



March 10, 2009 Tracy, CA

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## Building an economy for a change in fortunes [Print E-mail](#)

Written by Jon Mendelson  
Friday, 06 March 2009

**Federal money can help San Joaquin County build a foundation for the future, so don't call this spending pork.**

San Joaquin County's unemployment rate topped 15 percent in January. Tracy's rate, usually the lowest among SJC's cities, is sniffing double digits. Stockton is the nation's foreclosure Ground Zero. Mountain House is the most underwater community in the country.

If ever a place needed a change in fortunes, it's the 209.

While lifting the prospects of an entire region isn't easy — especially one with a tradition of high unemployment and shortchanged infrastructure — at least some of those trying to build a base of stable, high-wage jobs have a plan.

Call it the "Field of Dreams" blueprint: If you build it, they will come.

"You cannot (create jobs) if we don't have good transportation," said Leroy Ornellas, chairman of the county board of supervisors and a vocal supporter for upgrading our aging transport network. "... With good infrastructure, it's easier for manufacturing and other job providers to locate here."

Building an economy is like building a house — you're doomed if there's no foundation. In this case, that means roads, rails and airports. (We already have the population.)

The good news is we're not starting from scratch. The county has railways, interstates, an airport big enough for Air Force One and California's premier inland port. Not to mention smaller assets, like Tracy Municipal Airport.

It's a matter of improving what's already there and making it all work together.

The catalyst, of course, is money. Ain't nothing gonna happen without it.

That's why city and county officials for years have lobbied for help. This year, the efforts seem to have yielded results.

In addition to \$30 million in state bond money to improve Stockton Metropolitan Airport's road links to Interstate 5 and Highway 99, the federal budget working its way through Congress has several county-specific projects, thanks to 11th District Rep. Jerry McNerney.

For starters: \$1.34 million to study expanding the Deep Water Channel that connects the Port of Stockton to San Francisco Bay; \$5 million to keep the channel open to shipping; \$950,000 for the Stockton airport project; and, in Tracy, \$950,000 for studies and preliminary work for a new Interstate 205 interchange at Lammers Road.

The projects are far from guaranteed. It could take months or years for the money to flow, even if they survive trips to the Senate and President Obama's desk.

Still, Ornellas said there's reason to be "cautiously optimistic," and he and others hope it's just a sign of things to come.

In April, local leaders will make the annual One Voice pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., to further the cause of other long-term economy-boosters, including improvements to the Stockton airport's landing lights, a new Bird Road-Highway 132 interchange and — a biggie — turning Highway 4 west of Stockton into an expressway to take pressure off the crowded Altamont.

The merits of each individual project deserve debate, but here's hoping the feds don't mind pitching in a little more to revitalize one of California's most downtrodden regions.

As for feeding from the big-government trough, when it comes to these projects, cries of "pork" should fall on deaf ears.

This isn't pork spending. This is investing in a vision of San Joaquin County as more than a Bay Area bedroom or home to the country's most miserable city.

As Sarah Hersh, communications director for McNerney, points out, Californians get back only 78 cents for every tax dollar sent to Washington. These earmarks are a way of returning that money and putting it to good use.

This region, especially, needs help building a new economic foundation. If making that happen requires a few dollars from Uncle Sam, fine by me. Because we have to start somewhere.

"There's got to be a start, there's got to be a beginning," Ornellas said, "and this is money for that beginning."

• *Jon Mendelson is an award-winning columnist for the Tracy Press. Share your thoughts at*

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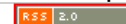


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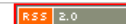
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written by Observer , March 07, 2009   
in Tracy, \$950,000 for studies and preliminary work for a new Interstate 205 interchange at Lammers Road.

\$950,000 for "studies and preliminary work"? Almost a million? Does that include materials for the constructing of the road?

Break it down?

...  
written by Tracy RealNews , March 09, 2009   
Tom,

What do you think, here?

Thanks!

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