

*The following article appeared in the December 2006 issue of
the Highgrove Happenings Newspaper*

Public Outcry expressed at RCTC meeting!

For 2 months in a row, community members and leaders from the surrounding area expressed their concern for the lack of action by the Riverside County Transportation Commission's Executive Director and Staff to acquire the land for a Metrolink Station in Highgrove.

At the last Riverside County Transportation Commission meeting on Nov, 8, 2006 there were 9 speakers who voiced their opinions during the public comments. The speakers addressed different issues such as traffic congestion, parking issues at the Riverside and San Bernardino Metrolink stations, the 35 vacant acres of land in Highgrove, the 2,100 new homes soon to be built near the proposed Highgrove location, bus route #25 that currently does through Highgrove between Riverside and Loma Linda, and many other transportation related items supporting this location.

The speakers in order were: yours truly; R.A. "Barney" Barnett, Don Earp from Colton, Jim Miller-current Grand Terrace City Councilman, Maggie Saunders-Grand Terrace resident, Melanie Zimmermann-Highgrove Municipal Advisory Council, Ed Demuth-Grand Terrace resident, Denis Kidd-Highgrove CSA 126E, Byron Matteson former Grand Terrace Mayor for 14 years and Letitia Pepper from the University Neighborhood Association near UCR.

During Jim Miller's presentation there were some intense discussions between Commissioner Bob Buster and Executive Director Eric Haley, Legal counsel intervened by suggesting that his item should be put on a future agenda and not discussed in depth by the Commissioners during the public comments.

Everyone is concerned that no action has been taken for the last 5 years to establish a Metrolink stop in Highgrove

On Nov. 8, 2006 I read the following Riverside County Transportation Commission document to the commissioners and then gave 30 copies to the clerk of the board for distribution to each Commissioner. This is what the Commissioners directed their Staff to do almost 3 ½ years ago.

Highgrove Site Alternatives Analysis

Executive Summary *"Residents of the community of Highgrove, as well as the city councils of Grand Terrace, Colton, and Loma Linda, have expressed an interest in a future Metrolink station in Highgrove. At its June 2003 meeting, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) directed staff to determine the feasibility of acquiring additional right-of-way for a future Highgrove Station to serve the Inland Empire-Orange County Line."*

The Inland Empire-Orange County Line mentioned above is the BNSF main line tracks that go through Highgrove right next to the 35 acre parcel of vacant land where we want the station located.

For the last several years we have been trying to get RCTC to purchase this vacant land for a Metrolink station in Highgrove. A curve through this property was initially considered years ago by RCTC when the route from Perris to Riverside was first being planned.

Over the last 5 years I have worked with and talked to many members of the RCTC Staff and I know they have spent many hours with their consultants trying to devise a workable plan for the Perris Valley Line in order to establish Metrolink service between Perris and Riverside. The location of the stations on the Perris Valley Line may not seem to affect the Highgrove location since they involve 2 different sets of railroad tracks, but if 2 stations are built close together on the Perris Valley Line such as the proposed UCR and Spruce and Rustin station locations, then it would be almost impossible to build a 3rd station in Highgrove. We have asked that the Spruce and Rustin location on the Perris Valley line be abandoned since it is only about 1 mile from the UCR station and use that money to help purchase the land for the Highgrove station. The University Neighborhood Association near UCR agrees that the Highgrove location is a better place for a station.

The Perris valley Line has been the RCTC staff's main concern for the last several years. But what about the Highgrove Metrolink Station? Should the public comments and written resolutions from the past be disregarded? Since June of 2003 has the Executive Director instructed his staff to try to acquire this property for transportation purposes like they were directed to do?

We are not criticizing the RCTC Commissioners since they received information from their RCTC Staff, their consultants, and the public, but many of us feel that the concerns and requests from the public have been ignored or delayed by the RCTC Executive Director and his Staff.

At the RCTC meeting on Oct. 11th I told the Commissioners that I gave 30 packets to the RCTC Staff on August 16, 2004 for distribution to the Commissioners but the packets were not given to the Commissioners for 14 months. These packets included a map of the Highgrove location and copies of the resolutions of support from Highgrove and the surrounding communities of Grand Terrace and Loma Linda that date back to Nov. of 2001.

Mr. Haley's reply was: **"I don't recollect a briefing in the summer of 2004- if it was not distributed- my apologies"**.

Also, if the Staff was directed to find a location in Highgrove 3 ½ years ago, why hasn't the property been purchased if this is such an ideal site? Who is responsible for his oversight? Someone has to be held responsible for not pursuing the acquisition of this land for a Metrolink Station regardless of what happens on the Perris Valley Line.

Eric Haley has been the Executive Director of the Riverside County Transportation Commission since 1998. He formerly worked for SANBAG the county agency in San Bernardino County that oversees the Metrolink Commuter trains on their side of the county Line. The jurisdiction changes at the county line near Highgrove from RCTC, to SANBAG for commuter trains that operate between Riverside and San Bernardino so he has worked on both sides of the county line.

On several occasions, Mr. Haley has stated that by purchasing the Highgrove property would be **"Land banking"**. He has been challenged for using this term many times due to the fact that the land would not

be purchased for speculation or future sale for profit but if the land was purchased and a platform built the existing commuter trains could stop for passengers on the day of completion. The existing Metrolink commuter trains currently pass right by this location 7 days per week but do not stop because there is no platform.

Another miss-conception attributed to Mr. Haley is that if a Highgrove station was built, it would trigger the need for an \$85 million railroad over and under where the Union Pacific RR tracks cross the BNSF RR tracks in Colton. The last several times he used these figures it had gone up to \$100 million and even \$150 million. That is enough to scare anyone- but this scare tactic simply does not apply to our situation!

We are not asking for any additional commuter trains between San Bernardino and Riverside that would change the Feb. 14, 1996 agreement concerning the amount of commuter train moves that can be made between Riverside and San Bernardino. We just want the “existing trains” to stop! That does not change the agreement.

In the past, we have had tremendous support from Supervisor Bob Buster. Commissioner Buster stated: **“Let’s not lose this opportunity based on staff policy making. A defacto decision has been made here apparently that has not been discussed by the Commission and we are the policy body!”**

Commissioners John Tavaglione and Marion Ashley agree that is a good location but they want SANBAG involved. Also Assemblyman Bill Emmerson has written a letter supporting the Highgrove location.

So why has nothing been done? Mr. Haley was the Executive Director when all of the surrounding resolutions were passed 5 years ago. In 2003 he was also the Executive Director when his Staff was directed to find a location in Highgrove. We pointed to the 35 acres of vacant land over and over again.

I have also listened to his statements that were made during public meetings that I feel are incorrect such as reference to the 100 million dollar requirement for the Colton crossing if the trains stop in Highgrove.

We were always told that by adding another commuter train to the BNSF tracks would change the Feb. 14, 1996 agreement for the amount of commuter trains that could operate between San Bernardino and Riverside. Then on July 15, 2006 the permanent weekend trains were added to include Saturday and Sunday commuter service over these very same tracks. Highgrove is now watching the commuter trains go by 7 day per week instead of 5.

At the RCTC meeting on Nov. 8, 2006, RCTC Chairman, Ashley referred this to the Executive Director with instructions to talk to SANBAG and at some point agenize this before the appropriate committee so it can be pursued to settle it once and for all.

This has caused concern for many of our local constituents. As members of the public we are apprehensive about sending the Executive Director of RCTC to meet with SANBAG about something that he does not believe in or want. When his multi-million dollar figures are presented to SANBAG what do you think their reaction will be? (Remember, these figures do not apply if the existing trains just “stop” in Highgrove).

On Nov. 9, 2006, I received a copy of a letter addressed to RCTC and SANBAG from Melanie Zimmermann who is a member of the Highgrove Municipal Advisory Council, requesting that I be present during the talks between RCTC and SANBAG. Copies were also sent to RCTC Executive Director, Eric Haley, SANBAG Executive Director Tony Grasso, and SANBAG representatives Bea Cortes from Grand Terrace, Robert Christman from Loma Linda, and Deirdre Bennett from Colton.

The public wants their voice to be heard loud and clear when RCTC and SANBAG sit down to talk.

The Highgrove station location will benefit the entire region and is a plan for the present and the future and the people have been ignored because the RCTC Executive Director thinks it's too close to the county line and people from San Bernardino County will be riding the trains at RCTC's expense.

Mr. Haley seems to have only one thing in mind and that is the Perris Valley Line. He has ignored what the people want and need because he says: "75% or 80% of the riders (his figures) will be from San Bernardino County." But the 2,100 new homes that will soon be built, and the existing homes in Highgrove are all in Riverside County. He fails to recognize that there will soon be long term **regional consequences** due to his failure to acquire this property. Our freeways are congested with vehicles from both counties and commuters from other areas. Isn't the idea of using Metrolink based on transporting people and taking their vehicles off the freeways and roads? And aren't the riders buying tickets to ride the Metrolink trains?

As members of the public we must continue to express our concerns during the public comments at both RCTC and SANBAG meetings and at the joint meetings between the two agencies. The best way our public comments can be heard is for us to stand up for our rights and speak our minds so that these public agencies will listen to the will of the people. At the last RCTC meeting on Nov. 8, 2006 during my public comments, I suggested a simple 3 step solution:

1. BUY THE PROPERTY
2. INSTALL A PLATFORM
3. STOP THE TRAINS!

Also at the Nov. 8, 2006 RCTC meeting Melanie Zimmerman from Highgrove asked the Commissioners to *"take a small bus to see where the new homes will be, meet with Barney and look with an open mind."* Denis Kidd from Grand Terrace also stated: *"Invite Barney to meet you at the Highgrove site so he could represent us because the opposition will be amply represented by RCTC Staff"*. That did not happen!

Eric Haley arranged for the Commissioners to tour the Perris Valley Line via rail on Nov. 28, 2006 but they did not stop at the Highgrove site. Viewing the vacant 35 acres from the rail is not possible since the track is lower than the property and there is a dirt bank in the way. (That is why Mrs. Zimmermann suggested using a small bus). So the Commissioners did not see the site for the platform next to the BNSF main line. Another concern is: Why did Mr. Haley schedule the tour on a Tuesday when all 5 of the Board of Supervisors were at their weekly meeting? These 5 Supervisors are also RCTC Commissioners but could not attend. Note: There are no freight trains on the Perris Valley Line tracks on Saturday and most of Sunday.

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

The next **SANBAG** meeting will be on **Dec. 6, 2006 at the old Santa Fe Depot located at 1170 W. Third St. in San Bernardino.** For further directions or information please call Cheryl Donahue, Public Information Officer (909) 884 8276.

The next **RCTC** meeting will be at 10:00 am on **Dec. 13, 2006 at the County Administration Bldg. located at 4080 Lemon St. in Riverside.** For more information please call (951) 787 7141

Call me if you would like to listen to a tape recording of the public comments of the RCTC meeting on Oct. 11, 2006 and/or Nov. 8th

If you can help, please contact me at: (951) 683 4994 Fax: (951) 683 7258
or www.highgrovehappenings@roadrunner.com

R. A. "Barney" Barnett

"Thank you" to all of you who spoke up at the public comments. We are the voice of the people and our voices should be heard!