

EDITORIAL

We support weekend train

In 1989, the San Joaquin Council of Governments developed a 20-year transportation plan identifying the No. 1 priority as passenger rail service over the Altamont. Some said back then that this was only a pipe dream worthy of discussion in 20 years. Using the Measure K half-cent sales tax funds strongly supported by the voters in 1990, the pipe dream became a reality in 1995, when SJCOG, through a joint powers agreement, created the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission.

We have to admit that we were skeptical about its success. Transporting commuters from the Central Valley to the Bay Area/San Jose was the easy part. What we thought would be the real challenge was how to get passengers to their final destination once they arrived at the train station on the other side. To our delight, and thanks to "big picture" planning, that has not proven to be a problem. Today, there is plenty of commuter demand, and the passenger rail service has been a success.

On Monday, Aug. 21, Altamont Commuter Express will debut a fourth train leav-

ing Stockton at 9:30 a.m., arriving in San Jose two hours later, with stops in between. The fourth train will then turn right around, leave San Jose at noon and arrive back in Stockton at 2:15 p.m.

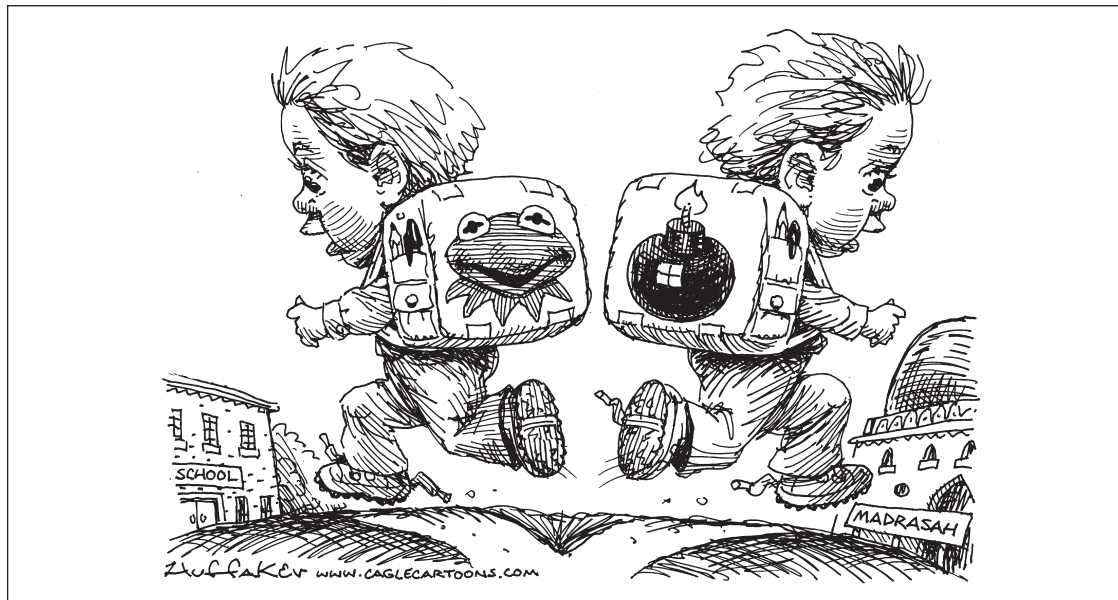
Since the inception of the ACE train, it's been known as a commuter train and the viable alternative to using a vehicle to cross over the Altamont hills to get to work. But rail commuter demand was only part of the decision to add a fourth train.

Some of the highest tourism is on weekends, and Caltrans has asked the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission to explore weekend service. Caltrans is even willing to offset some of the cost for the weekend train service. Discussions are centering on an ACE-Amtrak connection, as well as a reduction of vehicles on Interstate 205 while it is expanded to six lanes.

For those reasons alone, we think Caltrans' request is worthy of consideration. Exploring weekend train service is a great idea, and we wholeheartedly support this effort. After all, ACE has a proven track record.

QUICK HITS

- **\$114:** The average residential utility bill in July in California, 44 percent above normal.
- **21:** The average miles per gallon of 2006 model cars sold in the U.S.
- **22.1:** The average miles per gallon of 1988 model cars sold in the U.S.
- **81:** The number of spots in Delta levees that are vulnerable after being damaged by January's storm.
- **35:** The number of spots in Delta levees that protect homes, businesses or infrastructure and that urgently need to be fixed.
- **3,438:** The number of civilian deaths in Iraq in July — up 9 percent from June, and nearly twice as many as in January.



SOUND OFF

Manteca campaign disgraceful

By Joseph De Angelis
Manteca

It's not possible to explain much in three minutes. At the Aug. 7 Manteca City Council meeting, I told the council the new tax measure campaign was "almost a disgrace," but little else. I wonder if that was the reason for the three-minute time limit — to limit any substantive debate of the issue and instead rely on emotional appeals and fear.

This is a campaign of deception; the city government is participating in a well-engineered, scientifically based attempt to manipulate the people.

Everyone has heard by now that the city has hired a team of high-priced, highly skilled image consultants whose mission is to "get this measure passed." To that end, there is very little regard for truth. The only thing that is important is to say things that people will believe, things that will make them fearful or make them happy; in short, to do anything that will make them press the right button on the voting machine on Election Day.

When a scientist wants a lab rat to run through a maze or press a lever with its paw, he tries one type of bait, counts how many times the rat presses the lever to get it, and then tries another treat, then another. In other tests, the scientist can apply bristles, sandpaper or electric shock to see what makes the rat run faster. Using that technique, you can make a group of rats behave a certain way; you know what makes them press the lever and what makes them run.

The consultants are treating the people of Manteca like lab rats. They are using survey techniques to "test" which statement will make voters press the lever most often.

Look at the public documents available, the questions, the responses and the testing that went on. First, consultants tested various statements and asked, "Would this make you more likely or less likely to vote 'yes'?" By repeating this process a few hundred times, they found that some of these "facts" didn't make anyone want to vote "yes." But they also got the "yes" level up to 71 percent at one point, using a combination of statements that included the words "gangs" and "meth." Does this sound like "education"? Or manipulation?

Next, they tested names of people and groups. They asked how much you "trust" each person. Curiously, the City Council didn't score so well, with the mayor scoring slightly higher. But near the top of the list, they found that Manteca residents trust registered nurses, generally, and police chief Charles Halford, specifically. Not having a team of nurses handy, the consultants ordered Halford to the lecture circuit and told him to use the words

"gangs" and "meth" several times in his talk. As of Monday, the chief admitted to giving at least 30 talks to groups around the city to "educate" them. And that's not counting the press interviews.

Does anyone recall reading about "gangs" and the now infamous "10 meth labs in Manteca" claim? Now you know where that came from.

One citizen noted that they seemed to have "packed the chamber" with people who would say the new tax was great. Now, as a conspiracy theory, you can't beat that. But the consultants did indeed "help the citizens form a group." They handpicked people who would support the tax and presented them as a "grassroots" effort. "Look," they tell us, "see how your fellow citizens all want the new tax?" But a true grassroots effort is so named because it grows up from the people. When a government pays to organize a group knowing it will take a certain position, that's not grassroots — that's what students of politics call "Astroturfing," manufactured just like the plastic grass and just as artificial.

At the (very limited) public meeting, we heard about how you'll have to put out your burning house with a garden hose, how the firefighters don't have "air packs." What a mental image! We heard how the police left our neighborhood, and now we live in fear. Oh, and "gangs" and "meth." And every newspaper report repeated those themes. Almost word for word. How does that happen? A member of the consulting team at the meeting watched silently and only approached when a reporter went to ask a citizen a question about his or her view.

They are good. But then again, for what the city is paying them, they'd better be.

Others told me business people are intimidated and afraid to speak out. You wouldn't want the council that grants your permits mad at you. Another citizen commented, "We should demand 100 percent accuracy!" I commend her courage, but I'm also struck by the naiveté. We aren't anywhere close to anything resembling "honest debate."

The voters, the people, deserve better than being treated like a science experiment. We are not guinea pigs to be led to the voting booth to press the right button. That's how the consultants think of the people of Manteca. And what is truly disgraceful is that our city leaders are not only letting this go on, but also actively helping with the big con job.

Let's talk about the issues directly and honestly and leave out the emotional appeals. I'd like to list the facts and figures of the campaign and why most of what we're being told doesn't make any sense. But I have a feeling most thinking citizens have already figured it out: It's all about the money.

■ Joseph De Angelis, a registered nurse, lives in Manteca.

SUN POST

Owned and published by
Tumbleweed Publishing Inc.

CECELIA DRAKE, Owner/Publisher
CARLON PERRY, Owner/Publisher

The Sun Post is published every Friday at 245 W. Yosemite Ave., Manteca, San Joaquin County, Calif. Telephone: 239-6351 Fax: 239-9863 E-mail: cecelia@sunpost.net; carlon@sunpost.net Web: www.sunpost.net

Editorials reflect the opinion of the owner/publishers.

Letters of fewer than 300 words that deal with public issues will be given preference. Letters will be edited for length, clarity and civility. Routine thank-you letters will not be published.

All letters must include the name, address and daytime phone number of the writer. Only the name will be published. E-mail letters to splitters@sunpost.net