

# Economic Development and Recovery



## County Commits \$25 Million to Secure \$65.5 Million in Transportation Funding

On September 9 the Board of Supervisors approved three agreements to secure \$65.5 million in state bond funding for key transportation projects, including reconstructing interchanges at Cherry and Citrus avenues on Interstate 10 and building a railroad grade separation on Glen Helen Parkway. The agreements between the County and the California Transportation Commission require the County to commit \$25 million for the projects. The County's portion is expected to come from development fees; however, if development fees cannot cover the cost, the County can request a loan of Measure I dollars from the county's transportation commission. "This funding represents an unprecedented investment in the County's transportation system," Supervisor Paul Biane said. "With these dollars, the County and its partners can move forward with three vital projects that will provide traffic relief for thousands and thousands of drivers on a daily basis."



## San Bernardino County Moves to Reclaim Foreclosures

On December 1 the Board of Supervisors advanced a bold economic recovery plan to correct the Inland Empire's catastrophic mortgage meltdown and reduce unemployment rates hovering near 10 percent by agreeing to contract with the Inland Empire Economic Recovery Corporation. The nonprofit public benefit corporation will stabilize Inland neighborhoods by acquiring foreclosed residential properties, then rehabilitating and selling them to qualified buyers. About 42,356 homes in San Bernardino County currently are bank-owned, scheduled for auction or have been subjected to notices of default. In the past 11 months, property values in San Bernardino County have plummeted nearly 42 percent. San Bernardino County leaders say participation in the Economic Recovery Corporation is the best way to manage thousands of residential properties that once were owner-occupied but are now vacant magnets for crime, or that are being snapped up for prices below their real value and turned into rentals.



## Supervisors Approve Plan to Address Foreclosure Crisis

On November 18 the Board of Supervisors approved a plan to address the foreclosure crisis in the County. The plan includes programs to be implemented using \$22.8 million allocated to the County through the federal Housing and Recovery Act of 2008. The Housing Recovery Act allocated \$3.92 billion in emergency funding nationwide to address abandoned and foreclosed homes through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP). The NSP funds were allocated to communities hardest hit by the foreclosure crisis to purchase foreclosed homes and rehabilitate and redevelop the homes to stabilize neighborhoods and stem the significant losses in home values of neighboring residences.

Supervisors adopted a program to implement the NSP in San Bernardino County by

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allocating funds among six separate programs. Three of the programs will receive the majority of the funds, \$14 million, and are directed at assisting homebuyers with purchasing foreclosed homes. The balance of the funds will be directed at efforts to acquire and rehabilitate foreclosed properties.

### Progress made toward High Desert Corridor

In 2008 substantial progress was made toward the development of the High desert Corridor, a 50-mile, \$900 million expressway linking the Victor Valley with the Palmdale-Lancaster area. The High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Authority adopted a budget and made a commitment to select a firm to build the project. "The High Desert Corridor will serve as a new model for building major infrastructure projects in California. This public-private partnership will create a major new route for freight movement that will benefit the entire region in terms of jobs, air quality and traffic congestion," said San Bernardino County First District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt, who also serves as chairman of the Joint Powers Authority. The JPA's \$1.25 million initial operating budget this fiscal year is being funded with \$500,000 of federal funds transferred from the City of Victorville, \$500,000 from Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority and \$250,000 from Los Angeles County. The JPA is composed of representatives from San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties, Adelanto, Apple Valley, Lancaster, Palmdale and Victorville.

### County partners with Cal State San Bernardino

As part of the county's ongoing effort to attract the next generation of county employees, the county Human Resources Department recently established an on-site career counseling program with California State University, San Bernardino. The program allows students access to appointments with employment analysts to discuss career options, current job opportunities, academic preparation, and the process of applying for jobs with the county. Human Resources is also conducting monthly general information sessions that demonstrate how to navigate the county's web site, search for job opportunities, enroll in job interest notifications and, most importantly, how to complete the on-line application.

### County helps BNSF develop job training program

BNSF Railway, one of the county's large transportation employers, has an ongoing need for highly skilled and trained dispatch workers in its San Bernardino Command Center. The company had primarily recruited from Texas to fill open positions in San Bernardino, which offer an annual wage of approximately \$70,000. However, it was traditionally difficult for BNSF to keep its newly trained out-of-state recruits in California because of the higher cost of living. To help meet its need for a local pool of trained and skilled workers, the San Bernardino County Workforce Investment Board developed an intensive railroad dispatcher-training program to fill crucial positions for BNSF. So far, two classes of eight students have undergone the program. Seven members of the first

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class completed the training and are now working full-time as railroad dispatchers in the BNSF San Bernardino Command Center. A second group of trainees is slated to graduate in October and discussions are under way for a possible third training session.

**County's assistance to aviation firm results in award**

The county Workforce Development Department contracted with the State of California Employment Training Panel (ETP) and Southern California Aviation (SCA) to provide training to upgrade the skills of Southern California Aviation employees. SCA is a certified FAA repair station at the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville, Calif. The program enrolled current SCA employees into advanced technology courses on various aircraft types. As part of the partnership, SCA guaranteed that each employee would earn at least \$15 per hour at the completion of training. To date, 68 trainees have been enrolled into the ETP project. Of these, 37 have completed training and 27 are actively training. Four trainees who completed training have gone on to positions garnering an increase in wages of \$8 to \$10 per hour on average. Three employees enrolled in Bachelor of Science degree programs and two of them received degrees in January 2008. In February 2008, the Federal Aviation Administration honored SCA with The Diamond Certificate of Excellence award for their continued commitment to training programs offered to their employees. Both the state of California ETP staff and WDD administrative staff were honored for their contributions to SCA's success.

**Congressman Dreier's Road to Employment Job Fair**

The County of San Bernardino Workforce Development Department worked with Congressman David Drier to organize his 3rd annual Road to Employment Job Fair on April 2 in Rancho Cucamonga. Previously the Congressman's job fairs were presented in LA County. Due to the relationship developed by the Workforce Development Department and Congressman Dreier the Road to Employment Job Fairs are now held in San Bernardino County. More than 1,000 job seekers attended this event to take advantage of the opportunity to meet with more than 100 employers and organizations that provided assistance in job search strategies and training to upgrade their skills. Workshops to improve job search techniques, interview skills and resumes were also presented. This was the premier job fair for San Bernardino County residents.