

High speed rail speeding closer to reality

Some people call it the "Bullet Train" because it travels so fast. High Speed Rail trains will zip through the state in excess of 200 mph.

The California High Speed Rail Authority, which is overseeing the project, has a motto of "Fly California, without ever leaving the ground."

The routes are designed to cover most of California when the rail system is built out.

The initial leg of the train will connect San Francisco to Los Angeles, cutting through the Pacheco Pass and turning south at the station in Merced.

Another phase will create a run from Merced to Sacramento.

To learn more

To get additional news and information on the California High Speed Rail project, go to www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov. The site includes up-to-date schedules, in-depth information on the project, route maps and animated visualizations of what a trip might look like.



An artist's rendering of a high speed rail train going through the Central Valley.

Additional routes are planned in Southern California to provide cities more connections and extend service to San Diego.

A station is planned for Merced, which will mean easy local full access to the rail line.

Local supporters of the High Speed Rail are also proposing that the system's Heavy Maintenance Facility be located in Merced County, at Castle Airport or property south of town.

Merced is a choice location, supporters say, because it is centrally located on the line.

The Heavy Maintenance Facility will be used to do the major overhauls on the trains. Track maintenance crews will be positioned all along the routes.

The Heavy Maintenance Facility would employ approximately 1,500 people in a variety of well-paying jobs ranging from rolling stock maintenance staff to

How fast is fast?

The "Bullet Train" is expected to turn a 311-mile journey from Merced to Los Angeles into a 1 hour and 40 minute adventure.

A 131 mile trek to San Francisco would only take a passenger 1 hour and 14 minutes. And a trip to Sacramento would cover 110 miles in only 43 minutes.

The LA trip would be "green," cutting the CO2 emissions by 233.25 pounds and cost an estimated \$43.

management.

The High Speed Rail got the green light from voters in November 2008 when a \$9.95 billion bond was approved. Now rail supporters are trying to get some of the federal stimulus dollars set aside for bullet trains to start up the system.

One of the first lines to be built is expected to be a route through the Central Valley.

Protected/permissive is speeding up City traffic

It's hard not to notice the new turn signals that have sprouted up at some intersections in town.

They are called protective/permissive left turn signals, and they are designed to improve the flow of traffic.

A number of other communities have added this feature that speeds up the flow of cars and reduces vehicles pollution while idling at an intersection.

The idea is that people in the

left turn lanes sometimes get held up because the traffic light has changed, even when there is no on-coming traffic.

The new signals are designed to improve the flow of traffic when there isn't that much traffic on the road.

Drivers need to remember to exercise caution when they are at a protected/permissive signal.

The left turns are only permitted when there is no opposing

traffic (that means when there are no cars heading in your direction).

Eight intersections have recently been converted, and three more will be added later.

Not every intersection in the City is a good fit for the new traffic signals.

If the speed limit is above 50 mph, or visibility isn't good for the driver turning left, the protected/permissive signals won't be added.

Where to find them:

**M St. at Loughborough/
Collins**

M St. at 23rd St.

M St. at 21st St.

M St. at 19th St.

M St. at 18th St.

G St. at Childs Ave.

G St. at 21st St.

G St. at Main St.

Still to come:

G St. at El Portal (E&W)

G St. at Donna (E&W)

Buena Vista at R St. (E&W)

Merced City Council

Mayor Bill Spriggs
Council Members:
Bill Blake
John Carlisle
Michele Gabriault-Acosta
Noah Lor
Josh Pedrozo
Mary-Michal Rawling

Contact the City Council by email at Citycouncil@cityofmerced.org, by calling 385-6834 or writing to Council members at the Civic Center address below.

Council meetings

The Council usually meets on the first and third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers in the Civic Center. The agenda is posted online at www.CityofMerced.org. Due to the Presidents' Day holiday, the Council will meet Tuesday, Feb. 16 instead of Monday.

Contacting us

The Web site, www.CityofMerced.org, contains City Council information, the Municipal Code, General Plan and other information. Contact the Newsletter at newsletter@CityofMerced.org, call the Public Information Office at 385-6232 or write:

Merced Civic Center
678 W. 18th St.
Merced CA 95340

The Civic Center is open Monday-Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., except holidays.

Call us

City Council	385-6834
City Manager	385-6834
City Attorney	385-6868
City Clerk	388-7100
Airport	385-6873
Code Enforcement.....	385-6861
Finance	388-7900
Inspection Services	385-6861
Personnel.....	388-7100
Planning Department.....	385-6858
Public Works (7:30-4:30) ...	385-6800
After hours	385-6905
Parks/CommServices	385-6855

IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 911

Fire Department.....	385-6891
Police Department	385-6912

Ask the City: Where can I get a birth certificate?

Ask the City is an ongoing column answering questions that have been submitted to us by mail, email or phone. Readers can submit their questions to the addresses in the column on the left.

**I need to get a copy of my birth certificate?
Caller to the City's Public Information Officer**

We've covered this topic before, but we regularly get calls to City Hall asking us for a birth certificate, a mar-

riage license, or to register to vote. We even received a call from someone trying to arrange to get a Public Defender.

Another time we had a bride and groom show up at the Civic Center wanting to get married. The couple was sent off to the County Administration Building, 2222 M St. and wished good luck.

In "Romeo and Juliet" Shakespeare asked, "What's in a name?" We wonder, too.

People often confuse "the City of Merced" with "the

County of Merced." It's understandable because we are both government agencies, and we are located pretty close to one another.

Some of the most requested County numbers:
*Birth and death certificates, 385-7627
*Marriage license, 385-7501
*Voter forms, 385-7501
*Public Defender's Office, 385-7692
*Animal shelter, 385-7436
*Property tax payments, 385-7592
*Veterans' Services 385-7588

Census key to federal \$\$

The U.S. Census is gearing up a media blitz to build awareness of Census 2010, and explain why it is essential that every person be counted.

The Census numbers are used to distribute federal funds, and if people in Merced aren't counted, then the



www.census.gov

bucks go elsewhere.

When your form arrives in the mail, be sure to fill it out.

Free tax help is available

Low and middle-income taxpayers can receive free tax help at the Merced Senior Center, 755 W. 15th St. Starting Feb. 2. Tax advisors will be at the Center from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday with e-filing and Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. with no e-filing. Spanish-speaking advisors will be available.

City offices closed for holiday

City offices will be closed for the Presidents' Day holiday, Monday, Feb. 15. All residential refuse collection will be delayed by a day for the entire week, so the usual Monday collection will be on Tuesday and Tuesday collection will be Wednesday, etc.

Think Green

LEDs, the newest source of home lighting

Ideas from the Union of Concerned Scientists

Now that most everyone has converted to CFLs (compact fluorescent light bulbs, you know, the spirally things), there's a better bulb on the market.

LED (light emitting diode) bulbs use semiconductor technology to create light directly from electricity and are much more efficient.

The stats: A 6 watt LED puts out more light than an 11 watt CFL or a 40 watt incandescent light (the old fashioned light bulb). And the LED uses 45 percent less electricity than a CFL and 85 percent less

power than a light bulb.

But there is a downside to LEDs. At the present, they are pricey (but so were CFLs when they first came out).

The 6 watt LED would cost \$35, compared to under \$4 for the CFL. It would only cost \$30 to operate during its 35-year lifespan compared to \$55 for the CFL.

Another downside to LEDs is the kind of light they emit. They have a focused beam of light, so they work best as an overhead light. They also emit a bluish-white light that some people don't like.

But there's a lot of research going on to make them cheaper and easier on the eyes.