintenance to solar arrays and new buses, totaling \$43 million throughout Kern County.

Golden Empire Transit was awarded \$1 million in federal Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality revenue for solar panel improvements to keep a natural gas fueling station operating without interruptions. Other categories among the 43 funded projects include: pavement of dirt shoulders throughout the County of Kern;

traffic signalization synchronization in Bakersfield; new buses for transit services throughout Kern County; and a new park-and-ride lot in California City. The Board also approved \$18.8 million for 20 road resurfacing, reconstruction and reconstruction projects in ten cities and the County of Kern. The federal Regional Surface Transportation Program (RSTP) revenue will finance 20 resurfacing, reconstruction or rehabilitation of surface streets throughout the county. Federal approval is expected this June and projects in the 2012-13 could begin construction in 2013.

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Public workshops help shape strategies for future growth

So far, nearly 240 residents throughout the region have helped prioritize long-term transportation and energy-related strategies through a series of Kern COG public workshops supporting its “Directions to 2050” Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS).

The first round of workshops began March 21 in Taft and will conclude on June 18 in Greenfield. To date, workshops have been held in: Arvin, Bakersfield, California City, Frazier Park, Delano, Lake Isabella, McFarland, Shafter, Ridgecrest, Rosamond, Taft and Wasco. Tehachapi residents will have their chance to weigh in on June 13.

The outreach program builds on the visions and growth principles developed for the Kern Regional Blueprint in 2008. The Blueprint program was designed to better link transportation and land use planning to accommodate expected population increases.

This latest round of public outreach recognizes that circumstances have changed over the past four years and asks community residents whether their growth priorities are also different, including such topics as economic vitality and equitable services; open space and natural resource conservation; housing choice; transportation, energy and others.

Workshop participants are invited to play a card game in which several potential strategies are considered under each growth principle, such as adopting a business-friendly approach to regulation to support economic vitality. Players are asked to rank the strategies from those they like most to least. The results will be reflected in the “Directions to 2050” plan and also provided local elected officials and staff for possible inclusion in future general plan updates.

Anyone wanting to comment on the Regional Transportation Plan or partici-

pate in the priority-setting activity can log onto directionsto2050.com where the same information is available online.

A second round of public workshops is scheduled for fall 2012 and is expected to further refine the most popular strategies. ■



Citizens engage in conversation about planning strategies.



A workshop participant studies options in card game.

Energy and commuter program network for success

Two Kern COG programs designed to reduce air pollution and improve energy efficiency spent the spring building interest the old-fashioned way: Networking.

Kern Commuter Connection and Kern Energy Watch have co-branded during such events as the Bakersfield Women’s Conference; the Greater Bakersfield Clean-Up and Green Expo; California State University, Bakersfield’s Career Fair; the American Lung Association’s Fight for

Air Walk; and Grimmway Farms’ company picnic.

Along with other outreach events such as Bakersfield College’s GardenFest; CSUB Celebrates; AERA Energy’s Employee Health Fair; and Bike Bakersfield’s Bike Fest, the two programs reached out to more than 2,000 participants.

At the heart of Kern Commuter Connection lies Greenride, an online carpool matching service that allows commuters to



share a ride with others headed to the same location or at least in the same direction. The program’s website, commutekern.org, also offers lots of tips and tricks to start a carpool or vanpool, as well as information on bicycling or walking to work.

Kern Energy Watch, sponsored by Pacific Gas and Electric; Southern California Edison; and Southern California Gas Co., is a partnership between utilities and local governments to improve energy efficiency among municipal operations and throughout each community. Learn more about it at kernenergywatch.com.

The spring events allow program managers Linda Urata and Susanne Campbell to network with key business and community representatives, share resources to link them with rideshare opportunities, and help their operations become more energy efficient. ■

Infrastructure report card grades Kern a D+



A civil engineers professional group has issued a new warning about the condition of the region's transportation network, assigning it a grade of D+ in its "2012 Kern County Infrastructure Report Card" update on April 20.

The Southern San Joaquin branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) last issued its Report Card in 2009 with a grade of C-. According to ASCE, many of the County's infrastructure systems have not been given sufficient prioritization and funding to keep citizens safe, healthy, mobile and economically competitive. The report evaluates the current state of Kern County's transportation systems and the Sacramento Delta.

The study provides a county-focused report on the region's roads, highways, bridges and other infrastructure, similar to the most recent statewide report released in February. That report gave California an infrastructure a grade of C and called for an additional annual investment of \$65 billion. ASCE's national "Report Card for America's Infrastructure," issued in 2009, assigned U.S. infrastructure a nearly failing grade of D and called for a five-year investment of \$2.2 trillion.

Founded in 1852, the ASCE represents more than 140,000 civil engineers worldwide and is America's oldest national engineering society. The American Public Works Association, American Council of Engineering Companies, Kern COG and the Kern Transportation Foundation also contributed to the report. ■

CalVans program graduates first class of students

A San Joaquin Valley vanpool program that first began serving Kern County residents three years ago is seeing its first generation of users graduate from Taft College.

Jovanne Ayala has since moved on to California State University Bakersfield, but was one of the first students to use CalVans in Kern County. A Kings County-based program, CalVans caters largely to farmworkers who need transportation to their field jobs that conventional public transit systems can't provide.

Ayala took on the responsibility of collecting monthly fees from other riders and forwarding them to the CalVans office. Wheelchair-bound, Ayala would have preferred to be the vanpool's driver, but he seized his opportunity to help where he could.

"In these hard times when the cost of gas is very expensive, CalVans is an excellent alternative to save money because this company offers low-cost transportation," Ayala said.

Ayala's journey began in summer 2009,

when several of his fellow students, their parents, City of Shafter officials and

CalVans staff began working on a transportation solution to get students from Shafter to Taft College. Shafter officials couldn't afford a new bus service and the college was



Taft College students celebrate CalVans' service that allows them to commute to school each day from Shafter.

looking for ways to ensure their students would get to class.

CalVans staff offered to work with students to establish a vanpool to get to school each day. Under the system, CalVans provides the van and the program oversight. The students are responsible for driving,

collecting and paying the ongoing cost of the vanpool service, including gas.

To help the students, CalVans staff secured grants to lower costs, including the federal Job Access and Reverse Commute program, as well as San Joaquin Valley Air District funds. CalVans also provided older, lower-cost vans that had already been paid off by prior users.

Today, the average student is paying less than \$40 a month to use the vanpool. The vans are brought back to the CalVans office for cleaning and detailing when they are not being used during the summer months.

A second vanpool was formed in 2010 allowing the students more flexibility in their school schedules. Today, 29 students use the service.

CalVans staff holds summer outreach events in Shafter where potential riders can ask questions and talk to those that now use the service. In addition, Shafter High School advisors now refer students who might need a ride to Taft College after graduation to existing vanpool drivers for a seat in the fall. ■

Prison population decline spells fewer people in six Kern cities

Six of Kern County's 11 incorporated cities lost population during 2011, due to reductions in prison populations, according to the California State Department of Finance.

On January 1, 2012 Kern County had an estimated population of 850,066; an increase of only 5,526 from the prior year. The non-institutional, household population increased by 9,538, while the group quarter population (nearly all correctional facility inmates) fell by 4,012 due to inmate transfers to reduce prison overcrowding.

Delano's population dropped 1,103, as did McFarland (-346), Shafter (-278), Taft (-378), Tehachapi (-560) and Wasco



(-569). However, each of these cities also experienced non-institutional household population gains that partial offset the group quarter population losses.

Population growth in Kern County has historically been highly cyclical owing to the local economy's oil and agriculture base. In recent years, Kern County's growth rate has been among the highest both percentage-wise and numerically in California and the United States.

The Department of Finance's population estimates are produced for local governments to calculate their annual appropriations limit. Additionally, estimates are used for research and planning purposes by federal, state, and local agencies, the academic community, and the private sector. ■

Jurisdiction	2012	2011
Arvin	19,849	19,503
Bakersfield	354,480	350,020
California City	13,260	12,787
Delano	52,005	53,108
Maricopa	1,163	1,156
McFarland	12,333	12,697
Ridgecrest	28,089	27,835
Shafter	16,928	17,206
Taft	8,906	9,284
Tehachapi	13,872	14,432
Wasco	25,324	25,893
Balance of County	303,797	300,559
Incorporated	546,209	543,921
County Total	850,006	844,480

Director: Caltrans engineer built roads in Iraq

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Hakimi was also the subject of an Oct. 6, 2006 Bakersfield Californian profile detailing his service building roads in Iraq for a year. With more than 26 years of military service, including combat tours in Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, he was awarded the Bronze Star in 2005 and has received the Meritorious Service Medal four times.

"Kern COG is fortunate to appoint a candidate of Ahron's caliber," said Board Chairman Steven Morgan. "His strong engineering background and experience will keep our vast transportation network humming for years to come." ■

Projects: Beautification programs among those also funded

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Board members also approved 10 transportation enhancement projects for a total of \$4.8 million spread out over 2013-14 and 2014-15. The Transportation Enhancement Program finances pedestrian and non-motorized improvements, including sidewalks, landscaping and bicycle lanes.

Tehachapi will use the funding for bicycle and pedestrian paths, while Taft will pay for Rails-to-Trails along its linear parkway. Other projects include beautification improvements to State Route 43 in Wasco and median improvements to Bernard Street in Bakersfield. ■