

Ride with me

Sarah Ruby, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, April 9, 2006

I was recently paid to ride the bus all day. It was work -- at least more work than I thought it would be. Checking the schedule, finding a seat and making sure I didn't stomp the little boy playing in filth beneath my seat. All required vigilance. I was there to sample air-friendly transportation in Bakersfield. I wanted to see what draws people to board the bus 6.9 million times a year, and to ride it a total of 3.6 million miles.

Before the end of the month, all Golden Empire Transit District buses will be powered by clean-burning compressed natural gas. Driving one of these buses instead of a new diesel is the air-quality equivalent of removing 17 to 55 passenger cars from the road, according to a report by the Los Angeles-based Coalition for Clean Air.

Plus, it was a chance to sit on a bench made of recycled plastic milk bottles.

My experience on the bus was different from what you, as a commuter or sometime rider, would endure. I've ridden the bus as a civilian in other cities, and I found it relaxing, clean enough and an excellent place to hone my eavesdropping skills.

But this was a different adventure. I was on the bus from about 10 a.m. until past 4, with a rather long break for reporterly duties (lunch, phone calls, etc.). I started fresh, with boundless energy and curiosity about my fellow passengers, and ended exhausted, feeling mute and a little disgusted by the child under my seat.

Then I felt disgusted by my disgust for a boy whose mother would deride her child to fellow passengers and do nothing to get him off the floor.

Here are some practical observations on bus life:

- Buy a day pass. Who wants to fumble for 90 cents or break a dollar bill? And if you're taking more than two legs of your trip by bus, the day pass pays for itself. Once you get on board, a little machine sucks up the pass and spits it out again, and you're in.
- Enjoy the ride. As I said, the bus is clean enough. It smells fine. Even at its most crowded, I could sit without touching the person next to me. I have a bit of a thing about sitting on public-domain upholstery, but I worked through it. Soon enough I was settled in, staring out the big windows and pretending not to listen to the conversations around me.
- Get a bus driver talking. This was something I failed to do. I approached one lady driver, telling her I knew she was the one with the real stories to tell, and I think she called security.
- When a senior citizen alights, give him or her your seat. Most people were very good about this, but there's always someone who could use a reminder.
- Ignore the man at the downtown station who walks from one end to the other, and back again. And again. And again. He was doing it at noon, and was still going after 4 p.m.
- Don't be afraid. Riding the bus is fairly idiot-proof. Pay the money, take a seat. If you have questions, ask. Oh, and grab a map. You'd be surprised how many places you can reach by bus.
- Your fellow passengers might look tough, but don't believe in bus-rider bravado -- severe-yet-unfocused stare, vise-like arms across the chest. When I approached, the sternest faces melted into friendly, even bubbly characters. Deadpan came to life as most riders welcomed the chance to discuss the bus and how they came to be on it.

More than a lift

While you're cursing your life as a driver -- be it gas prices, idiots on the road or an unfortunate traffic ticket -- bus riders like Mike Garcia are joking with friends and enjoying the ride.

I met him on the No. 5 bus, which goes to Valley Plaza, among other stops. He was on his way to Super King Buffet on Ming Avenue, where he planned to treat himself to lunch.

Garcia, 60, never rode the bus until deteriorating arthritis put him in a wheelchair. He liked his van, and it never occurred to him to travel any other way.

"I finally wised up," he said.

To Garcia, public transportation is more than a cheap ride. Bus regulars meet at a downtown deli to share tips for getting by on a fixed income. That's where Garcia heard about Shafter Senior Manor, where he now lives and pays \$200 a month in rent.

Garcia "wasn't quite stable" until he found his home, he said. He'd been moving around, staying with friends, until he got the tip about senior housing.

"It worked out real good for me with all the extra help out there for us -- the disabled," he said.

Car trouble

Not everyone is a public transportation convert.

Shortly after 11 a.m., Eavon Chisley, 46, hopped on the No. 2 bus to get to work at a Boost Mobile call center. She only rides the bus when her car, a Lincoln Mark VIII, is in the shop.

It's not that there's anything wrong with the bus, she said, but "once you're used to (having a car), it's more of a status thing."

"I have an image to maintain," she said, at least half-joking.

Toward the back of the bus, Wilson Spry spoke into a cell phone. Many people talk on cell phones while riding the bus, but not many sound like James Earl Jones thumping from a sub-woofer.

He's been riding the same bus route for 35 years, he said.

These days he uses the bus to get from his downtown home to Modern Way Market, where he buys beef and hot links.

He likes the bus but usually doesn't talk to people. He didn't even really want to be talking to me, he said, yet went on to describe his illnesses, his career as a martial artist and his need for medical marijuana.

A guy like him can ride the bus without any trouble, he said.

"Look at me," he said, pointing to his shamrock-green sweatshirt, which matched his shamrock-green hat.

"You want to have problems with me?"

Don Glover takes the No. 2 GET bus to Rexland Acres. Glover likes muscle cars, but for now, he is riding the bus.

Cutting Methane May Save Lives

SCIENCE Notebook – Brief by Juliet Eilperin

Monday, April 10, 2006; Page A06

Washington Post

Reducing methane emissions from industrial polluters could save tens of thousands of lives over the next 30 years, according to a group of Princeton University and government researchers.

Their study, which was published last month in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, suggests that reducing emissions of methane -- a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming and ozone air pollution -- by 20 percent from current levels would prevent an estimated 370,000 premature deaths worldwide between 2010 and 2030.

Methane helps form ozone, which at the ground level is a pollutant linked to heart and lung ailments. The group, which included scientists and researchers at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory in Princeton, N.J., used computer models that assumed every \$100 spent to reduce a metric ton of methane emissions produced \$240 in public health savings.

"Reducing methane emissions is good for slowing global climate change, but it is also good for improving ozone air quality," said Princeton research associate Jason West, the study's lead author. "We show that when the global health benefits of reducing ozone pollution are accounted for, they can exceed the costs of methane emission controls."

Methane emissions are 10 percent lower today than in 1990, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. In 2004 the agency established a "Methane to Markets" initiative under which 17 countries agreed to promote ways to reduce methane releases. These countries produce 60 percent of global methane emissions.

Governor to focus on global warming Critics question his resolve on an issue dear to green voters

By Mark Martin, Sacramento bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Monday, April 10, 2006

Sacramento -- With his plan to build new schools and roads stalled, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is turning his focus to combatting global warming -- a burgeoning political issue that aides and pollsters say could be election-year gold for a governor in need of a major accomplishment.

But as Schwarzenegger hopes this year to woo moderate Democrats and independents by touting his green credentials, Democratic lawmakers and environmentalists are preparing to force Schwarzenegger to back up his tough rhetoric on greenhouse gases by sending him first-of-its-kind legislation that goes further than anything the governor has so far called for.

The proposal, to enact stringent reductions in the amount of carbon dioxide and other gases that power plants, manufacturers and other industries emit into the air, will spotlight whether Schwarzenegger is truly committed to earning a position among California environmental trendsetters, activists say.

"Once and for all, we will be able to see if he can make a tough choice and live up to his own promises," said Bill Magavern, a lobbyist for the Sierra Club, which has criticized Schwarzenegger at times for being less environmentally friendly than his speeches suggest.

Last Monday administration officials unveiled a long-awaited final report with several recommendations on how to reach goals Schwarzenegger laid out last summer to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in California during the next five decades. The governor is scheduled to make appearances in San Francisco and Davis this week to continue talking about the environment, a clear signal he and aides believe it's a good issue for him.

And in a news conference Tuesday, Schwarzenegger vowed to sign legislation this year to address global warming and took a direct shot at President Bush.

"I have to say that the federal government has so far fallen short with showing leadership when it comes to the environment," he said, explaining why California should take the lead on an issue that some business executives say should be addressed in Washington, D.C. "I think that I, as

governor, don't want to wait for the federal government or for any other states, as far as that goes, to see what they're doing."

Whether Schwarzenegger will continue the attack on Bush on the campaign trail this year remains to be seen -- he has hired at least five prominent Bush political advisers to help run his re-election bid.

But polls, both nationally and in California, suggest that taking on global warming, and bad-mouthing federal inaction, could be a winning issue for a Republican governor who desperately needs some Democratic voters and support from a lot of independents to remain in office.

During the last few years, voters have come to a consensus that the issue is a real problem, according to Mark Baldassare, research director for the Public Policy Institute of California. While 45 percent said in 2003 that global warming will pose a serious threat during their lifetime, 86 percent said in a poll just two years later that they were convinced it will affect current or future generations, according to the institute's studies.

And a national survey released last month by the nonpartisan group Civil Society Institute showed that 76 percent of Americans thought the federal government was not doing enough to address global warming.

Baldassare said current California voter opinions on global warming are unusual in two respects: There is bipartisan agreement on the problem, and there is significant support for more government regulation to deal with it.

The institute's 2005 poll showed, for example, that 85 percent of Democrats, 64 percent of Republicans and 81 percent of independents favored a law signed by former Gov. Gray Davis and also backed by Schwarzenegger that requires automakers to reduce car emissions by the release of 2009 models. Schwarzenegger got similarly high numbers for his proposal last year to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions: 72 percent of Democrats, 69 percent of Republicans and 74 percent of independents favor the idea.

"There is growing recognition that global warming is not just something happening in the polar regions but that it will affect Californians in a real way," Baldassare said. "It's not abstract, and it's not about the future."

With reports mounting about changes around the world likely due to global warming -- researchers recently said that quickly melting glaciers and ice sheets could cause sea levels around the world to rise as much as 13 to 20 feet by the end of the century -- the issue has become a much hotter political topic. Even Bush, whose record is condemned by environmental activists, has begun talking about breaking the country's addiction to oil.

And Schwarzenegger's potential Democratic opponents this year, state Treasurer Phil Angelides and state Controller Steve Westly, both have environmental proposals aimed at countering global warming. Westly has said he would work to enact the same greenhouse gas reductions outlined in the international Kyoto Protocol agreement that Bush refused to sign, and Angelides has called for reducing the state's gasoline and diesel fuel consumption by 25 percent during the next decade.

Schwarzenegger, meanwhile, will play up his global warming agenda this year, according to campaign aides, and administration officials say Schwarzenegger is convinced that staking out a lead position on the issue could be an important part of the governor's legacy.

"He's very sincere about this," said Terry Tamminen, Schwarzenegger's top environmental adviser.

The report released last week included several recommendations for achieving greenhouse gas reductions and noted that many steps -- such as the auto emissions law and another one signed

by Davis that requires the state's three major utilities to obtain more electricity from renewable sources -- are already under way.

Among the recommendations are requiring many industries to report the amount of greenhouse gases they emit, something not required now, and imposing a fee on gasoline to help pay for research into cleaner-burning fuels.

Schwarzenegger has already said he would oppose any new tax on gas, but Tamminen said he would support forcing business to report greenhouse gas emissions and is open to signing into law the goals he announced last summer: reducing emissions to year 2000 levels by 2010, year 1990 emissions by 2020 and 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

"It would be much stronger if it was a law," Tamminen said. The goals were included in an executive order signed by Schwarzenegger, which is less permanent than a law.

Schwarzenegger is expected to make specific comments on what specifically he will support from the report at a global warming summit he has called for Tuesday in San Francisco.

Democrats have introduced a measure that may be more restrictive on industry than the governor wants.

Written by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills (Los Angeles County) and backed by another Los Angeles County Democrat, Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, AB 32 would not only require industries to report their emissions, but also take the governor's goal for reductions by 2020 and make it a hard cap. Pavley, who authored the auto emissions bill, said a cap was essential.

"You need to put in a cap so that you send a signal that you're serious," she said.

The legislation calls on the state's Air Resources Board to develop regulations for the cap, which could include everything from tax credits to companies who significantly reduce emissions to the creation of a trading market where companies can buy and sell emissions credits.

A cap, though, has opposition from some of Schwarzenegger's key business allies such as the state Chamber of Commerce, which contends it will drive up the price of doing business in the state without solving what is a global problem.

Tamminen said the administration had not taken a position on any global warming legislation and seemed to indicate the governor was more interested in studying how an emissions credit trading system would work before implementing a cap on emissions.

"The report wisely recommends a two-year study," he said, calling any kind of cap without a thorough look at how it could be reached "hasty and irresponsible."

Schwarzenegger has spent much of the year touting his plan to invest more than \$200 billion in new roads, schools and levees, but he has so far failed to reach an agreement with the Legislature on the details. The failure to get a proposal to voters before the November election leaves him with a major gap in achievements, but Baldassare, the pollster, said the global warming issue could help that.

"He has been fairly consistent on the issue, and it's one that puts him in exactly the same place as the Democrats and independents he's trying to reach out to this year," Baldassare said. "If I were him, I would be talking a lot about this."

New Eurodiesels have come far, but still being tweaked for U.S.

Kevin Cameron, New York Times
In the S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, April 8, 2006

European roads are bustling with modern diesel cars that do not spew stinky clouds of black smoke from their tailpipes or announce their presence with a truck-stop clatter from under the hood. But with few exceptions, American drivers cannot buy these refined models.

Not that it matters. Buyers in the United States do not clamor for these thrifty cars anyway, largely because the diesels they have known were slow, quirky and not worth the fuss so long as gasoline was cheap.

But diesels are fast becoming much cooler, and much faster. Traditional diesel vices have been tamed by new technologies, and the latest Eurodiesels offer performance similar to that of gasoline-powered sport sedans. Further evidence of the diesel's performance potential came last month, when the diesel-powered Audi R10 won the 12 Hours of Sebring sports car race in Florida.

Cleaning up diesels to meet American emissions standards cannot be accomplished with the same solutions used for gasoline engines. A conventional gasoline engine compresses a mixture of fuel and air, then ignites it with an electric spark just before the piston reaches the top of its stroke. How much the mixture can be squeezed -- and therefore the fuel efficiency -- is limited by the fuel's ability to resist detonation, or pinging.

A diesel engine, though, compresses air only, and can thus compress it much more, raising its temperature to several hundred degrees. As the piston reaches the top of its travel, fuel is sprayed into the cylinder by a high-pressure injector; after a short delay, it ignites spontaneously. In both types of engines, the pressure created by the heat of the burning fuel drives the piston downward in the cylinder to produce rotary mechanical power at the crankshaft.

The appeal of a diesel engine is its greater fuel economy, a gain of 25 percent to 40 percent. European regulators allow diesels to operate under less-strict emissions standards and the benefit of a lower fuel tax in return for their ability to reduce dependence on foreign oil.

More than half of European car buyers choose diesel engines. In the United States, diesel efficiency could also help to reduce fuel imports -- or allow drivers to continue their romance with large cars and SUVs despite high fuel prices.

For a time in the 1980s diesels were attractive to buyers and regulators alike because they were so fuel-efficient and because their operation, with at least 20 percent more air than their fuel requires, suppressed hydrocarbon emissions. Then it was discovered that carbon particles in diesel exhaust carry chemicals linked to cancer.

Interest in diesels waned in the United States. But high fuel costs are again making diesels attractive, despite emissions rules that limit where they can be sold.

Controls that are effective in cleaning up gasoline engines are not always applicable to diesels, whose combustion process is a balancing act between exhaust particulates -- black smoke -- and nitrogen oxides, a precursor of smog. If combustion is made hot enough to cut carbon particles, the heat will cause nitrogen oxides to form. If combustion temperature is lowered by diluting the intake air with some exhaust gas, production of nitrogen oxides drops but combustion becomes less complete -- and unburned carbon clumps will form more particulates.

All pollution-control methods begin by minimizing emissions at their source through the use of the best technologies available. This includes fuel injection that sprays directly into a four-valve combustion chamber; use of a high-pressure common-rail injection system; and control of fuel flow by fast-acting electromagnetic or piezoelectric injector valves, capable of delivering multiple

injections for each combustion cycle. Once these features are in place, remaining emissions must be dealt with using devices further down the exhaust stream, known as aftertreatment.

When it became clear that regulators in the United States intended to hold light diesels to the same standards as gasoline vehicles, it seemed like the end of the road for such engines in this country. Research has continued nevertheless, and Mercedes-Benz, a leader in Europe, has developed technology that it says will meet emissions regulations in all 50 states.

In existing systems, particulates are sifted from the exhaust stream by fine ceramic or porous metal filters, in some cases assisted by a catalyst that enables the particles to react with excess air and burn off.

Nitrogen oxides are a more difficult problem. Two principal solutions exist. One, selective catalytic reduction, adds a supplementary source of nitrogen -- like urea or ammonia -- to the exhaust, then passes it over a catalyst. On the catalyst's active surface, nitrogen oxides in the exhaust are chemically encouraged to combine with nitrogen from the added urea to become nitrogen molecules. DaimlerChrysler plans to introduce such a system, which it calls Bluetec, on some vehicles in the United States in 2007, pending government approval.

Another system that reduces oxides makes use of a molecular trap, or adsorber, whose active ingredient is barium. Because this system requires an occasional shot of extra fuel to release the nitrogen oxides from the adsorber and chemically reduce them to harmless nitrogen, there is a small economy penalty. In addition, any sulfur in the fuel would be attracted to the adsorber, thus reducing its efficiency, so low-sulfur diesel fuels are being phased in this year in the United States. Such barium adsorbers store nitrogen oxides for several minutes, while only seconds of rich operation are required to purge the trap.

Regulators seek emissions control systems that will last the vehicle's lifetime, but as the California electric-car initiative proved, the desire for a novel technology does not automatically summon it into being. Before a new breed of diesels become must-have engines for American drivers, engineers will have to develop emissions-control systems that are simpler, more reliable and less costly to produce.

When those problems are overcome, drivers can look forward to affordable low-emissions diesel vehicles that save fuel, deliver enjoyable performance and are indistinguishable from gasoline alternatives.

Silicon Valley venture capitalist sees growth in green technology

By TERENCE CHEA - Associated Press Writer
Lodi News Sentinel, Monday, April 10, 2006

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- Silicon Valley venture capitalist John Doerr made his name and fortune with early investments in pioneering tech firms like Netscape, Amazon and Google that went from scrappy startups to household names.

Now Doerr and his firm, Kleiner Perkins Caulfield & Beyers, are placing big bets on an emerging sector he calls "green technology," which he believes could one day be at least as big as information technology or biotechnology.

Menlo Park-based Kleiner Perkins plans to set aside \$100 million of its latest \$600 million fund to technologies that help provide cleaner energy, transportation, air and water.

"This field of green-tech could be the largest economic opportunity of the 21st century," Doerr said. "There's never been a better time than now to start or accelerate a greentech venture."

As one of Silicon Valley's most respected investors, Doerr's decision to champion green technology as the next big thing is generating buzz in the venture capital community.

"When John Doerr talks, people listen," said Mark Heesen, president of the National Venture Capital Association. "John appears to have an innate ability to spot trends and execute a business plan that is actually able to take advantage of those trends."

Kleiner Perkins' plan to ramp up investment in green technology is just the latest sign of the sector's growth. Also known as clean technology, the field includes technologies related to water purification, air quality, nanotechnology, alternative fuels, manufacturing, recycling and renewable energy.

North American venture capitalists invested more than \$1.6 billion in clean-tech companies last year, a 35 percent increase over 2004, according to a report by the Cleantech Venture Network.

"It's a strong area for venture capital," said Craig Cuddebach, the network's senior vice president, whose group expects venture capital investment in the sector to double over the next three years. "It's no longer a choice between whether you will be clean or profitable."

As prices of more traditional energy sources continue to rise, the global market for clean energy sources such as biofuels, hydrogen fuel cells and solar and wind energy rose to \$40 billion last year, and is expected to increase to \$167 billion by 2015, according to a report released last month by Clean Edge Inc., a Bay Area marketing firm.

Past investments in renewable energy and other clean technologies often led to disappointing returns, largely because the technologies and market demand weren't strong enough, Heesen said. Alternative energy firms must fight for their share of a market that's tightly regulated and dominated by the oil, coal and natural gas industries.

"There are a lot of obstacles that stand in the way of creating a new way of creating energy," Heesen said.

But investors are seeing better prospects as technologies advance, more seasoned entrepreneurs enter the field and clean-tech companies generate higher revenue. Successful initial public offerings by clean-tech companies, such as Sunnyvale, Calif.-based SunPower Corp. and China's SunTech Power, have also stoked investor interest.

Venture capitalists point to the global forces driving green-tech investment: the rising cost of fuel; the economic expansion of China, India and other Asian nations; and growing worries over global warming.

"It's one of the most pressing global challenges we face," Doerr said. "It's causing the nations of the world to put an even higher priority than we have now on innovation."

Doerr sees another major trend: billions of people moving to cities in developing countries. Experts predict the number of people living in "megacities" with more than 10 million people will triple from 2 billion to 6 billion over the next 50 years, he said.

"This is the mother of all markets," Doerr said. "As those Asian economies rise, people will move from rural to urban settings. All those people will want the same things that you and I want - clean water, power and transportation."

In addition to investing in green-tech ventures, Doerr said he and Kleiner Perkins plan to "advocate for policies that reduce the climate crisis and increase energy innovation."

Vinod Khosla, a Kleiner Perkins associate who recently started his own venture capital firm, is financing a California ballot initiative that would increase taxes on oil companies to fund alternative energy.

Before it announced its latest \$100 million investment, Kleiner Perkins had invested more than \$50 million in seven green-tech ventures. Now the firm plans to step up the pace of investments in biofuels, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.

"We plan to encourage green entrepreneurs and work with other venture firms to support them," Doerr said. "I think this is one of those areas where we can do good and do well."

Big project in works

David Burger, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, April 8, 2006

In what city planners call the largest project in Bakersfield history, two developers have delivered proposals to add housing all the way west to Interstate 5 and almost as far south as Bear Mountain Boulevard. One of the developments would be built on dairy land owned by James Borba, who alongside his cousin George Borba fought a years-long and nasty fight to bring two 14,000-cow megadairies to Kern County.

George Borba's land is not part of the new proposals. The dairies, which were eventually approved, are in various stages of development.

The two new projects, which city planners talk about as a single development, would total about 11 square miles and house about 70,000 people, according to early estimates.

They would include homes, apartments, schools, shopping centers and parks -- just about everything a neighborhood needs.

That's like adding another southwest Bakersfield to southwest Bakersfield, said city planner Marc Gauthier. Completion would take about two decades, others involved said.

The proposals were dropped off at the city within the last two weeks. City planners are trying to grapple with the unprecedented scope of them, scouring the details and talking to other agencies that would be involved in the planning.

Years of studies, zone changes and government hearings lie ahead.

"How are we going to provide services?" Gauthier asked, running down questions to be answered. "What's going to happen to the streets? ... How about police and fire?"

Details are limited at this point, city planning director Jim Movius said Friday.

But the proposals for the two main developments -- Gateway, a development of D.R. Horton; and a proposal by Flying Seven Ventures -- come a little more than two months after the Kern County Local Agency Formation Commission allowed Bakersfield to add about 100 square miles to the city's "sphere of influence."

That annexation moved the future boundaries of Bakersfield all the way south to Bear Mountain Boulevard and west to Interstate 5. The two new developments nearly fill up that space.

D.R. Horton spokeswoman Cindy Pollard said planning by the company began in early 2005 and that the delivery of both developments' applications was just coincidence.

D.R. Horton will drop off a revised application Monday, Pollard said, but its general plan is for a mix of commercial, single-family and multifamily housing plus room for open space, recreation and schools.

The "build-out" time, or completion of the entire project, is 20 to 25 years, Pollard said. She said there is no set time frame for the start of the development.

Larry Pickett, spokesman for Flying Seven Ventures, was more definite on a time frame, hoping Flying Seven could reach the Bakersfield Planning Commission by fall, and that groundbreaking could begin in two or three years.

The plan for Flying Seven also has commercial and residential elements, with the latter being primarily single-family homes.

"We want to make it as much as possible to be walkable," Pickett said.

D.R. Horton is not interested in buying George Borba's land, Pollard said. The dairyman couldn't be reached for comment.

Pollard said the proximity between George Borba's dairy and the future development won't be an issue. Horton is confident Gateway's location would be free from any dairy-related nuisances, she said.

Besides, Pollard added, "Whether or not that dairy remains there, we don't know ... There's lots of interest from developers, (so any land out there) is potentially subject to developers."

James Borba said as for himself, he might want to get out of the dairy business altogether. He said it would be hard to run a dairy with all of the encroaching development.

The plans were new to John Fallgatter, president of Kern County's Smart Growth Coalition, which advocates for well-planned development.

"It isn't the growth issue (we're concerned about)," Fallgatter said. "We are going to grow. (The question is) where we grow."

The city, with incentives, should encourage developers to build in the east, where farmland wouldn't be eaten up, he said. Otherwise, Bakersfield would soon look like San Jose, Fallgatter said, which once had "phenomenal farmland but now is concrete."

With Bakersfield's population growth, expansion is inevitable, spokespeople for the developers said.

"The future growth of California is in the Central Valley," said Pickett.

County seeks greener cars

Officials want to get more hybrids for county use

By Tracey La Monica, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, April 8, 2006

Tulare County is taking steps to limit the number of SUVs it buys and to expand its fleet of fuel-efficient, low-emissions hybrid-fuel vehicles.

A new vehicle purchase policy to be presented to the county Board of Supervisors Tuesday is designed to increase the percentage of hybrid-fuel vehicles from the current 6 percent to 25 percent in 2015.

Hybrid-fuel vehicles typically are gasoline-powered when speed or power is required, as it is on a freeway. In town, the vehicle is battery powered. The battery is charged by the gas engine. The best known hybrid-fuel vehicles are the Toyota Prius and the Honda Civic.

The change to hybrid fuel vehicles is being driven by County Administrative Officer Brian Haddix, who also wants to cut the use of fuel-hungry sport utility vehicles.

"I'm steering away from sport utility vehicles," Haddix said Friday.

"They are more expensive to buy, and if you have a finite amount of dollars ... the idea is to stretch your dollars."

The county's vehicle fleet currently numbers 865. Fifty-six are hybrids - used by the Resource Management Agency, Health and Human Services Agency and the Agricultural Commissioner's Office - and 21 are SUVs. Most of the county's SUVs are used by the agriculture commissioner's office and law enforcement agencies.

The new policy, however, will not affect law enforcement agencies. They will not be required to give up SUVs or use more hybrids.

Others, however, will have to get Haddix's approval to order a new SUV.

The county won't be rushing out to buy a new fleet of hybrid-fuel vehicles.

Tom Sherry, associate director of Resource Management Agency, said the change will occur when vehicles are up for replacement because of age, high mileage or mechanical failure. Then, he said, a person who was driving a gasoline-powered sedan might get a hybrid-fuel car.

The Health and Human Services Agency has used hybrids for the past several years.

"Our experience has been very, very good," said John Davis, director of the agency. "They are very comfortable, one doesn't think that they will be. They ride well ... we've had very little problem with them."

The agency, which has more than 200 cars, 33 of them hybrids, has vans and other vehicles for special uses.

"As far as the general fleet -- it's all going to be hybrids," Davis said.

The average Honda Civic hybrid ranges from \$22,000 to \$25,000 while a comparable gasoline-driven Honda Civic starts at \$16,000.

The \$6,000 increase is considered an acceptable cost which is quickly recovered.

"We get that money back through the life of the car," Davis said. "You are paying considerably less for gas."

The Visalia Honda dealership said the policy was a step in the right direction.

"It's better for the environment ... you are getting better gas mileage," said David Garver, a sales representative.

The Honda Civic hybrid is one of two hybrids sold to the county motor pool and is popular with Visalia residents.

"Our biggest problem is we can't keep them in," Garver said.

The Agricultural Commissioner's office has three hybrids. Agriculture Commissioner Gary Kunkel drives one, a Toyota Prius he has driven since 2001 when he got the job.

Traveling throughout the county and to Sacramento, Kunkel said the hybrid has adequate room and power.

"I like it better than I thought I would," Kunkel said. "I was surprised at how well I did like it."

Kunkel said the Prius averages 42 miles a gallon.

In Carpool Lanes, Hybrids Find Cold Shoulders

Other motorists gripe that drivers of the fuel-efficient vehicles are slowing the HOV flow.

By Amanda Covarrubias, Los Angeles Times, April 10, 2006

When California allowed solo occupants of hybrid cars to use carpool lanes last year, many thought they were merging onto a narrow strip of car culture heaven.

But increasingly, hybrid owners say they feel like the victims of road rage.

Carpoolers accuse them of driving too slowly in order to maximize their fuel efficiency, and of clogging diamond lanes that were once clear.

Hybrid motorists even have a term for the ill will: "Prius backlash."

"There's a mentality out there that we're a bunch of liberal hippies or we're trying to make some statement on the environment," said Travis Ruff, a real estate agent from Newbury Park who drives a Toyota Prius. "People are a lot less friendly than when I drove a Mercedes."

Caltrans, which has issued carpool-lane stickers for about 50,000 hybrid cars, plans to study the effect of hybrids on carpool lanes, starting with the 405, 210 and 105 freeways.

"There's not enough excess capacity to absorb the hybrids," said James Moore, director of USC's transportation engineering program. "I think the foreseeable outcome here is that the congestion advantage we traditionally attribute to [carpool] lanes will disappear."

A debate over carpool-lane congestion also is occurring in Virginia, which like California allows solo hybrid drivers to use the lanes. Last month, the Virginia Legislature placed curbs on hybrid drivers using the lanes in peak hours, requiring three or more people per vehicle, except for those grandfathered in.

The California Legislature approved the hybrids in carpool lanes as a way of encouraging the use of the low-emission, high-fuel-economy vehicles.

The law grants carpool-lane access to hybrids that get at least 45 mpg. So far, only the Toyota Prius, Honda Civic and Honda Insight qualify. The vehicles use small internal-combustion engines in combination with electric motors to increase gas mileage and reduce air pollution. Larger hybrid SUVs and luxury sedans with solo drivers are not allowed in carpool lanes.

From the beginning, the law has prompted complaints from carpoolers. But in recent months the criticism has grown louder as carpoolers accuse hybrid drivers of clogging the lanes, also known as high-occupancy vehicle lanes.

"Prius drivers tend to drive slower, and it makes the HOV lanes slower," said Theresa Poprac, who commutes on the 405 Freeway every morning from her home near Los Angeles International Airport to her job as head of sales for an educational software company in Costa Mesa.

The chatter is more biting in Internet car chat rooms, where some carpoolers have declared themselves "hybrid haters."

"These [drivers] barely go 65 mph and allow no one to pass them on the right," fumed one driver on the Edmunds.com car town hall. "Talk about road rage!"

"Go with the flow, or get the heck outta the way!!!," wrote another in support.

Beyond the driving habits of hybrid users, carpoolers gripe that all those Priuses are beginning to clog the diamond lanes. On some freeways, it's clear hybrid drivers are shaving substantial minutes off their commute by going in the carpool lane. But on others, that doesn't appear to be the case.

Mar Vista resident and hybrid owner Jan Strnand, who often drives the 405 Freeway to Carson, said he has not been impressed with the program.

"Much of the time, the HOV lanes and standard lanes are going at the same rates, so there's no advantage," said Strnand, a television writer. "You do the math.... How many can you add [to the carpool lane] before it's more of a deterrent than it is a help?"

Assemblywoman Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills), who proposed the hybrid carpool-lane bill, said most hybrid users tell her they love the privilege. Still, she acknowledged that on some freeways, the time saved during rush hour has been a question — something the state study will seek to sort out.

But the Prius backlash isn't confined to California's carpool lanes. On a recent episode of Comedy Central's "South Park," one of the cartoon characters persuades everyone in town to buy a hybrid car. But hybrids end up creating their own air pollution. Not smog. "Smug."

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Saturday, April 8, 2006:](#)

Trucks from Mexico may deliver pollution

Marylee Shrider, Californian Staff Columnist

If there is anything we've learned in the dozen years since the United States, Mexico and Canada signed the North American Free Trade Agreement, it's that trade is anything but free. In fact, it may cost us dearly once U.S. roadways are opened to Mexico's older, diesel-chugging trucks, a condition of the NAFTA agreement signed by former President Bill Clinton.

As if it isn't already hard enough to take a deep breath around here.

Big rigs from Mexico are restricted to operating within 20 miles of the border, which means, in California, the added pollution has pretty much been San Diego's problem.

Now, with a federal lifting of the border-truck policy imminent, those trucks may soon wheeze their way through Kern County and on up through the state.

Keeping in mind that "imminent" in government parlance could mean anything from a day to a decade -- no one knows for sure when those trucks will get here. But in an area where pollution is so bad that residents can't light their fireplaces without a regulatory green light, it's unconscionable that these trucks be allowed through until they meet the same air pollution standards as domestic trucks.

How about a little equity here?

A report released in March by the state Air Resources Board estimates the daily truck traffic from Mexico will increase from 3,500 to 17,500, spewing about 50 tons of smog in its wake.

Roughly a quarter of those trucks are pre-1980 models, which means their engines emit "very high" levels of nitrogen oxide and particulate emissions. A large majority of these trucks were built before 1993, according to the report.

Mexico has not revised its emission standards to reflect recent U.S. standards, a reality that could threaten air quality for Kern County residents if and when those trucks come rumbling up I-5.

"We've been able in 14 years to decrease the amount of pollution industry puts into our air," says Brenda Turner, spokesperson for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "A large source of pollution like the Mexican trucks would offset what we've been able to do."

The air district has no regulatory authority when it comes to cars, so if emission levels go up, they'll have to enforce even tighter controls on the local level.

State air officials say they and federal regulators are collaborating with the Mexican government in an effort to reduce the spread of diesel exhaust. In San Diego, a pilot program funded by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency that retrofits older trucks with pollution control devices shows promise. That's good.

Problem is, trucks from Mexico are now twice as likely as California trucks to violate the state's emissions standards. State air officials say regulators at border stations can't stop every truck that passes through and only about half of the fines against Mexican trucks have been paid. That's not good.

In Kern County, residents and local industry must do their part to reduce pollution or pay the price. Shouldn't it be the same for those just passing through?

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, April 9, 2006:](#)

On the warm seat

EPA chief must choose between his bosses and the environment.

EPA administrator Stephen Johnson is well aware that California's trend-setting environmental laws have helped clean up cars and motor fuels nationwide. Johnson now has a chance to let California lead again. Whether he will — or will be allowed to — is another matter indeed.

To combat global warming, California approved rules two years ago requiring auto manufacturers to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles. Pollution from cars and light

trucks would need to drop 25% by 2009. Emissions from heavier trucks and sport utility vehicles would need to drop 18%.

With the federal government refusing to act on global warming, 10 other states have adopted California's standards. Auto manufacturers have sued in response. That's no surprise. Nor is it surprising that the White House is giving them plenty of cover.

This week, Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta issued what he called "ambitious" new fuel standards on cars and trucks. What he didn't mention is that his 371-page rule includes a section that overrides any fuel standards set by individual states. The Bush administration contends that California's emission rules are the equivalent of new fuel economy standards. It's an artful interpretation, and it mirrors the legal arguments of the automakers.

Because California began regulating air pollution before the federal government did, it has special authority to set its own vehicle pollution standards. But to do so, it needs a waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Johnson could quickly issue such a waiver, and he is being urged to do so by 21 U.S. senators, including those from California.

Johnson is in a tough spot. Reports suggest he was left out of the loop while Mineta's agency came up with its rule. Now Johnson must make a decision that will either anger his bosses or undermine states that are taking a proactive, innovative approach toward a serious threat.

We have little hope Johnson will make the heroic choice, but he might with enough pressure from certain wings of the Republican Party, such as that occupied by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. The governor should use some of his clout in Washington, if he hasn't already.

Ideally, states wouldn't need to be setting their own rules on greenhouse gases if the Bush administration were taking the problem seriously and working to reduce emissions through international treaties.

Sadly, Bush is like Nero on the topic of climate change. He fiddles while the planet burns.

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Sunday, April 9, 2006:](#)

State steps up on combatting global warming

IF WASHINGTON won't, then Sacramento will. This state has set its own course many times over: on car tailpipe emissions, a ban on coastal drilling and abortion law. Now comes the biggest go-it-alone bet in a long time: greenhouse-gas controls.

Both Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, an avowed greenie, and pro-environment Democrats have produced comparable plans that would put California on a tough pollution diet. By 2020, the state must roll back greenhouse gas emissions -- mainly carbon dioxide -- to 1990 levels.

It's a drop of 25 percent that will bring changes across the state in the ways people work and play. But it also sends a message to the rest of a nation that is neglecting mounting danger signs and passing the buck to future generations.

Other plans to rein in California's air pollution are already underway from farms to freeways, but the attack on global warming goes after greenhouse gases left largely unchecked. These emissions form a heat-trapping ceiling in the atmosphere and are blamed by most scientists for weather swings, higher temperatures, changes in vegetation and wildlife, and future rises in sea levels. In recent years, California state researchers have reported more rain, less snow, floods and beach erosion traceable to a warmer climate.

Nobody from the White House to most state capitals has wanted to face the politically risky choices needed to curb industrial emissions, driving habits and everyday life. That's where California aims to be different.

What makes change possible is a break from Sacramento gridlock. Both the Republican governor and Democratic leaders are on the same wavelength in proposing a major goal and directing state agencies to get there. Heard this before? The governor's vaunted infrastructure package, pegged at \$222 billion over 10 years, splintered when it landed in a suspicious Legislature.

And it could happen again with greenhouse controls, which have already come under attack from the state Chamber of Commerce. But the governor's staff has vetted the plan in public meetings and collected 15,000 comments, mostly favorable. Democrats likewise have sounded out their plan in a bill (AB32) carried by Assemblymember Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills. Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez has made the bill a top priority.

The plans are more alike than not. Both establish a definite deadline and call for a cap on emissions. The plan by the governor's team leans on trading pollution credits that reward clean businesses while costing dirty ones more. The Democratic plan leans on flat cap on emissions and turns over the regulatory rules to the state smog board. Both plans avoid a tax on fuel to raise research funds, an idea that Schwarzenegger opposed.

The controls aim mainly at industry: oil refineries, cement kilns, dump sites -- even manure ponds on big dairies, which give off lung-clogging gas. State law has already begun mandating caps on power plants. Cleaner tailpipe rules approved in 2004 are tied up in a lawsuit brought by automakers and joined by the Bush administration.

The car emission lawsuit illustrates the problem. Washington isn't about to do anything on global warming. President Bush is a famous non-believer when it comes to the science behind the greenhouse effect.

Last June, Schwarzenegger broke with this antediluvian view and declared the greenhouse effect was real in a speech in San Francisco. He directed Alan Lloyd, head of the state Environmental Protection Agency, to come up with a plan. After fits and starts, including the dropping of a politically touchy tax, this plan emerged.

On Tuesday, from the same perch in City Hall, the governor will explain his year-later outlook on global warming controls. He'll do it before an audience of enviros, scientists and skeptical business leaders.

There's no question that the subject is loaded. Raising clean-air standards will impose costs. Chamber of Commerce President Allan Zaremberg believes the state will lose jobs and end up importing products from high-polluting competitors, a double whammy that will punish California.

But supporters have a twofold answer. First, states or countries that have neglected the problem will, over time, follow California's lead because of local pressure. If this state, now the planet's 12th largest emitter of greenhouse gases, can reform, so can others. Secondly, the conversion to a cleaner industrial landscape will churn out more jobs, not fewer, as new businesses develop to meet the 2020 goals. A UC Berkeley study predicts 20,000 new jobs from such work.

Business may not be united in opposition. Silicon Valley is backing the initiative with notables from Sun Microsystems, Google and the venture capital world writing the governor. Several major oil companies, such as Shell and BP, are already on a voluntary state reporting list of greenhouse emissions.

There remain serious risks in redirecting the state's economy. The suggested system of trading pollution credits is still in its infancy. Policymakers have ducked the question of money for

research, enforcement and new programs. Lawsuits may surface as state rule-making enters new areas.

But the governor and Democrats are right to take on these risks. They haven't dodged a future challenge and are working together. California has a shown way to be a leader once again.

Why do anything at all?

A study ordered by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger predicted these effects of unchecked greenhouse gas emissions:

Average temperatures would rise by 3 degrees within 100 years.

The state's snowpack, which is half the water supply, would diminish by 75 to 90 percent.

Los Angeles and the Central Valley, which already have the worst smog levels in the nation, would see a jump from 25 to 75 percent in pollution-heavy bad days.

Rising sea levels in the Bay Delta, water shortages and hotter weather would damage California crops.

Floods would strain the state levee system.

Higher temperatures would damage forests and increase chances of wildfires.

Warmer weather would push demand for air conditioning, driving up prices and demand for more emission-producing power plants.

Source: www.climatechange.ca.gov

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, April 9, 2006:](#)

'Growth at any cost'

It's very sad to see the bucolic beauty of the San Joaquin Valley being decimated. Acre after acre of productive, irreplaceable agricultural land is being converted into jam-packed, expensive housing tracts.

Once known as the bread basket of the world, the Valley is now famous for its air pollution. What better basis for a solid economy could there be than food production?

Too many politicians and developers are committed to growth at any cost. They are responsible for our diminishing water supply, spent landfills, increased air pollution, and disappearing affordable housing.

While these vital issues have yet to be resolved, uncontrolled growth advocates are not dissuaded. They are charging ahead pell-mell, leading the Valley on the road to ruination.

Shirley J. Secrest, Fresno

[Letter to the Editor, Washington Post, Saturday, April 8, 2006](#)

Clear the Air for the Kids

The American Public Health Association applauds Montgomery County's efforts to create a vision for development that reduces sprawl and dependence on cars ["Planners Imagine a More Walkable Montgomery," Metro, April 3]. Likewise, the District's smoking ban went into effect this week, helping to clear the air for those who work and live here.

These steps are critical because, across the country, healthy communities for children are being engineered out of existence. Car-dependent suburban sprawl contributes to childhood obesity and asthma. The percentage of school-age children who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years, and asthma, due in part to air pollution, has become the No. 1 chronic

childhood disease. Nearly three out of every five children between the ages of 4 and 11 are exposed to secondhand smoke.

We urge other communities in the metro area to follow the lead of Montgomery County and the District. By designing healthy communities, we can make sure our children have every opportunity to grow up healthy.

GEORGES C. BENJAMIN
*Executive Director, American Public Health Association
Washington*

Editorial

The state of clean air

Los Angeles Times, April 10, 2006

CALIFORNIANS UNDERSTAND BETTER than most, and have for longer than most, that there is not an infinite supply of fresh air. After L.A. became as famous for its smog as for its celebrities, California jumped ahead of other states and the federal government in taking steps to counter air pollution from cars, with its first regulations of vehicle emissions in 1959 — more than a decade before the founding of the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Now California is poised to lead the way again, with legislation to fight global warming by setting mandatory standards on greenhouse emissions. The goal is by 2020 to cut such emissions to 1990 levels. The federal government would do well to do what it did decades ago and follow California's example.

The state's pioneering role as a fighter of air pollution is recognized by federal law, which gives California the power to set tougher air-quality standards than the federal government, though the EPA has veto power over the state's regulations. Other states can choose between the federal rules or California's.

The result has been extraordinary progress in cleaning up the air, though there is a long way to go. The number of smog alerts in the Los Angeles area dropped from 121 in 1977 to seven in 1996, and since then such alerts have all but disappeared. At the same time, the state still has the second-most-polluted air in the nation.

The National Research Council, a nonpartisan panel that advises Congress, spent two years studying whether the two-tiered system of air regulation works. The council's report last month praised California's regulations, saying the state is "a proving ground for new emissions-control technologies that benefit California and the rest of the nation." The benefits, it said, generally outweigh the occasional trouble that manufacturers have in following two sets of pollution standards.

The bigger problem, according to the report, is that California's proposed rules too often get bogged down awaiting EPA action. The new rule to cut down on emissions from leaf-blowers and lawnmowers is a case in point: The EPA has been sitting on it for four years. California's proposed standards for greenhouse-gas emissions from cars also require the EPA's nod and shouldn't have to wait for approval.

Even as reports reconfirm that Arctic areas are deteriorating more dramatically than even alarmists had expected, the Bush administration has been resisting any meaningful moves against global warming. That's not surprising for an administration that doesn't want to follow existing anti-pollution laws. Last month, a federal appeals court blocked the administration from loosening rules for older coal-fired power plants, saying the weaker rules violate the Clean Air Act.

It's bad enough the feds aren't taking the leading role in cleaning the air and reducing the threat of global warming. The least they can do is allow California to send a message to other states, and to the world, about what governments can do about these problems.