
Article published Jan 21, 2006

State invests in Valley

San Joaquin receives \$2M to help ease growing pains

MODESTO - The San Joaquin Valley received a \$2 million grant Friday to help the region cope with the boom of expected growth over the next two decades.

State officials on Friday morning presented the check to the region, saying the San Joaquin Valley is one of the most important areas to the state's economy.

San Joaquin County will get about \$325,000 of the grant, local transportation officials said.

The \$2 million will pay for mapping, traffic analysis and other data gathering as well as community outreach for all eight San Joaquin Valley counties, officials said.

The final product will be a blueprint for accommodating San Joaquin Valley's growth, which is expected to increase by about 1.7 million people in the next 25 years.

It will serve as a guide to help the region determine where to develop housing and business parks, where to invest transportation money and how to combat traffic congestion and air pollution as more people move to the region.

"The state government has said it's really important to focus on the San Joaquin Valley," Sunne Wright McPeak, secretary of the state's Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, said as she presented the check to leaders in the region.

The eight-county region received the largest sum of the total \$5 million grant. The remaining money went to the Bay Area and Sacramento and San Diego areas, among others.

This grant is another signal that the state wants to invest more resources into the future of the San Joaquin Valley.

Last year, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed a 26-member committee to address the future economy and transportation issues of the San Joaquin Valley.

That group met in December, proposing an ambitious \$6 billion plan to widen and improve safety along Highway 99, one of the region's most heavily traveled thoroughfares.

Since 1998, traffic has increased by about 52 percent in the north San Joaquin Valley and by about 577 percent in the southern part of the region.

Today, more than 100,000 vehicles travel the metropolitan areas of Highway 99 daily, including Stockton. Trucks account for about 19 percent of the traffic, according to the state Department of Transportation.

But it was not until recently that the state decided to invest in the San Joaquin Valley. Some officials, however, fault the region, saying representatives have not done enough to target state resources.

"I think that for a very long time the region was isolated economically and geographically, and it was not expressing any expectations," said Carol Whiteside, president of the Great Valley Center, a Modesto-based think tank.

Contact reporter Erin Sherbert at (209) 833-1143 or esherbert@recordnet.com
