

Modesto chamber joins air fees lawsuit Groups oppose asking developers to pay for contributing to sprawl

By MARK GROSSI - THE FRESNO BEE

Modesto Bee, Thursday, June 29, 2006, also in Fresno Bee, Wed. June 28, 2006

Builders, a taxpayer group and the Modesto Chamber of Commerce filed a lawsuit this week to stop a rule that imposes air pollution fees on developers contributing to city sprawl.

The rule amounts to an illegal tax because it doesn't relate directly to air pollution emissions, according to the lawsuit, which was filed Tuesday in Fresno County Superior Court. Local air authorities estimate the fees would raise \$103 million from construction over the next three years.

Builders question the fairness of applying air cleanup costs that they must pass on to buyers of new homes and businesses, while owners of existing structures pay nothing.

"There's an equity issue," said Nathan Magsig, Clovis mayor and head of the Coalition for Urban Renewal Excellence, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. "And it does nothing to assist with affordable housing."

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, named as a defendant, has not reviewed the case.

Spokeswoman Kelly Morphy said the district stands behind the rule, which was required by a law the Legislature passed in 2003. It was approved by the district board in December.

"We feel the rule meets the requirements of law," Morphy said.

The goal of the rule is to reduce bad air caused by traffic going back and forth from new homes, businesses, commercial buildings and schools built on the edge of cities.

Builders can install airenhancing features such as outdoor outlets for electric lawn mowers, bike lanes and energy-efficient water heaters to help reduce fees that will be assessed for traffic pollution.

Money raised from the rule would pay for clean-running buses and street sweepers, and other fixes to reduce the smog, dust and soot that make the valley one of the worst air basins in the country.

No money has been collected

The fees are estimated at about \$780 per house this year, but they will escalate to almost \$1,800 over the next few years. The building industry estimates the fee will raise \$225 million over the next five years.

The rule has been in effect for several months, but no fees have been collected as air authorities review developments of more than 50 housing units. The first fees might be collected later this year, officials said.

Magsig said it was unfair to assess only developments larger than 50 units, adding that the air district did not guarantee that pollution would be cleaned up.

"This litigation is a necessary last resort since the district failed to address the concerns of members in this community" in developing the rule, he said in a written statement.

Aside from Magsig's group and the Modesto chamber, other plaintiffs include the California Building Industry Association and the Fresno-based Valley Taxpayers Coalition.

An official from the nonprofit group Environmental Defense, which supported the rule last year, said she was disappointed by the lawsuit.

"I would have thought builders would be more responsible to protect their residents from air pollution," said Kathryn Phillips, who is based in Oakland.

News from the San Joaquin Valley

from The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Fresno Bee and San Francisco Chronicle, Thursday, June 29, 2006

A group of builders sued regional air regulators to halt a rule requiring developers to pay air pollution fees.

The lawsuit filed Tuesday in Fresno County Superior Court claims the fees amount to illegal taxes because they don't relate directly to air pollution emissions.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District charges fees for new development in the rapidly growing valley, home to some of nation's worst air pollution.

The \$780 per house fee would buy clean-running buses and street sweepers, as well as pay for other fixes to reduce smog, dust and soot.

Builders argued that the rules are unfair because existing homeowners pay nothing.

Developers can reduce the fees by creating bike lanes and installing energy-efficient water heaters.

The air district did not immediately comment on the lawsuit but said it stood by the rule.

Missouri senator won't impede new pollution standards for now

By SAM HANANEL, The Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian, Fresno Bee and San Francisco Chronicle, Thursday, June 29, 2006

Missouri Republican Sen. Kit Bond said Wednesday he will hold off -- for now -- on trying to stop regulators from setting new pollution standards for lawn mowers and other small engines.

The lawmaker's comments were good news to California lawmakers, locked in a three-year struggle with Bond over their efforts to impose tougher emissions standards for small engines that are a major pollution source.

Bond has long argued that stricter regulations pose safety risks and would cost manufacturing jobs at engine-maker Briggs & Stratton, a large employer in Missouri.

But environmental groups accuse Bond of ignoring pollution to protect Briggs & Stratton.

The Environmental Protection Agency has scheduled a hearing Thursday where California officials will argue for a waiver giving the state authority to write its own tough emissions rules for small engines.

Bond pledged not use his position on the influential Senate Appropriations Committee to interfere with the process. The committee is considering a spending bill this week that includes funding for the EPA.

"I was proud to fight a proposed California rule on small engines that would have threatened over 5,000 manufacturing-related jobs in Missouri and 20,000 jobs across the country," Bond said.

Bond said he will keep tabs on how the new regulations are implemented "but I do not believe further legislative action is necessary at this time."

The dispute goes back to 2003, when Bond won passage of a law to prevent any state except California from writing small engine emissions rules that are more stringent than the federal Clean Air Act. For the rest of the country, Bond wanted the EPA to study national uniform standards.

But last year, Bond insisted that California could not move forward with its plan until the EPA completed a new study to determine whether catalytic converters used to reduce air pollution created fire risks.

The EPA study, released earlier this year, concluded the devices are safe.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., urged the EPA to move quickly so California can implement its rules by January 2007.

"These rules are extremely important for improving the poor air quality breathed by tens of millions of Californians," Feinstein said.

While Bond says he won't interfere with California's plan this time, he said he wants to see how the national rulemaking process goes to make sure they are fair to manufacturers.

Frank O'Donnell, director of the environmental advocacy group Clean Air Watch, said small engines are a major source of pollution that need to be cleaned up around the nation.

"It's high time that Sen. Bond stopped throwing his weight around to protect one special-interest polluter," O'Donnell said.

A Briggs & Stratton spokeswoman did not return calls seeking comment.

Crowd gathers to protest Reynolds Ranch Project

By Rebecca Adler - News-Sentinel Staff Writer
Lodi News Sentinel, Thursday, Jun 29, 2006

Although few residents made official comments about the Reynolds Ranch Project to the Lodi Planning Commission on Wednesday night, a large group gathered outside to show their contempt for the proposed plan.

About 10 members of the Moose Lodge were fired up about the fate of their organization, which will be forced to move if the project is approved by the Lodi City Council in August and LAFCO later in the year.

"Moose Lodge has been open since '79 and if this passes we'll be forced to sell," Peggy Morrone said. "It's just very disheartening that they can rip us up after so long in the community."

Morrone and her husband have lived in Lodi for 26 years and have been members of the Moose Lodge for 25 of those years. In that time she said she's seen many changes in the city and doesn't think they are all bad, but she is concerned to see so much change planned for the future.

But community concerns weren't the topic of discussion at the planning commission meeting.

Commissioners met Wednesday night for a public hearing on an environmental report about the project, which was released in early June and will be taken to the city for approval after the public comment period closes on July 24.

The project, largely hinging on Blue Shield of California buying in, will develop 220 acres in southern Lodi into retail, office and residential areas.

Once the initial steps for approving the project have been completed, Blue Shield will begin

building and is expected to be occupying its building on Harney Road near Highway 99 by 2008, said Peter Pirnejad, city planning manager.

The 1,084 proposed homes wouldn't be completed until 2030, Pirnejad added.

Ann Cerney, a Lodi resident who spoke at the meeting, said she was skeptical of the environmental report paid for by the developer, San Joaquin Valley Land Company.

"There are three detrimental impacts that every project in the valley faces and must address," she said, "The air quality, the water resources and quality of the water and traffic and transport. Each of these must be addressed regionally, not locally."

Within the report, air quality is addressed as the only unavoidable impact the project would have on the city.

Pirnejad has said air quality problems cannot be avoided with any project because, with the addition of traffic and vehicles to the area, pollution will worsen.

Cerney said her concern is that the pollution problem is much larger and should be looked at on a regional scale because the entire Central Valley is suffering from smog.

"Even the building industry recognizes that development causes smog in the valley," she told the board, "And there's recognition on behalf of all parties that air quality is a problem for the entire region. This should be addressed."

Will Eckel, the only other resident to speak to the commission, agreed.

"We already have very poor air quality in the San Joaquin Valley and this is only something that will worsen it," Will Eckel added.

Eckel, the only other resident to speak to the commission, said he is more worried about the line between Lodi and Stockton becoming further blurred, and the San Joaquin Valley being transformed into another San Fernando Valley.

"At the risk of pointing out what should be obvious, this is another step in the merging of Lodi with Stockton," he said.

Others, like Tom Kettleman, share his fear of too much growth, but the commission can only reply to comments about the environmental impacts. It will be up to the City Council to weigh public opinion about the project.

But Kettleman and others at the meeting said their opinions won't make any difference.

"I don't want it, but I can't stop it either," Kettleman said. "There's a lot of money to be made with this project."

Reynolds Ranch breakdown

- 220 acres total
 - 1,084 new homes
 - 40 acres for retail
 - 20 acres for Blue Shield of California call center and operations building
 - 14 acres for schools
 - 12.7 acres of parks and open space
 - Five acres for a mini-storage facility
 - One acre for a fire station
- Source: Lodi Planning Commission.

\$2 million Valley Blueprint plan gets input

Regional planning may be met with resistance.

By Russell Clemings

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, June 29, 2006

Land use planning seminars usually don't draw much of a crowd.

But Wednesday was an exception, as about 650 people attended the kickoff of a two-year effort to define what the San Joaquin Valley will look like 20 years from now.

The San Joaquin Valley Blueprint project will spend \$2 million in state funds to plan for a population that is expected to double by 2040.

"That's equivalent to 10 new Fresnos" between Stockton and Bakersfield, said Richard Cummings, director of research and communication for the event's organizers at the Great Valley Center in Modesto.

By late 2007, the effort is expected to publish a set of goals for areas such as transportation, economic development, housing and environmental protection.

Local governments would then be able to use those goals to guide them in developing or modifying land use plans and similar documents.

Other products will include plans for better coordination of major infrastructure, such as highways, with local land use decisions, and a joint pool of data to analyze planning decisions and their effects.

Modest as it is, it may be the most significant step that Valley leaders have ever taken toward regional planning. As such, however, it is likely to meet with skepticism if not resistance among local leaders reluctant to cede control over land use and related matters.

The center's president, former Modesto Mayor Carol Whiteside, acknowledged as much in characterizing the event's audience of politicians, business leaders and interest group representatives.

"Two-thirds of them are enthusiastic and interested, and the other third is here to make sure we don't do anything bad," she quipped.

Nevertheless, Mark Baldassare, director of a newly released Public Policy Institute of California survey of 2,000 valley residents, said the results showed widespread public support for regional planning to deal with issues such as air pollution, population growth and loss of farmland.

"There's really a very strong desire out there for the kind of exercise that you're engaged in," Baldassare said. "They recognize these problems in the region ... and one of the answers that

they say needs to be explored more fully is the idea of local governments thinking and acting more regionally."

Much of Wednesday's schedule consisted of small groups working to brainstorm various issues.

At the back of a cavernous room in the Fresno Convention Center, giant posterboards were laden with yellow sticky notes on which attendees had scribbled their thoughts on issues that needed attention: "Water; where is it going to come from?" read one example.

In coming weeks and months, Councils of Governments in each of the Valley's eight counties will be seeking more public comment. Later, local and regional committees will formulate "vision" plans setting forth their consensus on issues ranging from transportation to farmland preservation.

Tulare County Supervisor Connie Conway urged those in attendance to make their voices heard.

"We have a real opportunity, finally, all of us together, to be masters of our own destiny," she said.

News in brief from Northern California

By The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Thursday, June 29, 2006

SACRAMENTO, (AP) -- A survey of residents from Redding to Bakersfield shows most are happy with their homes in the Central Valley.

Three-quarters think their communities are excellent or good. The Public Policy Institute of California poll of 2,002 residents found satisfaction is even higher in the Sacramento metropolitan region, where 82 percent are satisfied.

"These numbers are just amazing," said survey director Mark Baldassare. "It shows that people really value the quality of life in the Central Valley."

That's particularly true in El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties.

"Sacramento metro, from the perspective of the Central Valley, seems to be the one region that has the best of both worlds: high quality of life and a strong economy," Baldassare said.

Of course the survey also found problems, including traffic congestion, high housing costs, dwindling farmland and increasing crime. There is increased concern about air pollution, particularly in southern counties, while a lack of good jobs is seen as a bigger problem in northern counties. Public transit, flood control and deteriorating levees are the biggest worries in the Sacramento region.

Baldassare said residents are concerned about the valley's future as it evolves from a 400-mile stretch of farmland to a more populated region.

"They want to preserve and protect it — they worry it might be an endangered species because of the growth," he said.

The survey was conducted May 3-11 and had an error margin of plus or minus two percentage points.

Asbestos-removal contractors not insulated from costly fines Hayward firm one of two cited for failure to comply with guidelines

by Douglas Fischer

Triv-Valley Herald, Thursday, June 29, 2006

Regional air quality cops fined two asbestos removal contractors \$430,000 for a string of violations dating to 2002, the largest asbestos-related fines the air district has ever levied.

Roseville-based USA Properties Fund Inc. and USA Multifamily Management Inc. were dinged \$300,000 for using untrained workers to remove asbestos-tainted ceiling material from the Clayton Crossing apartment complex in Concord, the district announced Wednesday.

And Hayward-based Synergy Enterprises Inc. must pay \$130,000 in penalties for undertaking 250 asbestos abatement jobs from 2002 to 2003 without notifying the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, as required by law.

"The air district is serious about prosecuting asbestos abatement contractors and property owners who fail to comply with ... regulations," said Jack Broadbent, the district's executive officer, in a statement.

Of the two violations, Clayton Crossing is the most serious. According to the air district, the property manager hired laborers untrained and uncertified in asbestos abatement to remove the tainted ceiling material. Those workers, the district said, failed to take even basic precautions as they worked, potentially exposing themselves and residents to harmful asbestos fibers.

A call to USA Properties was not returned Wednesday afternoon.

In the Synergy case, the company used licensed workers, properly completed the work and even charged clients the district's required notification fees, according to the air district. But the contractor never transferred those fees — totaling \$59,885 — to the district.

Synergy president Steve Shallenberger attributed that lapse to an undiscovered heroin addiction of the former employee tasked with making those payments.

"It's a very unfortunate tragedy for this person and also for our company," he said. "It wasn't intentional by any means."

The district collected back fees and a \$130,000 fine, for a total payment of \$189,885.

Japan to swap gas cars for ethanol ones

By HANS GREIMEL, Associated Press Writer

in the Sacramento Bee and San Francisco Chronicle, Thursday, June 29, 2006

TOKYO (AP) - Japan plans to fight global warming and surging oil prices by requiring that all vehicles on the road be able to run on an environment-friendly mix of ethanol and regular gasoline by 2030, an official said Thursday.

The new policy, adopted by the Environment Ministry this month, will require all new cars to be able to run on a blend of 10 percent ethanol, an alcohol fuel often made from corn or sugar, and 90 percent gasoline, starting in 2010, said Takeshi Sekiya, an official at the ministry's global warming division. Costs and implementation are still being studied.

The switch to ethanol underlines the new urgency felt by industrialized countries trying to rein in the effects of greenhouse gases and reduce dependence on foreign oil.

Ethanol blends are already widely used in Brazil, and on Wednesday, U.S. automakers announced plans to double production of vehicles using the so-called flexible-fuel technology by 2010.

"The main goal is to counter global warming," Sekiya said. "Adopting the new technology is not that difficult."

Japan currently allows ethanol mixtures of up to 3 percent at the nation's pumps, but in practice "almost no cars" run on the fuel, Sekiya said.

To encourage the market, the ministry will ramp up production of ethanol fuel on the southern island of Miyako, where a plentiful supply of sugar cane will be converted into fuel for the island's estimated 20,000 cars in the next three years.

The goal is to have all cars on the nation's roads capable of running on the new fuel by 2030.

By mixing in the plant-based fuel, scientists can reduce the harmful greenhouse gases churned out in vehicle exhaust - a top priority for Japan, which is the world's second-largest economy and a top air pollution offender, despite being a key driver behind to the Kyoto Protocol - an international agreement to cut global output of carbon dioxide by 2012.

Japan also imports nearly all its oil and is keen to find alternative energy sources.

Yet many obstacles remain to a smooth switchover, starting with the fact that ethanol fuel is more expensive than gasoline and contains about two-thirds of the fuel value. Japan's goal of a 10-percent ethanol blend also falls short of the standards being met by U.S.

automakers, which are already producing cars that can run on 85-percent ethanol blends.

General Motors Corp., Ford Motor Co. and DaimlerChrysler AG's Chrysler Group have produced 5 million flexible fuel vehicles that can run on 85 percent ethanol. They are expected to produce an additional 1 million of the vehicles this year, and Wednesday's new commitment would lead to 2 million annually by 2010.

While only a handful of cars in Japan are actually running on ethanol blends, all vehicles produced by Toyota Motor Co., the world's No. 2 automaker, already meet the new 10-percent standard, Sekiya said.

The trial run on Miyako will help bring down production costs so the technology can be spread nationwide, he added.

Survey: Residents like Central Valley

Capital dwellers are even more pleased, citing quality of life and a strong economy.

By Dorothy Korber -- Bee Staff Writer
Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, June 28, 2006

If there's one thing that unites Central Valley dwellers -- other than resentment toward water-grabbing Southern Californians -- it's an abiding sentiment that the state's heartland is a good place to live.

That's especially true for Sacramento.

A new survey of 2,002 Valley residents, from Redding to Bakersfield, shows 73 percent consider their communities excellent or good. The contentment quotient was even higher -- 82 percent -- in the metropolitan Sacramento region.

"These numbers are just amazing," said Mark Baldassare, director of a survey released Tuesday by the Public Policy Institute of California. "It shows that people really value the quality of life in the Central Valley."

That appreciation appears acute in El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties.

"Sacramento metro, from the perspective of the Central Valley, seems to be the one region that has the best of both worlds: high quality of life and a strong economy," Baldassare said.

Theresa Brown, who participated in the survey, echoed Baldassare's thoughts. In an interview Tuesday, Brown said she likes what she's found here, two years after moving from Santa Rosa.

"What drew us here was jobs -- my husband was transferred," said Brown, 49, who lives in Folsom. "Frankly, we were somewhat reluctant to move over here.

"But we were pleasantly surprised, and now we really like it," she added.

"People are friendly. There are lots of recreational opportunities, things like trails and bike paths. And the job market seems healthy."

Despite upbeat reviews, the survey identified many serious problems, among them traffic congestion, high housing costs, dwindling farmland and increasing crime.

Baldassare said Valley residents are happy, but they're also concerned about the region's future.

"They want to preserve and protect it -- they worry it might be an endangered species because of the growth," he said.

Across the Valley, [concern over air pollution](#) has increased markedly since the first of these surveys in 1999. Then, 28 percent called air pollution a "big problem."

Today, that figure is 45 percent.

When it comes to ranking the importance of the various problems, however, respondents were all over the map.

In the Central Valley's southern counties, air pollution is seen as the biggest problem.

Residents in the Valley's northern end identify a lack of good jobs.

Around Sacramento, public transportation is a major concern, although flood control and levees topped the list as "the most important issue facing the Central Valley today."

Flood control was a much lower priority elsewhere, Baldassare said.

"The weather conditions of the past year -- all the rain and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina -- have especially hit home in the Sacramento metro area," he said.

Baldassare was also struck by the relative importance of public transit to the Sacramento region, where 38 percent of the respondents said these systems should be the top priority for transportation funding.

Valleywide, 29 percent said public transit should be the top priority.

"Sacramento is the one region in the Central Valley where people have begun to realize the importance of a transportation system that doesn't rely on the automobile," Baldassare said. "I think it speaks to the fact that people are having positive experiences -- there's growing acceptance."

The survey reflects the growing social and economic diversity of the Golden State's vast Central Valley, according Baldassare. Times have changed since the region was one 400-mile-long swath of farmland.

"Over the course of the past decade or so, there has been uneven development in the various regions of the Central Valley," Baldassare said.

"This puts different pressures on people and on local government. There is really growing separation in the Valley."

The latest Central Valley Survey is based on interviews conducted between May 3 and May 11.

The sampling error for the full survey is plus or minus two percentage points, and somewhat larger for subgroups because the sample was smaller.

The 2006 poll is the sixth in a series completed by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California, in collaboration with the Great Valley Institute.

Big Three cars emit 230 million tons of greenhouse gas

By REUTERS

New York Times, Wed. June 28, 2006

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Cars built by the Big Three automakers gave off 230 million metric tons of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide in the United States in a year, more than the biggest U.S. electric utility, environmental researchers said on Wednesday.

General Motors (GM.N), Ford (F.N) and DaimlerChrysler (DCXGn.DE) cars and light trucks emitted nearly three-fourths of all carbon dioxide from vehicles on U.S. roads in 2004, the year for which statistics were available, according to the watchdog group Environmental Defense.

Nine other car manufacturers with vehicles on the U.S. market accounted for an additional 84 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions, bringing the total for all cars and light trucks in operation in 2004 to 314 million metric tons, the report found.

General Motors vehicles gave off 99 million metric tons or 31 percent of the total; Ford vehicles emitted 80 million metric tons or 25 percent and DaimlerChrysler vehicles emitted 51 million metric tons or 16 percent, according to the report. Electric Power (AEP.N), had emissions of 41 million metric tons.

Greenhouse gases, notably carbon dioxide, contribute to global warming, which in turn has been blamed for more severe hurricanes, rising seas and other environmental ills. Though greenhouse gas emissions have most frequently been associated with coal-fired power plants, the new report aims to point up comparable emissions from automobiles.

"The image of the power plant, with a smokestack and stuff billowing out of it, creates that sense of a lot of pollution in one place," John DeCicco, co-author of the report, said by telephone.

"People don't necessarily understand that the millions of vehicles are part of the problem that is a really comparable scale."

He stressed a shared responsibility among consumers, auto manufacturers and policy makers.

“It's hard to pin just on General Motors the responsibility for that 20-year-old Chevy that's putting carbon up into the air,” DeCicco said.

With just 5 percent of the world's population, the United States has 30 percent of the world's automobiles and produces 45 percent of the world's automotive carbon dioxide emissions, the report said. U.S. cars are driven more and burn more fuel per mile than the international average.

Biodiesel fuels cut festival pollution

By Brian Charlton, Associated Press
LA Daily News Thurs., June 29, 2006

FRANKENMUTH, Mich. - The Bavarian Festival looks, sounds and smells like most other traveling amusement shows, except for one small detail. There isn't any black smoke.

Small children take slow spins on the carousel, while bigger ones flock to the more adventurous Gravitron and Zipper attractions. Adults stroll along, eating pretzels, funnel cakes and greasy french fries.

In the midst of all this activity sits an unassuming white trailer. Inside is a 350-kilowatt generator that powers the festival - with biodiesel. The only sign of the generator is the black power cords that snake across the grass-pressed ground.

But it wasn't always this way.

The generator used to release a thick, black smoke from its vents that could be seen from across the fair and would sometimes bother those enjoying the rides.

"It was bad. When the smoke floated into the rides, you couldn't breathe, and it would make you cough and gag," said Tracy Elliott, co-owner of Elliott's Amusements LLC, the show's operator.

Since Elliott's switched to biodiesel to run its food stands, rides and employee housing, the smoke looks more like rising heat blurring one's vision on a hot day.

The company also is using biodiesel in its trucks that haul the show from city to city.

The Bavarian Festival is one of a growing number of county fairs, carnivals and hometown festivals across the nation that will be powered by biodiesel this summer as amusement companies search for solutions for high diesel prices as fair season heats up.

More industries are looking to biodiesel as an alternative source of fuel because of rising energy costs. School districts are powering their buses with it, municipalities and state parks are fueling their diesel trucks with it, and trucking companies also are turning to it, said Jenna Higgins, director of communications for the National Biodiesel Board.

"I think our nation is trying to wean ourselves from our petroleum addiction," Higgins said.

Biodiesel is made with different percentages of diesel fuel and extracted soybean oil or sometimes animal fats or other vegetable oils. The cost for traditional diesel and biodiesel are about the same right now, but if diesel prices keep going up, the biodiesel eventually will cost less.

Amusement company owners say while they're not saving money yet, giving biodiesel a test run is worthwhile because of the benefits of having cleaner air at their shows and helping local farmers who grow soybeans.

Biodiesel advocates say the fuel reduces the black smoke associated with diesel, emits a french fry-like smell and lowers emissions, making the air safer to breathe.

According to a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study, the most common biodiesel, B20, cuts carbon monoxide and particulate matter emissions by 12 percent and hydrocarbons and sulfurs by 20 percent.

Elliott's Amusements, operators of the carnival that is part of the Bavarian Festival and about 25 other shows, and McDonaghs Amusements Inc., which runs another 20, are using B20 - a mix of 20 percent soybean oils and 80 percent diesel - at its shows this summer.

While biodiesel is more environmentally friendly, some users don't want to switch to the fuel without significant cost savings. Also, while most diesel providers will deliver biodiesel, companies have to do a little digging to find where it's available.

Sixty-five plants are producing biodiesel in the United States and about 50 others are under construction, according to the National Biodiesel Board.

And the demand is growing, as 150 million gallons of biodiesel are expected to be produced and sold this year, up from 75 million gallons in 2005 and 25 million in 2004, the board said.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Editorial, Thursday, June 29, 2006](#)

Spare the Air? Spare us the \$7.5 million

IF you want to see how to spend \$7.5 million in taxpayer money faster than a speeding BART train, go back and look at the news accounts of the recent Spare the Air campaign that provided free public transit for three days in the Bay Area.

Last Thursday, Friday and Monday, public transit agencies in the Bay Area offered free rides to commuters during a very hot and smoggy spell. The campaign is an attempt to entice those who normally wouldn't use public transit to give it a try with the idea that maybe, just maybe, those neophytes would become regular riders, thus reducing air pollution.

Plenty of commuters did take up the offer, which saw local public transit agencies be reimbursed for the free rides from a mix of state and federal tax money, to the tune of \$7.5 million.

So for \$7.5 million we as taxpayers funded a feel-good campaign with little return on the investment.

Sure, taking thousands of cars off the road helps with air pollution — for three whole days. There may have been a few converts who realized that public transit is a viable option, but there has been no evidence that

one single commuter has converted to public transit because of the Spare the Air campaign.

Everybody loves something for free. Commuters get a free ride, public transit agencies get fully reimbursed for the free rides that brought in more riders than usual.

It's win-win, right? Hardly.

This campaign is not free. It is funded by taxpayers to the tune of more than \$2 million a day. We don't think that's the best use of taxpayer money.

Instead, that money could have gone to helping alleviate congested corridors such as Interstate 580, where money is desperately need for carpool lanes and/or truck lanes.

There won't be any more Spare the Air campaigns this summer in the Bay Area, as the money for this year was exhausted. We think this public relations campaign should be ended, and that money should be used for real transportation improvements.

[Fresno Bee columnist, Thursday, June 29, 2006:](#)

Clovis mayor is poster boy for bad air

By Bill McEwen

It's become a bittersweet tradition. My wife and I soak up Canada's gorgeous scenery and clean air on a vacation.

Then, on the trip back, after marveling at purple-hued, snowcapped Mount Shasta, we're shocked to see the brown gunk spread over California's great Central Valley.

The insidious thing about the brown gunk is how it creeps into your life, corrodes your health and corrupts your perspective. When you're bathed in smog, you forget what good air looks like. But, try as I might, I can't forget what a bad politician looks like.

Meet Nathan Magsig, mayor of Clovis and political poster boy for bad air. This week, the affordable-housing group that Magsig heads joined commercial builders, a Fresno-based taxpayers group and the Modesto Chamber of Commerce in filing suit against the local anti-smog agency over a rule that makes developers help pay for air-pollution cleanup.

His nonprofit group, Coalition for Urban Renewal Excellence, builds and renovates houses for low- and moderate-income families. It contends the clean-air rule will make the group's work harder.

If you've followed the efforts to fix our air — the nation's worst, along with that of Houston and Southern California — you know that many industries have been required to change how they operate.

What you might not know: Magsig has accepted more than \$114,000 in campaign contributions from construction, real estate and property-management interests while winning two Clovis City Council races.

In other words, he's a flunky for developers, many of whom are reaping huge profits from the local construction boom.

What's more, Magsig is basing his political career on keeping them happy — not on reducing asthma rates or beautifying the Valley.

I'm not surprised by the lawsuit. Last December, when the San Joaquin Valley became the first area in the country to tackle smog created by urban sprawl, the builders cried a thousand tears.

These fees will price out the poor, their flaks protested.

You're making the building industry shoulder the whole load, Magsig complained.

If they had cried any more, the San Joaquin River would've been restored.

These complaints are drivel from an industry that believes it's exempt from joining farmers and manufacturers in helping clean the air.

The fee (\$780 per house this year) is a pittance compared with the cost of a new house. Developers also can reduce the fee by building environmentally friendly projects with features such as bike lanes and electric outlets for gardening equipment.

The law is sound because it is expected to raise enough money (\$225 million over the next five years) to put a dent in pollution while encouraging the kinds of homes that builders should make anyway.

There's a huge need for more affordable housing in the Valley, but the issue is separate from air quality. We need them both.

And if Magsig wants to help more people buy homes, he ought to tell his developer buddies to stop donating to his campaigns. Their money could be better used for honest efforts to promote affordable housing.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, June 29, 2006](#)

Highway projects don't relieve traffic

THE JUNE 21 front-page story on this fall's highway bonding proposition belonged on the opinion page, not in the news section.

It was poorly researched, contained glaring omissions and factual errors, and it read like an infomercial for Caltrans' highway department.

It neglected to mention money that would go toward a new bore for the Caldecott Tunnel, which would dump thousands more cars onto North Oakland streets and promote more sprawl east of the tunnel. It also neglected to mention the rising cost of borrowing money and the other indirect costs of highway building. Finally, it assumes that the congestion relief claims of MTC are true.

Name a single highway project in the Bay Area that has ever "relieved traffic congestion." For more than 60 years, we've been wasting hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars building freeways in this state, yet traffic congestion is worse than ever. In the process, we've paved over huge sections of our nicest cities and countryside with eye-sore parking lots, noisy polluting freeways, and hideous, car-only tract home developments.

The property tax value and further economic value of that lost land is one of many subsidies that we give to cars and highways. Diminished urban air quality, global warming, tire fires, oil spills and overseas oil wars are some of the other subsidies, and they are the reason that America is so addicted to foreign oil.

Why are we even considering bonding for more highway construction? We should be using every available transportation dollar to improve mass transit and lower BART and bus fares.

Andy Singer, Oakland