

Ozone-reduction timeline approved

The Stockton Record, Thursday, May 3, 2007

FRESNO - The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has approved a controversial plan giving it more time to meet federal ozone standards.

The board voted 9-2 on Monday night in favor of the plan, after four hours of public testimony.

Critics have said ozone can be reduced much more quickly than 2023, which is the district's new target date. The delay could cost lives and money, they said.

The district has said it's not possible to meet the target faster even if money was no object.

San Joaquin County's air quality is already within the federal standard, but some areas in the southern Valley are not.

Air cleanup plan extended

Valley air pollution regulators ask for 11-year extension

The Madera Tribune

By June Woods - Tribune Writer

Wednesday, May 02, 2007

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District air regulators voted 9-2 Monday to approve a plan asking the government for an 11-year extension to bring the region's air in line with federal standards. The district, which has some of the worst air in the nation, heard eight hours of testimony from air quality experts, business leaders and clean air advocates both for and against the extension.

An extension in time, according to Kelly Morphy, the air district's public information officer, doesn't mean there will be an extension in efforts to clean air.

"When we went through the emission deductions," she said, "we didn't find enough deductions to say for certain the air would pass federal standards by the original date."

The 2023 extension was meant to avoid sanctions that may cut off more than \$2 billion in federal transportation funds to the region.

"The goal of the plan was to show how we'll get clean air by 2013," said Catherine Garoupa, of Central Valley Air Quality Coalition in Madera. "Now they say it's not possible to clean the air by 2013. We feel the plan could be tougher." CVAQC held a workshop to teach people how they could advocate for tougher standards.

Morphy confirmed that there were more aggressive plans suggested at the hearing. "There were critics (of the plan) who said the plan should include 'no drive days' and other rules," she said. "You can't shut down ag for 3 months without a fiscal impact. We had to take these things into consideration."

The California Air Resources Board must approve the proposal before forwarding it to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by June 15.

The valley, stretching from 240 miles from Stockton to Bakersfield, is one of the dirtiest air basins in the nation for emissions that create ozone, the main ingredient of smog.

In February, a Los Angeles-area firm that consults on air pollution projects in Mexico City, released a report claiming the district could lower the bulk of ozone emissions in the valley within the original 2013 deadline set by the federal government.

"I have a 2-year-old son. It breaks my heart to think that I have to be careful to let him go outside," said councilmember Raji Brar, who voted against the plan. "This is America. It doesn't fit with me well that we can't do anything else."

Local personnel prepare for what figures to be a rough fire season

By Natalie Ragus

Hanford Sentinel, Tuesday, May 2, 2007

As the Central Valley's scorching summer months quickly approach, local firefighters are bracing for the start of what they said could be a difficult fire season.

Fire season -- which in California generally lasts from late spring through the fall -- is called such because warm temperatures and dry weather create the perfect conditions for fires to thrive.

After experiencing one of the driest years in recent history, Kings County is especially vulnerable during this fire season.

"The state is in really bad shape because there wasn't adequate rain throughout the year," said Hanford Assistant Fire Chief Bill Lynch.

Last year Kings County temperatures soared to record heights, which, combined with this year's dry weather, could spell complications for firefighters.

"There was no recovery time," Lynch said.

Adequate spacing between dry and hot years is crucial in reducing the risks of out of control wildfires.

According to Accuweather.com, a Web site which tracks climate patterns, Kings County has received just 3.15 inches of rainfall this year. Normal rainfall for the area is closer to 8.24 inches.

Several fires have ravaged the county.

Just last summer, an arson-related fire with seven separate starts burned 1,200 acres in four hours.

In 1997, a collection of fires ravaged 600 to 5,000 acres at a time. During the 1997-1998 fire season, a grass fire burned more than 18,000 acres within a 26-hour period.

"That was a nasty fire season," recalled Kings County Assistant Fire Chief Mike Virden.

Although Hanford itself is not at a very high risk for rampant fires, experts said, the western part of the county's foothills are.

"We don't really have any wildland fire settings or fire problems in the city limits," Lynch said. "We don't really have any foothills or large areas with open grasslands."

River and creek areas are also risky. As they dry up, they leave a wide variety of debris behind, such as dry leaves, that could fuel a fire, Virden said.

As well, Virden said, river areas are "really hard on the firefighters because they're really tough places to get to."

County fire authorities said they are planning a spring training session to take place in two weeks to better prepare themselves for the worst.

Although county firefighters will battle controlled fires during their training, they do not plan to start abatement fires.

["With the air pollution restrictions, we don't do any more abatement burning," said Virden.](#)

Abatement fires are fires deliberately started under controlled conditions and are designed to clear brush away to lessen the severity of an uncontrolled fire.

City fire officials' weed abatement program is well under way, Lynch said. People must clean up weeds and other debris from their homes, or face the risk of a hefty fine.

Final appeal for highway dollars made

By Leslie Albrecht - The Merced Sun-Star
in the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, May 2, 2007

Local officials will make a lastditch effort this week to secure state dollars for two of the county's top transportation priorities -- a Highway 152 bypass around Los Banos and widening Highway 99 near Livingston.

Those two projects were left off the list of statewide road fixes that Caltrans will fund over the next two years. Without \$7.5 million from Caltrans, the long-delayed projects won't move forward until at least 2009.

On Wednesday, local leaders will plead Merced County's case at a California Transportation Commission hearing in Sacramento. The CTC, a panel of nine commissioners, has final say on which projects make the funding list. It votes on the list at its June 7 meeting.

Merced County Association of Governments Executive Director Jesse Brown, Los Banos City Councilman Mike Villalta, and Livingston City Councilman Roy Soria will have five minutes to convince the CTC to add the bypass and widening project to the funding list. Representatives from at least 33 other regional transportation agencies will also make funding pitches to the CTC during the four-hour session, said CTC Assistant Deputy Director Annette Gilbertson.

Los Banos mayor Tommy Jones said not winning state dollars for the Highway 152 bypass would be "devastating" for the Westside town of 34,000.

With cars, pedestrians and 18-wheeler trucks crowded together on Highway 152's route through downtown Los Banos, the city has seen several fatalities in recent years, Jones said. The bypass has been planned since 1967.

New traffic lights recently added along the route have snarled traffic even more, Jones said. It can take up to an hour to move through the city, which means more smog polluting Los Banos skies, Jones said.

Highway 152 is also a key route for trucks carrying shipping containers from the Port of Oakland to other parts of California and the country, Jones said.

"This is one of the main arteries for goods to be transported to the complete United States," Jones said. "When you stop this artery, you're doing a lot to hurt commerce."

Livingston Mayor Guralp Samra said not widening 99 from four to six lanes between the Stanislaus County line and Livingston will create an "accordion effect" that would mean major traffic problems for motorists. As drivers are well aware, the highway is six lanes through Stanislaus County, then shrinks to four lanes in Merced County.

The answer to funding both projects could lie in delaying planned landscaping along Highway 99, said MCAG's Jesse Brown. If Caltrans is willing to put off plans to add bushes and trees along 99, the money meant to fund those improvements could be put toward the Highway 152 bypass and 99 widening project instead.

That's the idea Brown and others will pitch in front of the California Transportation Commission on Wednesday.

"It's not that the landscaping will never happen, it will just be delayed," Brown said. "The MCAG governing board would rather see progress on major projects than pretty projects."

Stop signs sprout at Center, West Crossing Center Avenue won't be quite as thrilling

By Gerald Carroll, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Thursday, May 3, 2007

Traffic on Center Avenue moved even more slowly Wednesday with the addition of yet another stop sign - this one at the West Street intersection.

That intersection became more hazardous in late October when the city converted parallel parking into diagonal parking, removing one of Center's three lanes in the process. This had the effect of making it tougher to cross Center while traveling north on West Street because sightlines are blocked by diagonally parked cars.

The decision to add the stop sign was based on federal standards and such data as vehicle numbers, speeds and accident reports, Visalia traffic safety engineer Eric Bons said.

Safety, not convenience, is the city's top priority, Bons said.

And the stop sign will make the intersection safer, Bons said - once drivers get used to it.

"There's no guarantee every driver will stop [right away]," Bons said.

To help draw attention to the change, a fold-out stop sign straddles Center Avenue and the word "STOP" was painted in white letters on each lane.

"We have to give drivers a chance to get accustomed to the new stop," Bons said.

As city crews erected the stop signs Wednesday morning, passing drivers honked, waved and gave "thumbs-up" signals. Less enthusiastic, however, was Visalia City Council member Don Landers.

"I'm opposed to it," Landers said. "It would be better to have traffic lights at places like this and synchronize them as to avoid all the stop-and-go traffic that develops."

Jan Minami, executive director of Downtown Visalians and Alliance, favors the conversion of Center Avenue from a high-speed artery through downtown to a much slower street, much like Main Street, that will draw more pedestrians and businesses.

"People should drive to downtown, not through downtown," Minami said.

Like other proponents of a vibrant Visalia downtown, Minami noted that major east-west thoroughfares across Visalia - Mineral King Avenue, Noble Avenue and state Highway 198 - already exist.

The stop-sign installation continues a trend by the city to slow overall traffic flow on Center Avenue.

In early January, the Visalia City Council voted to install a similar stop sign at the Bridge Street intersection. Decorative "islands," or extensions of the curb, also are planned.

Landers is not impressed.

"You get to the point of having to stop at every corner," Landers said. ["This increases air pollution and traffic congestion."](#)

Group to monitor air for steel foundry emissions

BERKELEY: Residents blame plant for health complaints; company alters process to limit pollution

By Doug Oakley, MEDIA NEWS STAFF

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, May 3, 2007

To try to prove that Pacific Steel Casting in Berkeley is showering residents with dangerous heavy metals, a San Francisco group has started monitoring air around the Second Street plant.

Meanwhile, the plant has agreed to change an ingredient in its steel-making process that should reduce pollution coming out of its stacks by 2 tons a year, said Adrienne Bloch, staff attorney at Communities for a Better Environment, which sued the steel foundry in federal court last year over violations of the Clean Air Act.

Bloch said Pacific Steel agreed to change a binder used in sand that forms castings into which molten metal is poured. When that binder gets hot, it releases a smelly emission that Pacific Steel believes is to blame for most of its complaints.

Pacific Steel also plans to install a new pollution-control device on one of its older plants that should further reduce emissions, Bloch said. The measures resulted from a settlement of the lawsuit that mandated the plant set up a committee of union members, plant managers and Communities for a Better Environment representatives to talk about how it can reduce pollution.

"They are taking the settlement very seriously, but there are a lot of things that still need to be done," Bloch said.

Pacific Steel spokeswoman Elisabeth Jewel declined to comment on either the air-monitoring project or the two measures the plant is taking to reduce pollution.

While the plant applies for permits from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District to change its steel-making process, community members now are monitoring the air around the plant through a project funded with a \$25,000 air district grant. The equipment and procedures used to monitor the air have the agency's blessing as a credible scientific undertaking, said air district spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick.

On Monday, Global Community Monitor of San Francisco placed a machine atop the home of Berkeley resident Richard Spencer, who lives about four blocks from Pacific Steel, to start taking 24-hour readings.

"We have a long history of complaints related to Pacific Steel," Schkolnick said. "There's been a relationship built over time with the community, and this grant came out of that in addition to the other enforcement and litigation we are pursuing as a comprehensive (pollution-reduction) strategy."

Schkolnick said the district is in the process of installing a permanent air-monitoring device near Pacific Steel but added that it could take years to get it running.

Denny Larson, director of Global Community Monitor, said he wants to use data collected from the air samples to show that Pacific Steel is endangering the health of the community.

"We think Pacific Steel is a serious community health problem in Berkeley, and we want to assign the proper blame to them, which we think is quite large," he said. "We're very dissatisfied with the denial the company is exhibiting on this issue. They are spending a lot of money on public relations rather than cleaning up their act."

Larson said the air monitoring will be done in 24-hour increments for about four months at eight or 10 other locations in Berkeley. He said he is looking for "marker" metals that he and the air district have identified as specific to Pacific Steel.

Schkolnick said the district will look at the information from the monitoring but "it's a little premature to say if it will be used for enforcement."

Community Activist L-A Wood, who is helping with the monitoring, said the air district is giving the air-monitoring job to a nonprofit group "because it gets (the air district) off the hook. That works for them. Sometimes they have other people do what they can't or won't do."

Spencer, who volunteered the roof of his home for the monitoring device, said he did so because he is worried about his health. He and his son suffer headaches and have trouble sleeping at night, and he thinks the plant's emissions are the reason. The blasts of toxic smell that hit him at different times have driven him to get tested for the presence of heavy metals in his body.

Spencer showed the lab results of a test taken from his hair that showed he is in the 95th percentile for the "potentially toxic elements" of bismuth, cadmium, silver and tin.

"I thought about moving away, but how far do you have to move?" he asked. "If I walk around the corner here, immediately I am assailed. The smell comes in blasts, but it is not sustained. The

smell suggests toxicity. And the company has been recalcitrant in divulging what those blasts contain."

Asarco moves closer to gaining permit for El Paso smelter

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, May 2, 2007

EL PASO, Texas- An Arizona mining company moved closer to obtaining a permit to resume operations at an El Paso copper smelter that has been closed since 1999.

A report released Tuesday by the executive director of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality recommended renewing Asarco's air quality permit only if the Tucson-based company takes a series of steps to ensure that it "maintains effective pollution control equipment and practices."

Among them, the executive director said the company would need to develop a plan for repairs to its acid plants and thoroughly inspect certain electric systems.

Doug McAllister, Asarco's attorney, said in a statement that the conditions laid out in the 30-page report are what Asarco would expect to face before restarting the plant.

The report must be approved by the TCEQ commissioners. Public comment will be accepted on the findings through June 18 and a public meeting on the permit renewal will be held.

Environmentalists and some civic leaders have urged the state to reject Asarco's permit because of possible environmental hazards.

"El Paso wants to be a clean town and wants to move forward, and we can't move forward with a copper smelter right in the middle of town, next to hospitals, schools and businesses," said resident Debbie Kelly during a Tuesday protest of about 60 people. "El Paso has so much potential. We don't need Asarco. Asarco is outdated and it needs to go."

Asarco and its supporters say the resumption of smelter operations will provide an economic boost for the city, including the addition of up to 380 jobs.

In October 2005, a pair of administrative judges ruled that Asarco's air permit should not be renewed, saying the company had not proven that it would not add pollution to the air above El Paso.

McAllister said the company "is pleased with the results of the rigorous investigation conducted by the Executive Director of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, which confirmed that emissions from the El Paso plant will comply with federal and state air quality standards and guidelines and be fully protective of human health and the environment."

The report calls for a five-year renewal period for the permit.

Pacific Steel settles air lawsuit

Activists say \$150,000 'chump change,' equipment installation will offer no real relief

By Doug Oakley, MEDIANEWS STAFF

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, May 3, 2007

BERKELEY — Pacific Steel Casting has settled a second lawsuit over allegations it is not doing enough to curb pollution at its Second Street foundry.

In the latest settlement, the company agreed to pay the Bay Area Air Quality Management District \$150,000 and to install a hood to capture particulates coming out of one of its three plants. After Pacific Steel gets permits to install the new hood, it has nine months to complete construction, according to the air district.

"Even though the lawsuit is settled, we will be there to make sure the terms and conditions of the lawsuit are complied with and to ensure they are not violating any other emissions requirements

through any of the permits they hold with the district," said Karen Schkolnick, a spokeswoman for the air district.

Berkeley residents have complained for years about a foul odor emanating from the plant, an emission they suspect is unhealthy.

The air district sued Pacific Steel in August 2006 alleging it failed to meet deadlines for reporting how much it pollutes and for installing a carbon filter device on one of its plants.

Pacific Steel settled a different lawsuit in January with Communities for a Better Environment over allegations it violated the federal Clean Air Act. In that settlement, the company agreed to pay \$350,000 to fund air pollution reduction measures for three years and to eschew dirty or oily scrap metal when making new steel castings.

The company also agreed to start using a new binder that holds together its steel casting molds, and is seeking permits from the air district to start using the binder. The company suspects the binder it uses causes the offensive odors.

Meanwhile, 14 small-claims cases against Pacific Steel are moving through Alameda County Superior Court. Those cases were brought by Berkeley residents who claim the company is a public nuisance because the smell has interfered with the enjoyment of their lives and property. Each is seeking the maximum \$7,500 penalty from Pacific Steel. The next hearing is May 30.

Pacific Steel said the court-ordered changes are helping it clean up its act.

"All of these things together will add up to a significant reduction (in pollution)," company spokeswoman Elisabeth Jewel said. "It's a huge step forward."

But community activists who have been fighting the company are not satisfied yet.

"These things look really good on paper, but they are not getting at the root of the problem," said Denny Larson, executive director of Global Community Monitoring, which has a \$25,000 air district grant to independently test the air around the foundry. "You need to start at the end of the pipe and see what's coming out, then rethink the whole process from the beginning."

Larson said changing the binders is a good example of the process being rethought.

"But there are other points in their process that create pollution," Larson said. "You have to look at everything in the process."

L.A. Wood, a Berkeley activist and a Pacific Steel watchdog for a decade, called the \$150,000 settlement with the air district "chump change."

"No matter what you put on the plant for emission suppression, you have to be reminded that it is a foundry, and it will always be a foundry with no buffer to a residential area," Wood said. "What a reality. And there are four child care centers nearby."

Belmont's mayor refuses to sign climate agreement Feierbach objects to land-use clause encouraging high-density housing

By Will Oremus, MEDIANEWS STAFF
Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, May 3, 2007

Environmentalism is in the air in San Mateo County, and local cities are rushing to clean up their acts with "green" policies and resolutions.

But one local mayor who considers herself an environmentalist is saying no to the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, recently signed by San Mateo and Redwood City, among others.

Mayor Coralin Feierbach of Belmont said she refuses to sign the agreement, which is part of the Sierra Club's national Cool Cities campaign, mainly because of a clause about land use: Cities

that sign the agreement commit to "adopt and enforce land-use policies that reduce sprawl, preserve open space, and create compact, walkable urban communities."

Feierbach said she believes that the Sierra Club and other groups endorsing the pact are "using the 'green' excuse to rationalize more development." She added, "I think there's a certain amount of hypocrisy in that."

The main rationale behind the clause is that if many homes are clustered near employment and transit centers — for instance, along the Caltrain and El Camino Real corridors in San Mateo County — people will drive less. That, in turn, will cut automobile exhaust, seen as a leading contributor to air pollution and global warming.

Feierbach doesn't buy it. "The Bay Area is not an infinite population sink," she said. "We've got to look at how much (growth) we can accept. That's why I'm talking about limiting density."

She added, "They're talking about urban" communities. "We're not urban — we're suburbia."

Though Feierbach agreed that people are moving inland for cheaper housing, she said high-rise apartment complexes on the Peninsula won't solve the problem. "People are moving out there looking for single-family homes. They're not going to move into these buildings that look like nice jails."

She pointed to a recent letter that Belmont residents received from the Mid-Peninsula Water District asking them to conserve water to avoid rationing. Shortages are expected throughout the Bay Area because of the this year's low snowpack in the Sierra Nevada.

"You have all these cities like Redwood City and San Mateo that are building really high-density units," Feierbach said. "That means lots of new people are going to come in soon. How are we going to take care of our water supply? How can these cities call themselves green?"

Redwood City Mayor Barbara Pierce, who signed the agreement last month, was eager to explain. She said her city has done research on the housing market and found lots of young singles and couples who work in Redwood City.

"These are the people that are leaving the Peninsula in droves because they can't afford to live here," Pierce said. "They are the work force. And now they're driving here from other places."

Rather than fight growth, Pierce said, Peninsula leaders should plan for it carefully. She said Redwood City has invested heavily in programs to recycle wastewater for landscaping, freeing drinking water.

Putting more people downtown will also increase demand for public transit, eventually improving the Peninsula's network of buses and trains, Pierce added. Chris Mohr, executive director of the Housing Leadership Council, said that whether high-density development is environmentally responsible depends on how broad your perspective is.

"If you're looking just at what's happening within a single city's borders, I can understand where Coralin is coming from," Mohr said. "But when you look at the regional level, home-building in the Central Valley causes way more pollution from people commuting by car back to Santa Clara and San Mateo County."

[Hanford Sentinel, Editorial, Wednesday, May 2, 2007:](#)

Our view: It's up to the feds to clean up our air

On Tuesday, local Valley air regulators took action that will delay when our polluted air will meet federal standards.

We are absolutely dismayed.

Just a few years ago, board members with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District managed to put off a 2005 deadline for cleaning the air until 2010.

Then the U.S. EPA changed how it monitors air pollution. So now the Valley air district wants a deadline of 2024 to clean our air.

It would be easy to beat up on the local air district.

But we don't believe that's where the blame should fall. Frankly, if you want to blame somebody for our dirty air, blame yourself if you drive a car.

Trying to understand the jurisdiction of who cleans the Valley's air is a relatively complicated puzzle with multiple layers of bureaucracy. Deadlines and plans are flimsy and easily changed by planners who often don't have to live with our air, our cars or our ag-based economy.

In short, the federal Environmental Protection Agency sets standards of air quality. The California EPA and the state Air Resources Board are responsible for ensuring that those standards are met.

And the standards are overseen by various local air districts, like the San Joaquin Valley district.

The district may implement restrictions on businesses and farmers. But the majority of the pollution is created by cars. And God knows we love to drive.

Here's the rub: The local air district has no authority to regulate cars, only our local businesses.

If our air is to be changed, it is going to literally take an act of Congress.

That's because the federal government's authority is obviously needed to regulate the quality of the air we breathe.

We hope that will happen one of these days -- and before 2024.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Thursday, May 3, 2007](#)

State of our air: Better than some, not good enough

The American Lung Association has released its annual "State of the Air" report and, to no one's surprise, valley cities and counties are near the top of the list for the worst ozone and particle pollution. It's more evidence that despite the progress we've made, we have a great deal left to do.

Many new regulations are in place governing emissions of all sorts; more are in our future. Perhaps most important, awareness of our air quality problems has grown enormously. That's crucial, because we're all going to have to change some habits if we are to have clean air someday.

The news isn't entirely bleak. Ozone pollution is declining nationally, as it has in the valley in recent years. But "better" isn't the same as "good."

Los Angeles is at the top of the list of cities with the worst ozone pollution. It's followed by a roster of familiar names: Bakersfield, Visalia-Porterville, Fresno-Madera, Merced, Sacramento, Hanford-Corcoran and Modesto. Our community's specific rankings:

Worst short-term particle pollution — 11th in the nation.

Worst year-round particle pollution — 17th.

Worst ozone pollution — 20th.

We're not as bad as some parts of California or the south end of the valley, but we're still in poor company. The Northern San Joaquin Valley has to take the air pollution problem seriously now, and for years to come.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, May 3, 2007:](#)

Can we handle it?

Valley's rising population means more burdens on infrastructure.

The Valley's population is on the rise. That's hardly news to those of us already living here, but the latest estimates from the state should sound warning bells and raise red flags all over the region. Our infrastructure is inadequate today in every respect. How will we accommodate even more people in the years ahead?

Schools, roads, mass transit, air quality, water supplies, parks, recreation, entertainment and other amenities, health care -- all these will be impacted by new arrivals, whether they are newborns, immigrants or equity refugees from coastal California. And all are inadequate now. How bad is it likely to get if we don't start making plans for this growing population?

More people mean greater demands on everything from roads to water supplies. And because much of our growth is from "natural increase" -- the difference between births and deaths, the pressure may be greatest on schools.

The Valley is already younger than the rest of the state -- Fresno County's median age is 30.1, compared with 34.4 statewide. There is a new "baby boom" going on right here in the Valley.

Rising population means more pollution in an already polluted region. It means greater demands for water in an area already worried about adequate supplies.

More people means greater pressure on a health care system that is already badly strained. We don't have enough doctors, nurses and hospital beds to take care of those who are here now.

What will we do with all the newcomers? Many -- perhaps most -- of the new arrivals will be either infants or retired folks seeking lower housing and other costs. But those are also the groups that typically have the greatest need for health care. How will they get it? How will we pay for it?

We don't have enough parks and open spaces now. What will all those new residents do for respite in an increasingly dense urban environment?

Where will they all live? Will we continue the process of permanently following the richest farm land in the world by covering it with tract homes and asphalt?

Or will we learn to build denser urban landscapes that help conserve ag lands as they provide compact and comfortable lifestyles?

Will our transportation system be adequate? It isn't now, though passage of Measure C and other actions now under way offer some hope.

Will there be jobs for those who need them? Will those jobs pay enough to provide a decent level of comfort and security to families, or will they offer only subsistence-level wages with little hope for the future?

That's a full agenda. Are we up to the task?

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Thursday, May 3, 2007:](#)

Lose stigma, GET on board with use of public transit

Leonel Martinez, Californian Columnist

Almost every weekday morning, I do something that would scare some people.

I climb into a Golden Empire Transit bus, pay the 90-cent, one-way fare, and ride comfortably to my job downtown. With some predicting that the price of gas will surge to almost \$4 a gallon this summer, it's a practice I highly recommend.

I realize many commuters can't take the bus because there's no route nearby or it would otherwise be impractical. But GET buses also seem to carry some sort of stigma that frightens

others away. Judging from the comments I hear, a lot of people think it's a rolling refuge for gang bangers, drug addicts and other undesirables.

I've ridden the bus about 10 years, and that's not what I've seen.

In fact, I've never felt unsafe even though I usually take one of two routes that cut through southeast and east Bakersfield, supposedly the "bad" parts of town.

I even look forward to the pleasant half-hour of chatting with people, reading a novel or just plain relaxing without fighting traffic. [If it helps keep the air cleaner -- many buses run on compressed natural gas instead of dirtier diesel fuel -- that's good, too.](#)

Most passengers on my routes seem to be working-class people. I see construction workers in paint-spattered jeans, hotel maids in aprons and medical technicians in scrubs. But "working class" does not equal "criminal." I'm not sure some people know the difference.

I say that because when I tell people I'm a bus rider, the first questions they ask are always about crime. Have I ever seen anybody attacked? Have I ever seen anybody with weapons or illicit drugs? Surely, teenage girls shouldn't ride the bus alone?

It's like they've been watching too many old Charles Bronson movies where switchblade-carrying sociopaths descend on helpless women and senior citizens on public transportation systems. Other times, I just get "the look," pursed lips, an arched eyebrow, a few seconds of awkward silence, as if the fact that I ride the bus says something bad about me.

That attitude is hard to understand considering the worst problems I've had on the bus are pretty minor. One or two drivers were chronically grouchy. Buses sometime arrive too late or too early, and every once in a long while, they don't arrive at all.

On one trip, a drunk asked me every 30 seconds to remind him about where to get off. Another time, a gentleman in the back seat cursed out the driver for some unknown reason. And some passengers like to recount embarrassing details from their private lives very loudly. There are buses that get so crowded, I joke that they should start loading people on the roof.

But I'd face bigger obstacles if I drove to work. For one, I'd have to buy another car. Although I could afford it, I don't relish the thought of forking over hundreds of dollars in car and insurance payments. Then there are the frazzled nerves that come from dodging the maniacal drivers barreling down Highway 178 every morning.

No, thanks.

You can have your rude drivers, traffic snarls and extra car payments.

Tomorrow morning, I'm taking the bus.

[Tracy Press Editorial, Wednesday, May 2, 2007](#)

Without parking, BART is a no-go

Bay Area commuters passed the first test the day after connector ramps to the MacArthur Maze in Emeryville tumbled in a heap because many drivers stayed home from work on the advice of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. But the rest of this week, and many more this spring, will be challenging for those who have to return from San Francisco to Tracy and Mountain House and other valley communities.

Except for Altamont Commuter Express trains from San Jose, several commuter buses and carpool vans, the passenger car is the vehicle of necessity here. Since you cannot make the return trip from San Francisco in a straight shot on Interstate 580 anymore (there are several congested detour routes), many commuters have intentions to take Bay Area Rapid Transit trains to and from the Dublin/Pleasanton station. But where do they park

On a normal weekday, the BART lots are full by 8 a.m., but on these bad-drive days, riders practically have to arrive before sunrise for a parking spot. BART's official line of "Parking will be

more difficult at many stations” is hilarious. There are up to 80,000 drivers looking for new ways to get across San Francisco Bay.

BART officials want us to use the public transit system — and we should to save on gasoline and [improve air quality](#) — but they won’t give us the opportunity unless we can walk, bicycle or bus into the station — the first two avenues are nearly impossible from Tracy and Mountain House, about 25 miles away.

We suggest that, while the MacArthur Maze is being repaired — and quickly, we hope — the government should lease unused parking spaces in nearby business parks for the commuters intending to ride BART from Dublin/Pleasanton. Reconfigure more lots closer to the BART station for the disabled and drivers with long-term parking passes.

Give us valley residents the chance to “go BART.”

[N.Y. Times editorial roundup, Thursday, May 3, 2007:](#)

From The Star-Ledger of Newark (N.J.), May 1, on pollution:

The amount of pollution spewed in the air has dropped by more than half since the United States began stepping up efforts to fight smog in 1970. Those cuts occurred even as America's population grew 46 percent and the nation's energy and vehicle use rose dramatically.

But the hard-won progress will be choked off if the Bush administration gets its way.

A new rule proposed by the EPA last week would produce more dirty air by redefining how power plant smog is measured. The result would be old plants running longer and polluting more, sending more dirty air to New Jersey.

The proposed new rule is a shameless attempt to bypass two recent Supreme Court rulings, one coming just yesterday, rejecting looser air pollution enforcement.

The EPA is trying to sell the new rule by saying it will just make electricity production more efficient, not worsen national air quality. But the agency admits pollution could increase in some places. ...

A glance at the American Lung Association's annual review of air quality, released today, shows the magnitude of the problem. ...

The EPA should look at those numbers, take a deep breath and drop its pro-polluter rule proposal.