

City defends bike lanes following grand jury criticism

BY PETER SEGALL
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The city of Bakersfield is standing behind its expansion of bike lanes in its response to a Kern County grand jury report that questioned the value of adding such lanes to existing streets.

"Motor vehicle vs. bicycle accidents are reduced by 49-53% when bike lanes are installed," the city wrote in its response to the grand jury report.

"Eliminating bicycle lanes due to

cost concerns would conflict with the City Council goal to implement safe multimodal transportation opportunities on all roadways and would also conflict with the adopted Complete Streets Resolution," the response said.

Released in May, the grand jury report — titled "The Proliferation of Bike Lanes: Whose Road Is It?" — raised issues with the city's expansion of bike lanes, particularly on existing streets where the lanes take away from space from motor vehicle

traffic.

"Initially funded by a federal grant for pollution reduction, bike lanes were later justified by safety improvements and reduced road maintenance costs," the grand jury report said.

"However, concerns arose about biased urban planning, questionable pollution benefits, and lack of prior bicycle traffic data."

The report recommended the city review its request for proposal process to better evaluate consul-



PETER SEGALL / THE CALIFORNIAN

A group of cycling advocates gathered in downtown Bakersfield earlier this month to give comment before the Bakersfield City Council in support of bike lanes and in response to a Kern County grand jury report raising concerns about the city's policies.

tants for bias or conflict of interest and conduct bicycle traffic counts and cost benefit analyses before installing bike lanes on existing city

streets.

The only recommendation the city agreed with was the first, but

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BC gives Tyler Thompson chance to lead Renegades

BY RYAN T. BLYSTONE
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The first time Tyler Thompson attended a football game at Bakersfield College's Memorial Stadium was in 2000. He was there to watch a linebacker from his hometown of Shafter, Ryan Kroeker, play for the Renegades. Thompson and his mother, who had grown up and was friends with Kroeker's mom, were there among the big Saturday crowd.

"He had a neck collar on. It was old school ball, just a completely different way they played the game, even in those days," Thompson said. "He was just running through the A gap every play, giving people concussions. There were a lot of people there. The lower decks were almost full and some people in the upper decks. If the lower decks are full, that's about 9,000 or 10,000."

A few years later, as a Shafter High football player, Thompson was invited to a 2007 BC football game by head coach Jeff Chudy.

"That was the year they were No. 1 in the nation and they had guys like Attrail Snipes and Brandon Banks," he said. "I remember watching Brandon Banks take a driver route 70 yards. He caught the ball three yards past the line of scrimmage and he outran everybody."

A few years later, he was suited in the red and white uniform himself, playing safety for two seasons under Chudy, who converted him from a receiver to the defensive side of the ball upon his arrival. The change in positions went hand-in-hand in how different community college football was from high school for him and other newcomers.



RYAN T. BLYSTONE / THE CALIFORNIAN

New Bakersfield College head football coach Tyler Thompson, right, talks to a Renegade player during practice in preparation for Saturday's season-opening game at Santa Ana.

"My first memory as a player was shock," he said. "There were a lot of really good players here. A lot of local kids' perception is that they think this level isn't as competitive as it is. They get here and 'oh, man' there's a lot of really good football players here, a lot of Kern County kids."

Having Chudy as head coach and the culture he was part of made for a great BC experience.

"A lot of really good guys, and naturally the way everyone is cut from the same cloth being from this area creates a very quick camaraderie buy-in within the team. There's not a lot of egos, people are on the same page, working toward the same thing and



Tyler Thompson watches a defensive drill in practice. Thompson, 34, is Bakersfield College football's new head coach, moving up from defensive coordinator and 12 total years on the coaching staff. He'll debut as head coach Saturday when BC plays at Santa Ana.

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Newsom deploys 'crime suppression' teams statewide while mocking Trump's threats

BY ALEXEI KOSEFF
CalMatters

As he publicly mocks concerns that crime in California is out of control, Gov. Gavin Newsom is also surging law enforcement resources across the state.

Newsom announced Thursday that he would deploy new "crime suppression" teams of California Highway Patrol officers to partner with local officials in six regions: San Diego, the Inland Empire, Los Angeles, the Central Valley, Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area.

It's an escalation of a strategy that Newsom has already tried in cities such as Oakland and Bakersfield, sending in state officers to assist with cracking down on retail theft, stolen vehicles and drug dealing.

And it appears closely related to political considerations, as Pres-

ident Donald Trump ramps up threats of military action to "clean up" Democratic-led cities across the country. In a statement, Newsom alluded to the president, suggesting that communities were better left to handle the issue themselves.

"While the Trump administration undermines cities, California is partnering with them — and delivering real results," Newsom said. "With these new deployments, we're doubling down on these partnerships to build on progress and keep driving crime down."

Crime has again become a hot-button national topic. Earlier this month, Trump deployed thousands of National Guard troops in Washington, D.C. and took control of its local police force, arguing that federal intervention was needed because of unsafe conditions in

the city — though reports of violent offenses are at their lowest in three decades.

Since then, Trump has publicly mulled expanding the operation into numerous other cities that he claims Democrats have destroyed, including San Francisco and Oakland.

On social media, Newsom's provocative press team has responded by highlighting murder rates and other crime statistics from Republican-led states that are far higher than California's.

But his latest "crime suppression" program also provides an opportunity to get ahead of Trump and show that California is already taking action with an approach that Newsom claims is highly effective. Last year, CHP officers made more

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Immigration crackdown could force painful changes at local farms

BY JOHN COX
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Expectations for greater immigration enforcement in the Central Valley have turned attention to how such activity might affect local farming practices, and already researchers say they may have a partial answer.

Based on a survey done in 2019, when local farmworkers were in shorter supply than they are now, researchers say the most likely outcome of immigration raids would be higher wages, changes in cultivation practices and, to a lesser extent, greater investment in automation.

"If immigration enforcement targets undocumented farmworkers, we expect similar adaptation strategies," stated the authors of a new report put out by the University of California's Giannini foundation of Agricultural Economics.

But given the difficulties those changes would likely entail, researchers at UC Davis and Michigan State University listed two main alternatives: development of labor-saving equipment and greater use of the H-2A guest worker program.

The report warned that any rapid reduction in the undocumented ag labor force could leave producers unable to adapt quickly, "leading to significant disruptions in production," and possibly reduced production of labor-intensive crops, further industry consolidation and higher prices for consumers.

"Labor market disruptions resulting from deportations may reduce the domestic availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, increase dependence on imports, limit seasonal variety and constrain consumer choice," the report stated.

The challenge of farmworker shortages has a difficult and politically contentious history in California. The industry's reliance on undocumented workers for an estimated 50% of its workforce has often put the state's farming community on the opposite side of immigration reform efforts from its peers around the country.

President Daniel Hartwig of the California Fresh Fruit Association said by email

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TODAY IN HISTORY

- 1814:** During the War of 1812, Alexandria, Va., formally surrendered to British military forces, which occupied the city until Sept. 3.
- 1825:** The Treaty of Rio de Janeiro was signed by Portugal and Brazil, officially ending the Brazilian War of Independence.
- 1862:** The Bureau of Engraving and Printing began operations at the United States Treasury.
- 1944:** 15,000 American troops of the 28th Infantry Division marched down the Champs Elysees in Paris as the French capital continued to celebrate its liberation from the Nazis.
- 1958:** The U.S. Air Force Academy opened in Colorado Springs, Colo.
- 1966:** The Beatles concluded their fourth American tour with their last public concert, held at Candlestick Park in San Francisco.
- 2004:** Marathoner Vanderlei de Lima was attacked by a spectator during the running of the Olympic marathon in Athens; de Lima, who was leading the race at the time, eventually finished third and received the Pierre de Coubertin medal for sportsmanship in addition to his bronze medal.
- 2005:** Hurricane Katrina struck the U.S. Gulf Coast near Buras-Triumph, La., breaching levees and spurring floods that devastated New Orleans. The costliest storm in U.S. history, Katrina caused nearly 1,400 deaths and an estimated \$200 billion in damage.
- 2008:** Republican presidential nominee John McCain picked Sarah Palin, a maverick conservative who had been governor of Alaska for less than two years, to be his running mate.
- 2013:** In a sweeping new policy statement, the Justice Department said it would not stand in the way of states that wanted to legalize, tax and regulate marijuana as long as there were effective controls to keep marijuana away from children, the black market and federal property.
- 2021:** Hurricane Ida blasted ashore in Louisiana as one of the most powerful storms ever to hit the U.S., knocking out power to all of New Orleans, blowing roofs off buildings and reversing the flow of the Mississippi River.

— The Associated Press

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BIKES

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noted that the city chose the consultant — Alta Consulting + Design — because of its expertise in bike and pedestrian-friendly street design.

“A consultant with extensive experience in multimodal transportation design was commissioned for the project,” the city said in part of its response.

“Since streets are often designed with a bias toward vehicle travel, it was essential to engage a firm specializing in multimodal solutions to ensure the needs of those walking and bicycling were properly addressed.”

To the grand jury’s other two recommendations, the city disagreed.

“It is difficult to count bicycles if there are no bicycle lanes,” the city said in response to the recommendation to conduct bike and vehicle counts before installing new bike lanes on existing streets. “Most fatal and serious injury bicyclist crashes occur at nonintersection locations.”

To the cost/benefit analysis recommendation, the city disagreed, citing a roughly 50% reduction in motor vehicle vs. bike accidents following the installation of bike lanes.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Members of the public were quick to push back against the grand jury report, citing Bakersfield’s low ranking for street safety. Residents regularly ask the City Council to improve street safety for bikes and pedestrians during public comment.

At the council’s Aug. 13 meeting, more than a dozen local bicyclists asked the council to continue installing bike and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.

“We like what the city is doing as far as far as putting down the green paint, wider bike lanes, but we can continue to do better,” Bike Bakersfield co-founder Cindy Parra said at that meeting.

Even before the city issued its response, council members largely defended the installation of bike lanes, noting the grand jury’s own report said that bike lanes reduced accidents between cyclists and vehicles by more than 50%.

“I bicycle every day and I see lots of people bicycling, so yes, there are not as many bicyclists as there are cars, but they’re not quite as visible as cars either,” said Ward 4 Councilman Bob Smith, a cycling advocate.

Smith said multiple studies have shown bike lanes help slow traffic, which in turn makes city streets safer.

“The bicycle lanes not only make it safer for the bicyclists, it also makes it safer for the cars and walkers and everybody and so we’re trying to configure our streets for the safety of all citizens of Bakersfield,” Smith said.

VEHICLE TRAFFIC CONGESTION

Still, some members of the public have agreed with the grand jury’s findings, saying bike lanes serve very few residents and cause congestion for vehicle traffic.

“The other thing that we should probably look at more intently is vehicle traffic. How is this going to affect it? Where is your evaluation of the impact?” former Councilman Terry Maxwell said at Wednesday’s meeting, in reference to proposed changes on H Street.

“Have you ever gone to (Bakersfield High School), which sits on H Street, in the morning or in the afternoon? It is a madhouse, and you’re

going to make that into only one lane, going by BHS? Have you lost your minds?”

DANGEROUS DRIVING

Bakersfield consistently ranks among one of the most dangerous cities in the country for driving, and that includes for pedestrian and bike accidents, according to Matt Clark, an attorney with the law firm Chain, Cohn, Clark.

“I will say that that includes impaired driving, whether it be drunk, drugged, or distracted, as well as driving too fast and not obeying the rules of the road, is a serious problem in Bakersfield, California,” Clark said.

“I mean, we’re about as bad as it gets,” Clark said.

Clark said he was unable to comment on the report’s finding on the environmental impacts of bike lanes, but noted the grand jury report — despite clearly taking issue with the impact of bike lanes — was clear in its findings that bike lanes make streets safer.

“But you can see how motorists might be frustrated by the fact that the road they’re on went from three lanes down to two because there’s now a bicycle lane,” Clark said.

Determining fault in a vehicle accident is extremely complicated, Clark said, but bike accident claims do tend to be higher.

“If you’re looking strictly from an insurance claims perspective, then bicycle accident claims, even when the bicyclist isn’t adhering to the vehicle code like they should be, those claims typically are valued higher,” Clark said.

“And the reason for that is the injuries are so much greater, right? You hit a cyclist versus you hit somebody in a car, who do you think is going to be more injured?”

AG

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Thursday that timing is the biggest factor in how widespread immigration enforcement would impact local farming. A crackdown during harvest season would see the largest downside, he wrote.

Harvesting the state’s many fresh commodities cannot feasibly be done through mechanization, he said, and the H-2A program requires a long lead time. Raising wages only puts local farmers in competition with each other without adding to the overall labor supply, he added.

“The best solution would be for immigration reform to happen sooner than later, which would ensure stability for our employees, our farmers and the communities which depend on them,” he wrote.

Kevin Andrew agreed as senior vice president of operations at Bakersfield table grape grower Illume Agriculture. He noted there is no “Plan B” if U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement begins rounding up local undocumented farmworkers — “unless you and a few thousand of your close friends would like to help out harvesting the crop.”

“I’m hopeful we get some real immigration reform in place and the country realizes and acknowledges the importance of having a stable workforce for all industries,”



JOHN DONEGAN / THE CALIFORNIAN, FILE

In this August 2023 file photo, two farmworkers start to move their shaded packaging stand at the start of this shift one early morning at a California vineyard.

Andrew wrote in an email Thursday.

When the labor supply was tight a few years ago, he said, Illume had no flexibility to delay operations, which meant falling behind and losing some fruit.

But some California farmers adjusted their cultivation practices with some success between 2014 and 2018, according to the new report.

It said the most common change, reduced pruning or weeding, was done by 43% of survey respondents who were able to adjust their routines. Delays in such work was the next most popular adjustment, done by a reported 32% of respondents.

After that came delayed

harvest (15%), reduced harvest (14%) and reduced or changed tillage practices (8%).

The report noted that U.S. Ag Secretary Brooke Rollins said on July 8 that there will be “no amnesty (for farmworkers) under any circumstances,” and that “mass deportations (will) continue, but in a strategic and intentional way, as we move our workforce towards more automation and towards a 100% American workforce.”

It also pointed to research suggesting that removing all undocumented farmworkers from California could raise farm wages by 42%, “which may force farmers to shift crops or go out of business.”

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