



CITY OF COALINGA
The Sunny Side of the Valley



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Coalinga and Mendota Partner with Fresno Superior Court to Test State's First Videoconferencing Courts

Yesterday, the Fresno Superior Court became the first court in the state to be approved by the Judicial Council of California to test two-way videoconferencing for traffic trials. This followed an amendment to the California Rule of Court earlier in February opening the door for the pilot project. The groundbreaking Remote Video Proceedings (RVP) project was conceptualized locally at the Fresno Superior Court, which is now preparing to implement the state's first two videoconferencing traffic courts this spring in partnership with the Cities of Coalinga and Mendota. These two communities applied to host RVP sites in a selection process open to all municipalities in Fresno County outside the Fresno-Clovis Metropolitan Area.

The three project partners will test the viability of RVP for increasing access to court proceedings for residents outside urban centers at a lower cost than operating courthouses. The pilot project will target traffic cases because they are relatively simple, short, and in high demand. Prior to last summer's closure of Fresno County branch courthouses due to state budget cuts, there were approximately 125 traffic trials held weekly in six courthouses outside the Fresno-Clovis area.

The Cities of Coalinga and Mendota are providing the space to host court at each location once a week initially, with the potential to add court days if needed. The two host cities are also covering the costs of the cameras, television monitors, computers, and other items needed to run videoconferencing at their sites. They will provide technical support for troubleshooting on court days. The Fresno Superior Court is purchasing the RVP equipment for one courtroom in the City of Fresno and providing technical assistance to Coalinga and Mendota for project implementation. The court will provide interpreters at the RVP sites as needed on court days as well as personnel to run the equipment and perform courtroom duties onsite. The court will also cover the \$125 per-site monthly fee for the videoconferencing service in all three locations. Videoconferencing will be provided by Court Call, which now enables offsite parties to attend court proceedings by phone and recently implemented videoconferencing.

There is still much preparation to do before the RVP project is operational this spring. When it is, motorists cited at least 15 miles outside the Fresno-Clovis area will have the option of appearing in the Fresno courtroom or via videoconferencing from either Coalinga or Mendota. In cases in which the defendant has opted to appear in court via RVP, the citing law enforcement officer may appear at the same location as the defendant or in the Fresno courtroom. This is expected to save travel and staff costs for law enforcement agencies as well as reduce the time officers are diverted from field duties to appear in court. A public outreach campaign and media demonstrations are planned for this spring to increase awareness and use of this new court process.

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