

Wood-burning ban issued for today

The Bakersfield Californian
[Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Nov. 20, 2004](#)

Kern County residents west of the Tehachapi Mountains are prohibited from lighting wood-burning heaters and fireplaces today and tonight due to high air-pollution levels.

The ban, imposed by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, lasts until midnight. An updated wood-burning status will be issued this afternoon for Sunday.

People who want to report a neighbor violating the prohibition can anonymously call (800) 926-5550. More information about the wood-burning status is available at (800) 766-4463 or www.valleyair.org.

This is the first wood-burning ban of the season here. Violators can be fined.

The prohibition does not apply to natural gas or propane devices; homes at elevations of 3,000 feet or higher; homes in which no other heating device exists and wood burning is the sole source of heat; and homes in areas with no natural-gas service.

Idaho senator's dairy-exemption plan draws flak

By VIC POLLARD, Californian Sacramento Bureau
[Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Nov. 21, 2004](#)

An Idaho senator's proposal to exempt dairies and feedlots from a pollution reporting requirement is drawing heavy fire from environmentalists and dairy industry critics in the Central Valley.

Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, is calling for federal legislation to exempt dairies and other livestock operations from reporting the toxic chemicals they emit.

Factories and refineries have long been required to make such reports under two federal toxic waste prevention programs.

Environmentalists contend the law applies to agriculture as well. They point out that dairies, for example, emit large quantities of toxic ammonia and hydrogen sulfide.

Farm industry officials insist the law was meant for heavy industry, not for rural America. And so far, federal regulators have not required farmers to comply.

In a lawsuit brought by environmentalists, a federal judge ruled last year that the reporting requirements applied to chicken farms in Kentucky.

That prompted Craig to propose legislation that would make agriculture clearly exempt.

Craig insists that the reporting exemption would not let dairies and feedlots off the hook for state and local laws requiring them to control their output of chemicals that cause air and water pollution.

"Those laws would still apply," said Craig spokesman Sid Smith.

In fact, California has the first laws in the nation that require dairies and other farm operations to help reduce air pollution.

But environmentalists say that misses the point for areas like the valley, which is becoming a major new dairy center for California.

"This would keep the residents of Wasco from knowing how much ammonia and hydrogen sulfide is being created by those 150,000 cows" planned for the area, said Brent Newell, an attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

Newell and other critics are worried that Craig will try to insert the proposal into an omnibus appropriations bill currently being rushed through Congress. That would make it harder for critics to fight than if it were being pushed separately on its own.

On Friday, Smith said the senator had not decided how to proceed.

"He may insert it in the omnibus bill or he may look for another appropriate vehicle," Smith said.

Stanislaus can't stop growth

By BLAIR CRADDOCK - BEE STAFF WRITER

[Modesto Bee, Monday, Nov. 22, 2004](#)

Stanislaus County's growth boom has its origins outside the Central Valley.

And county leaders claim there isn't much they can do about it. But they can try to plan for growth - although they point out that might not be easy.

"The speed of growth is far outpacing any community's (ability) to keep up with it," said Bill Bassitt, chief executive officer of the Stanislaus County Economic Development and Workforce Alliance. "The county has got to get its arms around the management of growth."

That doesn't mean stopping growth, he emphasized. It means harnessing growth to create jobs.

Central Valley growth is influenced by a factor "without precedent in the United States," according to a report released last week by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California.

"Just two hours away from the richest metropolitan area in the country" - San Francisco - "is one of the poorest," wrote the authors, demographers Hans P. Johnson and Joseph M. Hayes.

Modesto is the poor area they describe. In terms of per-capita income, it's near the bottom - No. 288 - of the country's 316 metropolitan regions.

Stanislaus County's poverty rate of 16.2 percent outstrips the state's 14 percent rate, the demographers observe.

The county's unemployment rate in 2003 was 11.5 percent, or 72 percent above the state's 6.7 percent average.

The area's poverty and unemployment are a double-edged sword: They make life difficult for existing residents, and keep housing prices relatively low for people who can't afford rising prices elsewhere, say, in the Bay Area.

"There's a large middle class being pushed out (that) can't afford to live in the Bay Area," Johnson said in an interview.

They keep their jobs in the Bay Area, though. As a result, commuter traffic pounds county roads and contributes to smog levels that are among the highest in the nation.

"Where does it end?" asked Paul Caruso, one of five members of the county Board of Supervisors. "Some way, we have got to provide the jobs here for not only these folks, but future generations."

Lack of year-round employment

The lack of well-paying, year-round jobs is a factor keeping the county poor, Johnson and Hayes observe in their report.

The problem is not that the Northern San Joaquin Valley doesn't create jobs.

From 1990 to 2002, employment in the region - which includes Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties - grew 24 percent, they say. That was higher than the 15.3 percent increase in employment for all of California.

But in the Northern San Joaquin Valley, like other agricultural areas, many jobs last only part of the year.

Local officials said they are trying to attract business development - and hope to break the cycle that's turning the county into a bedroom community.

New residents - typically more highly educated - could be the very people who will help attract new business, the officials said.

Almost 30 percent of county residents over age 25 are not high school graduates. By comparison, only 24 percent of state residents over 25 failed to graduate from high school.

Newly arrived residents from coastal California tend to have at least high school diplomas, though college graduates are in the minority, Johnson and Hayes found.

Even the county's high unemployment rate can be used to advantage, by showing "there's a high number of people looking for jobs," Bassitt said.

Upgrading the infrastructure

County leaders hope to get more than just new homes from residential developers.

They "will need to play a part in providing the infrastructure that's necessary for business park development," said Richard Jantz, the county's deputy executive officer for economic development.

For example, he said, developers sometimes agree to put in oversized water or sewer lines in conjunction with housing tracts, with the extra capacity designated for industrial areas.

Said Stanislaus County Supervisor Jeff Grover: "We need to no longer have the discussion about whether we're going to grow, but about how we're going to grow."

Growth is happening whether people want it or not, Grover said. "Sometimes, not making a decision is a decision" to not take charge.

Water policies playing a role

But county officials have only limited authority.

Partly, that is because cities have considerable powers of their own to control growth, said Ron Freitas, director of Planning and Community Development for Stanislaus County.

The county and its nine cities have worked together in recent years on growth issues, Freitas said.

The state and federal governments also make decisions that affect growth.

For example, California's increasingly strict water policies have an impact, Freitas said.

"In the past, it's been real easy to just drill a well, and away you go," he said. Now, the state requires proof that a new development will have a permanent water supply.

Strict water quality rules also have an impact: Modesto took wells off-line when the federal government tightened allowable arsenic levels, Freitas said.

Caruso said the state budget also plays a role. "The best-laid plans can't be implemented (if) the money is not there," he said.

Coordination is crucial, said Carol Whiteside, a former Modesto mayor who is president of the Great Valley Center.

"We will all prosper or suffer, depending upon what we do," she said.

She said she favors planning for business development and amenities such as parks.

But, she added, "There are other people that think the market and the economy will take care of it."

Fireplace smoke signals

[Modesto Bee, "Around the House/Your Home" section, Sunday, Nov. 21, 2004](#)

Firing up a fireplace after it's been sitting idle all summer can cause all sorts of unwanted problems. They range from red eyes and coughing to air pollution and carbon monoxide poisoning. So, before you hold a match to any logs, be they natural wood or natural gas, look for smoke signals.

The Chimney Safety Institute of America urges homeowners to check flues and dampers for tightness, blockage, debris and buildups. You can do it yourself or hire a chimney pro to make sure everything is free and clear. Otherwise, you could be in for a military-quality smokescreen of your very own - with explosive action and real live firefighters.

Give your chimney, lungs a break this winter, district says San Joaquin residents asked to be mindful of air quality

By Staff Reporters

[Tri-Valley Herald, Saturday, Nov. 20, 2004](#)

Before tossing a piece of firewood into the hearth and striking a match, San Joaquin Valley residents are being asked to remain mindful of the county's air-quality conditions, officials said.

"Check Before You Burn," a program that began Tuesday, is designed to reduce concentrations of harmful air pollutants throughout the Valley, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The use of wood-burning fireplaces is prohibited when air quality is expected to be unhealthy, officials said. Air conditions can be checked by calling (800) 766-4463. Information also is available at www.valleyair.org

According to the district, when a no-burn order is issued, it will remain in effect from midnight to midnight of the day in question. The program will run through the end of February.

Residential wood burning adds 24 tons of pollutants per day to the Valley's air during winter- time, officials said. That amount is roughly four

times the amount of pollutants emitted in one day by all motor vehicles traveling through the San Joaquin Valley. Airborne pollution can be inhaled into the lungs and cause a myriad of health problems from cancer to heart disease, said Kelly Malay, the district's senior education representative.

The San Joaquin Valley basin repeatedly fails to meet federal and state health-based standards for air quality, officials said.

On days when wood-burning restrictions are in place, Air District inspectors will make rounds to see if residents are complying with the ban, Malay said. To report violations, call (800) 281-7003.

Group: Hydrogen highway hokum Libertarian think tank says plan would not cut fuel emissions

By Harrison Sheppard - SACRAMENTO BUREAU

[TriValley Herald, Nov. 20, 2004](#)

SACRAMENTO -- A report by a libertarian think tank seeks to debunk Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plans for a "hydrogen highway" by claiming hydrogen-fueled vehicles will make little difference in reducing harmful emissions.

The report released this week by the Reason Foundation argues that, even while hydrogen itself may be clean-burning, the processes used to manufacture and distribute hydrogen are dirty enough to nearly negate the benefits -- and the cost of conversion isn't worth the difference.

The study instead advocates more conservation, lowering freeway speed limits and making gasoline-powered cars smaller.

"Until we figure out ways to create hydrogen that are less energy-intensive or the performance of hydrogen improves, it's not a good air-quality measure," said Adrian Moore, the study's project director.

State environmental officials concede the study's argument has some merit -- if one only considers the current state of technology. But hydrogen is still an emerging science, with rapid advances, and it is expected to be cheaper and more efficient in the future, said Michele St. Martin, spokeswoman for the California Department of Environmental Protection.

Ultimately, she said, the goal is to produce hydrogen through clean, renewable sources, such as solar, wind and biomass, rather than natural gas.

"Every day these vehicles coming out are lighter and more fuel-efficient," St. Martin said. "At the end of the day, experts are saying hydrogen-powered vehicles will be at least twice as fuel-efficient as gasoline vehicles."

Earlier this year, Schwarzenegger proposed a "California Hydrogen Highway Network" that would result in a network of up to 200 hydrogen fueling stations on the state's freeways by 2010. The project is expected to cost \$75 million to \$200 million, with much of the costs picked up by the private sector.

The state has already opened three hydrogen fueling stations -- in Los Angeles, Davis and San Francisco -- and expects to have 18 more open soon, she said. City governments in those regions are using hydrogen cars in pilot programs.

Hydrogen car supporters say they are the clean-burning wave of the future, producing only water, not dirty carbon dioxide, in their exhaust.

The Reason study said it is not the emissions of individual hydrogen vehicles that is troubling, but the way in which hydrogen is produced and distributed. Hydrogen plants would most likely run on natural gas, which results in high emissions of carbon dioxide, the study argues.

The study also notes that converting some vehicles to hydrogen may actually make them greater polluters, because hydrogen vehicles are heavier and therefore take more energy to generate the same horsepower.

According to the study, a Hummer H2 that is converted to hydrogen use will be about 1,000 pounds heavier. In order to get the same performance as a gasoline powered Hummer, a greater amount of carbon dioxide will be produced.

Schwarzenegger, who was criticized during the recall campaign for driving a Hummer, promised to convert one of his vehicles to hydrogen.

Last month, he appeared at a press conference at Los Angeles International Airport driving a hydrogen Hummer to open a fueling station there, although it turned out the vehicle was a prototype loaner from General Motors that is not available to the public.

V. John White, an adviser to the Sierra Club on clean-air issues, said he is skeptical of findings by the Reason Foundation because of the group's ideological bias. Hydrogen, he said, is only one part of a multipronged strategy to reduce emissions in California, and the hydrogen field continues to improve.

"The Reason Foundation doesn't accept we're living in a carbon-constrained world and petroleum is rapidly reaching its peak and will soon begin a long decline," White said.

"The alternatives to our addiction to petroleum are important to develop."

News in brief

[S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, Nov. 20, 2004](#)

SACRAMENTO (AP) -- A libertarian think tank says Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed "hydrogen highway" won't cut nearly as much air pollution as he says it will.

Hydrogen itself is clean-burning, but the Reason Foundation said the benefits are mostly offset by the air pollution created as hydrogen is manufactured and distributed.

Schwarzenegger is promising to build enough hydrogen fueling stations to jump-start the use of clean vehicles that use fuel cells instead of gasoline. But hydrogen is made mostly using natural gas, a fossil fuel that emits carbon dioxide when it is burned.

"Until we figure out ways to create hydrogen (vehicles) that are less energy-intensive or the performance of hydrogen improves, it's not a good air-quality measure," Adrian Moore, the Reason Foundation's project director, told the Oakland Tribune.

The foundation says the same benefits would come from more conservation, lower highway speeds and smaller cars.

Schwarzenegger recently highlighted the program by unveiling a Hummer converted to use hydrogen.

But the foundation said current hydrogen technology means adding heavy equipment to vehicles. A hydrogen-burning Hummer H2 weighs about a thousand extra pounds, the foundation said, meaning it ultimately produces more carbon dioxide than a standard gasoline version.

Proponents say making hydrogen will be more environmentally friendly if the fuel is made with clean, renewable sources such as solar, wind and biomass.

"Every day these vehicles coming out are lighter and more fuel-efficient," said Michele St. Martin, spokeswoman for the California Department of Environmental Protection. "At the end of the day, experts are saying hydrogen-powered vehicles will be at least twice as fuel-efficient as gasoline vehicles."

Schwarzenegger's proposed network would consist of as many as 200 hydrogen fueling stations lining highways by 2010, at a cost of \$75 million to \$200 million. His aides said much of the cost would be borne by the private sector or federal government.

Three stations are open in Los Angeles, Davis and San Francisco, and 18 more will open soon as city governments experiment with using hydrogen-powered vehicles.

Bidder for L.A. 'green' port site asks judge to halt search for tenant

The Associated Press

[In the LA Times, S.F. Chronicle, Fresno Bee and Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Nov. 22, 2004](#)

LOS ANGELES (AP) - An international shipping line has asked a judge to stop the bidding for a "green" terminal site at the Port of Los Angeles, claiming port officials favor its competitor.

In a petition filed in Superior Court on Thursday, P&O Nedlloyd Container Line of London said it had been close to becoming the new tenant, but port officials had reneged on tentative deals and instead began negotiating with Evergreen Marine Corp.

Port and city officials declined comment to the Los Angeles Times.

P&O Nedlloyd claims in court papers that officials tossed out its four bids in September, though the proposed projects had new technology for reducing air pollution.

Clean-air and community activists have raised concerns about the potential negative health effects of air pollution from ships, trains and trucks at the port. The port is the largest air polluter in Southern California. In October, port officials changed anti-pollution standards and began a new search for a tenant at the port's Terminal Island site after rejecting all the bids on the table at the time.

"We don't understand why there was a second bid, and we don't think it's fair to us or the public," said Robert Agresti, executive vice president for P&O Nedlloyd's North American trade operation.

A court hearing on the petition was scheduled for Monday.

I kicked the car addiction - it can be done

By Mike Fuller

[Fresno Bee, Commentary, Saturday, Nov. 20, 2004](#)

As currently constructed, our car-driven country makes us act like junkies.

How many gallons of gas do you guzzle a day? How long can you go without getting your fix? How would you react if you couldn't get any? Would you panic? Would you get the shakes? Would you steal from your neighbor? Would you kill people?

The war in Iraq is reason enough to lessen our addiction. The instability of the Middle East is another reason. Our vulnerability to terrorism, inflation, pollution, global warming, high health-care costs, political and corporate corruption adds additional motivation to kick the habit.

The benefits of living without a car are better than I ever imagined when I was a junkie. The joy of traveling by foot, bike, bus, plane, train or taxi without the burden of driving, parking and paying the price of a car prove my point.

Riding mass transit, carpooling, walking and riding a bike get me where I want to go and are wonderful ways to travel. The pace, rhythm and routine of life are nicer. No more rushing from place to place, gas station to station. My productivity increased, since the time I spent driving is now spent working or relaxing. The time and money spent commuting pushed me to work at or close to home. Car costs pushed me to live where I don't need one.

On the rare occasion when I need a car, carpooling, borrowing or renting one is easy. Relying on taxis, phones, fax, Internet and home-office delivery also helps.

Safer neighborhoods

The benefits of diminishing our addiction to cars need to be extended to schools. Schools ought to anchor safe neighborhoods, not overrun them with fast-moving machines, SUVs and minivans. The traffic jams at schools before and after the bells ring are ridiculous.

Not relying on cars makes for healthier, smarter and safer children. Walking is a lesson in fewer taxes to support outdated government policies. Skyrocketing rates of diabetes, obesity, car accidents, and asthma, health care and transportation costs will lessen when more children walk or bike to school.

The benefits of diminishing our addiction to oil need to be extended to our food system. Thanks to my small-scale, inner-city farm, my food supply and what I pay for it is no longer dependent on the price of oil.

My food system is secure because I get mileage out of it. I enjoy a steady supply of fresh food from my front and back yards.

My small-scale, inner-city farm is set up to produce 30 to 40 different kinds of fruit and 50 to 60 different vegetables.

I also enjoy fresh eggs, meat and beautiful surroundings at home. My farm uses little gasoline and no pesticides, herbicides or artificial fertilizers.

Free mulch makes beautiful, productive and healthy ground cover, weed control and compost. Tree trimmers save the time and expense of driving far to dump their loads.

Getting green waste from my neighbors and a nearby park also helps. Soil fertility and weed control are enhanced while soil erosion, air pollution, costs to city, county, state and the local landfill are reduced.

That our flat, fair-weather Valley doesn't have a world-class mass transit, bike trail and local food system is silly. Car-driven development spreads urban sprawl and eats up farmland. The price of urban sprawl, inflation, oil, food and cars is going to wreck our standard of living.

Living without a car makes me less culpable for and vulnerable to the vagaries, vulgarity and vexation of the war in Iraq, not to mention winning economic and environmental battles on our own soil. The whole world will breathe easier when America kicks the car habit.

Imagine the benefits

Can America be driven by patriotic people living in a peaceful, beautiful, healthy, walkable and livable country with a secure food supply, strong and sustainable economy?

We can because our freedom, success and standard of living depend on breaking our addiction to oil. Just think: no junkies; peace; clean air; quiet, healthy, beautiful walkable livable communities; and a safer world.

Support our troops and economy. Kick the habit. Living without a car will get even easier as more people do it -- when more people realize how nice living without a car can be and is, as I already have. The benefits are many and magnificent.

Living with less oil leads to a better way of life. Where better to demonstrate these facts than the sunny, but smoggy San Joaquin Valley?

Natural gas station 'good start'

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Monday, Nov. 22, 2004](#)

Bakersfield will soon have access to a refueling station for natural gas vehicles. The station will be open to the public in a few weeks and will offer compressed natural gas, an ultra-clean fuel that is better for the environment than traditional fuel. This is only the second such station in the area and the first one that is privately-owned.

The station's owner, Lester Stuart, is a lifelong Bakersfield resident who, motivated by the valley's poor air quality, wants to encourage the use of the alternative fuel. San Joaquin Valley has the dubious honor of being the home of the worst air quality in the nation.

Stuart is so committed to natural gas that after buying Bakersfield Yellow Cab, he converted its fleet to natural-gas powered Chrysler minivans. Vehicles powered by natural gas are the cleanest-running conventional passenger vehicles around and have all the power and features of conventional vehicles. Owners of natural gas powered cars and trucks also have the added benefit of paying less for their fuel and having their engines last longer and require less maintenance than gasoline-powered vehicles.

Stuart acknowledged that his initial customers will mostly be fleet owners, citing lack of availability and knowledge about natural gas powered passenger vehicles. He describes the station as a "stepping stone" and says, "You've got to start somewhere."

We agree and applaud Stuart on this first step. Hopefully other business owners and individuals alike will be inspired by the same forward-thinking and community-focused outlook.

Bearing an unjust burden

[S.F. Chronicle, Editorial, Sunday, Nov. 21, 2004](#)

FOR YEARS, city and state officials have dragged their feet over proposals to shut down two high-polluting power plants in the southeastern section of San Francisco, leading to frustration and anger among local residents. So it's no surprise that the recent announcement by city officials that they hope to close plants in Potrero Hill and Hunters Point by the end of 2007 has been greeted with a high degree of mistrust.

But the news that Mayor Gavin Newsom has laid out a specific time line to shutter the plants is probably the most encouraging sign to date for community residents, since it appears that the managers of the state's power grid have signed on to the proposal. It's up to the city officials to show that they can replace

the power generated by the plants with cleaner energy sources -- a goal that Newsom and San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Chief Susan Leal have vowed to meet.

Still, it won't be easy. A number of firms have moved out of the Silicon Valley and technology investments have gone elsewhere, too, because of fears that the state does not have enough power to meet future demands. San Francisco officials must build four smaller natural gas sites to replace the two aging plants. And the Mirant Corp., which owns the Potrero Hill facility, has so far refused to agree to close it -- a curious stance for a company that has filed for bankruptcy.

While some community activists can't fathom a three-year wait -- and with the area's asthma rates among the highest in the nation, who can blame them? -- the bitter truth is that the city can't close the plants until new ones are in place. The fact that the state's power operators appear ready to adopt the plan is a rare bright spot in what has been an ugly and protracted battle.

Smog issue cited

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Nov. 21, 2004](#)

Let's see if I have this correct. When the air quality is good it is OK for people to burn their fireplaces and the farmers to burn their fields. That, of course, makes the air quality worse. So, those who have breathing problems are doing OK outside till the guy next door starts his fireplace and makes that person go inside to protect himself from the smoke.

Added to that will be the farmers' additional smoke. So that good day ain't so good anymore. On the bad air days, those with breathing problems just stay inside.

Would they care if the fireplaces or farmers were burning their stuff?

Ain't no justice.

-- KEN CANNON, Bakersfield

Concerned about traffic

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Nov. 21, 2004](#)

That was a killer idea members of the Kern County Board of Supervisors had when they voted for an additional 382 new homes to be added to the current ongoing sprawl out in the Rosedale area, which is Supervisor Ray Watson's District.

Growth is healthy and makes sense if infrastructure is in place prior to development. But this plan is farcical at best. At the public meeting regarding this project, Watson was just glowing as he heaped praise on the developing conglomerate for their great sewer system and zero emissions plan.

Headlines screaming from *The Californian's* front page denounced the horrific smog index that exists and showed statistics regarding lack of respiratory growth in our children. The recent suit filed by the Sierra Club is just.

Are we so naive as to think that there will be absolutely no pollution added to our unhealthy air as this project brings approximately 1,500 vehicle trips per day to the Rosedale area?

The most crucial and unforgiving backlash this development presents is the proliferation of more traffic on Rosedale "killer" Highway as this project sits but five miles north of it.

The transit infrastructure is just not there, people. As an example, Fresno has nice freeways crisscrossing their city to move the masses. Going ahead with this project -- knowing the transit situation -- just gives "Backwardsfield" another black eye.

In the last 12 months, three people have lost their lives in accidents on Rosedale Highway between Renfro and Heath Road. If this abominable project comes to fruition we can call that stretch of road "Watson Way."

-- MICHAEL T. ELLIOTT, Bakersfield

Time to consider a growth ban

[Modesto Bee, Letters to the Editor, Monday, Nov. 22, 2004](#)

It is amazing that this huge new sports complex in Manteca along Highway 120 is being allowed to be built without an environmental impact report. Once again, developers get their way. Who is allowing the environmental study to slide?

Of course this project (on a flood plain) will create tons more traffic, congestion and air pollution - not to mention more urban sprawl on ag land. Isn't it time for a growth ban here in the valley - while the air is still somewhat breathable?

JACK ARNOLD

Modesto

Balance growth, air needs

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, Nov. 20, 2004](#)

Editor: I left the forum hosted by the Sierra Presbyterian Church on Nov. 16 with a heavy heart. I honestly felt that many attendees would leave possessing vital information concerning the very real health hazards associated with the quality of air in the San Joaquin Valley. Instead, after politely listening for more than an hour, many participants left feeling that a group of environmental activists were trying to halt economic growth for selfish preservationist reasons.

Growth within the local area is inevitable. There remains the question of what kind of growth we, as local citizens, will accept. People from all walks of life and with many varying points of view can work together to ensure that job creation and economic development take place in a manner that creates the least adverse impact on the health and well-being of all of our citizens. It is my sincere hope that the citizens of the area carefully study the available data related to Valley air quality before endorsing economic growth that involves the movement by automobile of great numbers of people over a considerable distance.

If our air quality deteriorates much more, the county of Merced could be fined \$10,000 per day by the EPA. This equates to \$3,650,000 per year. It would take a lot of economic development to compensate for lost county services created by this drain on the county treasury.

George W. Gallaher
Atwater

Uniting will bring rail line

[Merced Sun-Star, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, Nov. 20, 2004](#)

Editor: Transportation Involves Everyone (TIE), which has the earliest roots in Merced County in high-speed rail advocacy, salutes Yosemite Valley Railroad and the self-named "Merced County High Speed Rail Committee" for coming aboard.

Advocacy for this extraordinary technology and for Castle Airport Aviation and Development Center to take a highprofile function as a transportation nucleus is a prerequisite to inclusion in any eventual statewide system.

Perhaps because of misguided allegiance placed by the Merced County High-Speed Rail Committee in the sneaky California High-Speed Rail Authority (HSRA), a back-door movement is afoot outside this region to take Castle out of the picture.

Curiously missing from the committee's report to this region about proceedings at a key state meeting on Nov. 10 in Sacramento was a bid by San Jose politico and HSRA governing board member Rod Diridon

to have Castle at least temporarily, if not permanently, set aside. The reasoning of the former Santa Clara County supervisor, who is tight with megabuck business interests that set out about five years ago to hijack the overall high-speed rail plan and make it San Jose-centric, is indeed enlightening.

Diridon warned at last week's HSRA meeting that including Castle might be an inducement to urban sprawl. Instead, under the options Diridon endorses, far more rampant and more profitable population growth would occur along a shifted high-speed rail line from near Madera to his home ground of Santa Clara County.

The problem for the Merced region is that in the capricious world of modern transportation planning, Diridon may have a point. A compelling argument can be made that if Altamont is denied, routing trains west from Merced/Atwater/Castle through the Diablo Range results in ridership, environmental and economic deficits. The numbers make Castle analytically feasible when the originally designated Altamont route is reactivated, thereby having the Madera area, Stanislaus County, San Joaquin County and more of Alameda County in the initial round of high-speed service.

High-speed rail proponents who make up a TIE task force have advocated centering on Castle because it makes sense. Beyond the former air base's transportation advantages to Merced, Atwater and the forthcoming UC campus, Castle has potential for high-tech locomotive and rail car manufacturing, even if a "maintenance hub" is logistically problematic.

TIE is enthused that the Yosemite Valley Railroad, an entity heady in enthusiasm but lacking in such rolling stock as engines and cars, has taken polluting steam engines out of its advocacy for Castle-to-Yosemite rail travel. Beyond the railroad's original wise goal of re-establishing rail links from Merced to beyond the El Portal terminus to Castle, the addition of UC Merced proximate to the former air base enhances opportunity.

Only by following Atwater's lead in uniting with fellow Valley counties such as Madera, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Sacramento for the trans-Diablo corridor to be re-established at Altamont Pass is Castle given its maximum rail potential.

Kenneth A. Gosting
Executive Director, Transportation Involves Everyone, Merced