

SJ Valley meets federal air quality standards

The Associated Press

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, September 26, 2008

FRESNO, Calif.—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says the San Joaquin Valley now meets federal clean air standards for small particle pollution.

The announcement Thursday drew strong rebuke from environmentalists, who called it a "farce" and said air pollution continues to threaten the health of valley residents. They said the decision effectively sweeps the valley's dust problems under the rug.

The EPA said it approved the state's request to divide the San Joaquin Valley into two air districts for measuring coarse particulate matter. Under the change, the San Joaquin Valley area meets federal air standards for coarse particulate matter, but the other area, East Kern, does not.

Still, neither region meets federal standards for ozone or smaller particulate matter.

Central Valley air passes EPA benchmark

Activists argue PM-10 standard was set too low.

By Mark Grossi

In the Fresno Bee, Merced Sun-Star and other papers, Friday, September 26, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley's air is now classified as healthy under the federal standard for dust and soot, the dangerous, tiny specks that can trigger lung problems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency made the landmark announcement Thursday following two years of protests from environmentalists who say officials have simply ignored many violations.

Environmentalists sued the EPA in March after the agency waived several violations because of high-wind conditions in the Valley.

Arguments are supposed to be heard in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court in February.

Local air officials say the Valley -- 25,000 square miles from Stockton to Bakersfield -- has not violated the so-called PM-10 standard since 2003. It is the first completed cleanup of a major pollutant here since the 1990s.

The EPA's action Thursday means the Valley no longer faces PM-10 cleanup deadlines or possible federal sanctions, which include temporarily cutting off \$2 billion in federal road-building funds.

But environmentalists say the EPA's approval is illegal because the agency should not have waived bad-air readings in Bakersfield and Corcoran over the past few years.

"There are literally dozens of exceedences that have been ignored," said attorney Paul Cort with Earthjustice, a nonprofit legal watchdog group in Oakland. "This is the Bush administration patting themselves on the back when people are clearly suffering." Federal, state and local air officials disagreed, citing Clean Air Act exceptions for natural events, such as excessively windy days.

Environmentalists say that if they prevail in the case, they may have a legal reason to force the EPA to rescind the Valley's new clean-air classification for PM-10.

Meanwhile, authorities will not shy away from stricter rules to hold down dust from industries and residents, said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"We have a maintenance plan in place for the next 10 years so there will be no backsliding," he said.

Sadredin said the PM-10 cleanup relied heavily on rules requiring farmers to water unpaved roads, make fewer passes over their fields with tractors and other similar measures. Fireplace regulations over the past several years also have helped, he said.

Sadredin added that if the district has even one bad reading in the future, the Valley will again be in violation of the standard.

EPA officials said they would push for stricter requirements on other major pollutants as well.

"In addition to the current controls, many additional reductions will be needed to attain the more protective PM-2.5 standard and the ozone standard," said Deborah Jordan, air division director for the agency's Pacific Southwest region.

Activists were not impressed, saying the EPA doesn't pay enough attention to the health problems created by the dust and soot.

"When I stop seeing Valley residents in the emergency room gasping for breath, then I'll pop the champagne," said respiratory therapist and Fresno resident Kevin Hamilton. "Until then, we'll see EPA in court."

Feds say valley's PM10 pollution meets standards; environmental group disagrees

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Sept. 27, 2008

Federal environmental regulators this week declared the San Joaquin Valley in compliance with national standards for a certain air pollutant, but an environmental group is challenging the agency's decision.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday the valley has sufficiently curbed its coarse particulate matter pollution, known as PM10, and has attained compliance with national standards.

In order to be in attainment, the valley had to go three years without exceeding the national PM10 level.

However, Earthjustice, an Oakland-based environmental group that's been active in valley air quality issues, said PM10 levels exceeded federal limits in Bakersfield and Kings County on dozens of occasions during the three-year time period.

EPA maintains those instances don't count because they were caused by high-wind conditions. Earthjustice and several other groups are challenging the agency's claim in court.

The matter will be heard in federal court early next year.

PM 10 is a mixture of soot, dust and liquid droplets caused by wood-burning and farming. While EPA has declared the valley in compliance for PM 10, the region still does not meet national standards for smog and fine particulate matter, known as PM 2.5.

Construction emissions fees to stay

By Alex Cantatore-Staff Reporter

Turlock Journal, Saturday, September 26, 2008

Like everything else in the world, construction sites are now being told to go green, or else. Thanks to a recent court decision developers will end up paying fees for the air pollution generated at worksites, despite their many objections.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District won a case in Fresno's U.S. District Court last week that ensured their regulation of development-associated air pollution, Rule 9510, will continue. The court found that the Clean Air Act allowed the district to "regulate aspects of land use critical to air quality."

The National Association of Homebuilders had filed suit in June 2007 claiming that the Valley Air District's agency to assess development fees for air pollution mitigation was pre-empted by federal authority.

"This decision affirms that we have the authority to regulate the effects of motor vehicles and equipment attracted to development sites," said District Counsel Phillip Jay.

This is the second court decision in favor of the Valley Air District's authority to regulate construction site air pollution this year.

A coalition of development-related interests, including the Building Industry Association, the Valley Taxpayer's Association, the Coalition of Urban Renewal Excellence, and a local chamber of commerce had attempted to overturn Rule 9510 in February. The coalition had argued that the fee amounted to a tax under Proposition 13, but the Fresno County Superior Court found otherwise.

"Although the state and national industry associations have challenged the District's authority, our local builders have exhibited a great cooperation and willingness to implement reasonable measures to help protect public health," said Seyed Sadredin, Air Pollution Control Officer and Executive Director of the Valley Air District. "The Valley's innovative approach to emissions from new development activities is being closely studied by other regions in the state."

The rule in question was the first of its kind in California when adopted in Dec. 2005, setting a benchmark that other areas are looking to as a model for their own future regulation. Rule 9510 currently governs all eight counties in the Valley Air District, ranging from San Joaquin County in the north to parts of Kern County in the south.

Rule 9510, also known as Indirect Source Review, forces developers within the district to quantify the emissions produced by their project in both construction and habitation phases. Based on that number, mitigation fees are charged which can be offset through the construction of air-friendly components such as sidewalks, electric plug-in stations, green space, and other elements that encourage alternatives to driving.

According to the Valley Air District, Rule 9510 is one of the crucial elements for improving the Valley's air quality when taking into account the myriad factors that contribute to the area's poor breathing conditions.

"We have significant natural challenges to our air quality in the Valley by virtue of our geography and climate," Sadredin said. "Piling on our history tendency to sprawl has only posed another obstacle to achieving cleaner air. However, the cooperation of the development community in the Valley has been, and continues to be, crucial in improving air quality for all of us."

Kids calendar artwork

Hanford Sentinel, Sunday, Sept. 28, 2008

KINGS COUNTY -- The deadline to submit artwork for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's 2009 Healthy Air Living Kids Calendar is Oct. 13.

The Valley Air District produces the four-color, bilingual calendar each year. About 20,000 calendars are distributed free to schools, community groups, healthcare facilities, churches and non-profit organizations in December.

Valley school students in kindergarten through 12th grade who live within the Air District's boundaries are eligible to enter the contest. Artists should place the page sideways, in landscape orientation, so the paper is 8 1/2 inches high and 11 inches wide. Artwork should be in color and contain a written message about how to live a healthy air life. Healthy Air Living, a new, comprehensive initiative, aims to improve the health and quality of life of all Valley residents by making air quality a priority consideration in all business and personal decisions.

Messages for the 2009 calendar could include:

- Live a Healthy Air Life.
- Healthy Air Starts with Me.
- When we breathe cleaner, we live better.

- Avoid using leaf blowers.
- Use a propane grill, instead of charcoal.
- Avoid drive-through restaurants.

Fourteen drawings will be selected for the calendar. Artists must include their name, address, phone number, age, grade and school on the back of the artwork and mail it flat, not folded, to 2009 Kids Calendar, Valley Air District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726.

The Valley Air District covers eight counties including Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings and Tulare.

Information: call Maricela at 230-6000.

Big West leak under control

By James Geluso, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Sept. 28, 2008

An apparent hydrogen leak at the Big West refinery prompted responses from local fire departments, but the refinery's own fire department had the situation under control, officials said Sunday.

Hazmat teams from both the Kern County and Bakersfield fire departments responded to the call at about 11:45 a.m. Sunday, said Kern County Fire Department Capt. Benny Wofford. But those units played a support role, he said.

"They had detected the leak, they were conducting the operation, they had the source shut down," Wofford said. "We were just monitoring the situation and making sure the gas bled off."

The refinery's sensors detected a leak of hydrogen, probably from a failed gasket on a compressor, Wofford said.

"It was never to the point where it was going to be immediately dangerous to life and health in the general area," Wofford said.

The compressor involved was among several pieces of equipment that had been taken down for regular maintenance in what's called a "turnaround," said Melinda Hicks, a senior environmental engineer for Big West. The refinery was going through the process of restarting when the leak occurred. No oil was being refined at the time, but the machines were being prepared to start refining.

Two members of the county's environmental health emergency response team went to the refinery, said Environmental Health Director Matt Constantine.

He said the explosive nature of hydrogen was the cause for concern.

Constantine said both his department and Big West will follow up to determine the cause of the leak and how to prevent future leaks.

Hicks said the investigation will determine whether there was a bad seal in the machine, something missed in the maintenance process, or something else entirely.

Sunday's leak isn't an isolated incident.

On Friday, the same day the Kern County Planning Commission recommended approving an expansion of the refinery, an equipment failure at the facility vented sulfur gas into the air.

The release of 500 pounds of sulfur in that incident was caused by a failure of the facility's sulfur recovery system, according to a report Big West officials filed with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

Refinery reports yet another gas release

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Sept. 27, 2008

The same day the Kern County Planning Commission recommended approving an expansion of the Big West of California refinery, an equipment failure at the facility vented sulfur gas into the air.

Big West officials reported releasing 500 pounds of sulfur dioxide vapor around 10:30 a.m., according to report they filed with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services. The release was caused by a failure of the facility's sulfur recovery system, the report said.

Big West officials could not be reached for comment Friday afternoon.

The company also notified Kern County Environmental Health Services Director Matt Constantine when the release occurred.

Constantine said the sulfur plant failure diverted gas to the refinery's flare, which was then burned and released into the air as sulfur dioxide.

Big West was still reporting problems with the sulfur plant around 2 p.m., Constantine said.

That was around the same time a sulfur smell wafted through parts of downtown Bakersfield, though it's unclear if the odor was related to the refinery release.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, high levels of sulfur dioxide can contribute to respiratory illness and aggravate heart and lung diseases.

Local air regulators have cited the refinery at least 19 times in the past two years for flaring excess amounts of carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide.

Big West is also the suspected source of a heavy, petroleum odor in Bakersfield on Sept. 11 and Sept. 12. The odor sickened several students at a northwest Bakersfield middle school on the morning of Sept. 12 and prompted a flurry of odor complaint calls from the Westchester area the night before.

Big West discovered a leaky valve on a storage tank releasing gas around the same time the smell was being reported on Sept. 11, Constantine said.

While it's impossible to know if the refinery valve was the source of the odor, Constantine said wind patterns on both days would have blown the odors from the refinery toward the areas where they were detected.

Tulare split on sports complex

Supporters and opponents offered their thoughts at a recent meeting

By Luis Hernandez

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Saturday, Sept. 27, 2008

About 200 people packed into Tulare's Claude Meitzenheimer Community Center earlier this week, ready to learn more about the proposed motor sports complex and ready to voice their opinions on the controversial project.

Thursday's town hall forum was not a debate, stressed the organizers — the Tulare Motor Sports Complex Citizens Advisory Committee, which is made up of supporters and opponents of the 711-acre project. But supporters and opponents at the meeting still found ways to voice their opinions.

Here's a sample:

For: "I can't see anything but positive [things] coming out [of] this. That land will be developed one way or another." — Roger Dysart, Tulare. The complex would include a racing oval, drag racing strip, hotels, shopping, public safety offices and other elements. The mostly empty land is surrounded by Highway 99, the International Agri-Center and a couple of farming operations.

Against: "We work to clean the air and then something like this comes along." — Donald Brown, commenting on the track's effect on the local environment. Opponents of the project say it'll bring

pollution, noise to residents, traffic congestion and take up valuable farm land, as well as disturbing dairy operations.

For: "This will benefit the ag show. [Attendees] have been asking for more hotels, restaurants and others attractions. This will complete the circle for us." — Jerry Sinift, World Ag Expo general manager. The annual February event attracted 1,600 exhibitors and 100,000 attendees, but is now facing a rival ag show in Orlando, Fla. in 2010.

Against: "We have to be concerned about our children. There are two schools nearby and soon there will be three." — Pat Drilling, commenting on pollution that could come from the track. Mission Oak High School and Cypress School are within three miles of the proposed site, and College of the Sequoias is planning a campus for the area.

For: "Everybody I talked to, there was not one person who had anything negative about this." — Anthony Castaneda, who said he has spoken to many people about the project.

Against: "I don't feel this is right for Tulare." — Rachel Dysart, Tulare.

Upcoming dates

Tulare Planning Director Mark Kielty said the project's Environmental Impact Report will likely be ready in four weeks. The Tulare Planning Commission will hold a public hearing in November. The project then would go before the City Council on Dec. 2, and if the council approves the project, it would then go to the Tulare County Local Agency Formation Commission in February or March.

Mountain fires again mar air quality

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday (afternoon), Sept. 25, 2008

FRESNO -- Air pollution officials warn that smoke from two stubborn fires will impact air quality across the San Joaquin Valley for the next few days.

The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District said Wednesday that particulate matter from a 3,700-acre blaze in Sequoia National Park and another 9,400-acre blaze in Kings Canyon National Park could cause health issues for people with respiratory and heart problems.

Temperatures as high as 95 degrees and a lack of breezes are combining to trap bad air in the valley. The air board said even foothill communities in Fresno, Madera, Tulare and Kern counties normally above the smog line are being affected.

Officials are warning people with respiratory problems to limit outdoor activity.

Sierra fires, high temps cue air quality warning for Central Valley

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, September 26, 2008

Air pollution officials warn that smoke from two stubborn fires will impact air quality across the San Joaquin Valley for the next few days.

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Fires may hurt air quality

The Madera Tribune, Saturday, September 27, 2008

Smoke from the "Hidden" fire in Tulare County and the Tehipite fire in Fresno County may pollute air in foothill and mountain communities of Madera, Fresno, Tulare and Kern.

"We are advising people in these areas to monitor their local air quality and take precautions as necessary," said Shawn Ferreria, senior air quality specialist at San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Smoke produces particulate matter, which can cause serious health problems, aggravate lung disease, cause asthma attacks and acute bronchitis and increase risk of respiratory infections. In people with heart disease, short-term exposure to high pollution has been linked to heart attacks and arrhythmias, according to US Environmental Protection Agency.

A press release from the Air Pollution Control District asserts, "If you can see or smell smoke, your area is being impacted."

The district also advises residents in affected areas to use caution.

Fresno's planning fails three court tests City wins just one in 10 challenges; settles 6 others.

By Brad Branan / The Fresno Bee
Monday, Sept. 29, 2008

Interest groups and government agencies are successfully suing the city of Fresno, winning cases that raise questions about how the city protects the public from the effects of development.

The lawsuits, filed under the California Environmental Quality Act, have accused the city of failing to fully consider air pollution, traffic, historic buildings and other factors when approving development.

Since the start of 2005, 10 CEQA actions against Fresno have been decided, and the city won just once. Fresno settled six cases and lost three -- the losses coming in appellate court decisions made during a 14-month period ending in May.

The string of higher-court rulings, including a decision on the Fresno 40 project in northeast Fresno, suggests the city isn't always following the law, experts said. Some critics of the city have made that complaint for years.

"If I was the planning director, one appellate ruling would have me scratching my head," said Mike McCoy, co-director of the Information Center for the Environment, at the University of California at Davis.

"Three would have me in the city manager's office defending my job."

But Nick Yovino, who recently retired as Fresno's planning director, said the court decisions aren't the result of problems in the Planning and Development Department. The department handles most of the city's environmental reviews.

"Everything we do is in compliance with CEQA," Yovino said, even though two of the appellate rulings involved his department. The third case was handled by the city's Redevelopment Agency.

City Council Member Jerry Duncan said the court rulings didn't convince him of the need to change the city's review process.

"We could probably make sure we never have a CEQA challenge, but it would probably add a year to each project," he said. "I don't want us to shut down our economy."

City Attorney Jim Sanchez, however, said the city has refined its development reviews as a result of CEQA decisions. The city pays greater attention to historic properties, and what development means for air quality and traffic, among other things, he said.

The city has spent about \$100,000 on legal fees for lawsuits filed over the relocation of historic homes for a redevelopment project downtown, Sanchez said. But typically the city spends less than \$10,000 on legal fees for CEQA cases.

Former City Council Member Tom Boyajian said the city doesn't worry much about the cost of CEQA challenges. An attorney who served eight years on the council before leaving in 2006, Boyajian often voted against development proposals, saying the city hadn't met CEQA requirements.

"It was like a badge of honor at the city not to follow CEQA," he said. "The city is like a prostitute who knows she's going to get caught a few times and considers it the cost of doing business."

Fewer reviews in Fresno

Government agencies must review all development proposals to see whether CEQA applies. If it does, the agency decides whether the project will likely have significant environmental effects.

A finding of significance leads to a more detailed study, which can upset developers. The study can take nine months to a year to complete and cost the developer up to \$20,000, city officials said.

Fresno finds that projects are likely to produce significant effects far less often than other similar-sized cities in California, The Fresno Bee found in an analysis of CEQA records sent to the state.

In a 10-year period ending in July, Fresno required a full environmental review for nine out of 73 projects, or 12% of the time, according to the CEQA database.

By comparison, California's 20 biggest cities, except Los Angeles and San Diego, required a full environmental review for 26% of projects.

The results seem to indicate that Fresno is reluctant to require a full review, said McCoy of the Information Center for the Environment, which maintains the database.

Environmental violations

Appellate courts repeatedly have found fault with the city's CEQA standards:

In April 2007, an appellate court tossed out the city's approval of a shopping center proposed on North Friant Road near Highway 41. The Woodward Park Homeowners Association sought the decision for the property known as the "Fresno 40," referring to its acreage.

The city erred by allowing developer DeWayne Zinkin to pay just \$44,000 for the traffic the shopping center would add to Highway 41, when Caltrans estimated the fee at \$307,000, the court said. Fresno's decision would leave the public "holding the financial bag," the court said.

As a result, the city failed to make a reasonable effort to offset the effects of development, a key CEQA requirement, the court said.

The city violated the other key part of CEQA by failing to inform the public about the likely effects of the shopping center, the court found.

The court said the city's reviews were "deeply flawed": Instead of comparing the project's expected effects against existing conditions, the city wrongly based its review on a comparison with a "massive hypothetical office park," creating a "misleading report." The city staff misrepresented findings to the City Council, which received them at the last minute, the court said.

More than a year after the ruling, Terry Rivasplata, former director of the State Clearinghouse, an agency responsible for reviewing CEQA filings, recalled specifics of the decision.

"It just gives you pause about how the city is handling CEQA," said Rivasplata, a planning consultant in Sacramento. "It suggests problems to me -- not keeping up with case law, for instance ignoring the Caltrans recommendations for another."

Yovino and Sanchez said the city will make sure the mistakes aren't repeated in the next review of the project, due next year. The Planning Commission and the City Council will have to vote again on the project, having first approved it five years earlier.

In February of this year, an appellate court ruled that Fresno botched another environmental review. The review, which found a downtown apartment building wasn't historic, would have allowed developers to tear it down for a parking lot.

City staff mistakenly used an earlier decision by the City Council to not list the building on the city's historic register, when a separate decision was needed under CEQA, the court said.

CEQA has a different standard than the city's historic register, the court said, and the circumstances of the city's initial decision also made the question worth revisiting. The council voted 4-3 to exclude the building from the register when the city's preservation manager and preservation commission had unanimously recommended its inclusion.

The city is waiting to find out whether the developers want to go through the review process a second time.

In May, an appellate court found yet more errors in a city review of historic property -- homes that stand in the way of a proposed parking garage for the Old Armenian Town redevelopment project downtown.

Preservationists want to keep the homes in Old Armenian Town, saying they represent an important part of the city's history.

An initial report by the city found that developers couldn't build the parking garage where they wanted, because the relocated historic homes would need to go there, the court's ruling says.

Nevertheless, the city proceeded with the developers' plans for the parking garage, ignoring what its own review had found earlier, the court said.

The city "never justified its abandonment of the previously adopted mitigation measure, and no substantial evidence supports the change," the court said.

The future of the parking garage, originally approved in 2002, is now in doubt. Without the garage, the developers might also abandon plans to build retail and office space there. The city is waiting to see whether the developers want to proceed.

Lawsuits get response

CEQA can invoke strong feelings. Developers worry about costly delays and additional requirements. Interest groups worry about their various causes. And the city tries to sort out the competing concerns.

"CEQA is like abortion -- you have your proponents and opponents," said Moses Stites, who reviews CEQA cases for the state Public Utilities Commission. "CEQA is very controversial."

Until he left in July, Stites reviewed CEQA cases for 18 years at the state Department of Transportation district office in Fresno. He often butted heads with city officials, trying to get Fresno to collect fees from developers for projects that would add traffic to highways.

In one case, developer Ed Kashian had a highly publicized dispute with Yovino over how the city would review his Fancher Creek development. When completed, Fancher Creek will put 700 homes and a shopping center on 500 acres in southeast Fresno.

City staffers initially recommended approval of the project without a full environmental review. Fancher Creek would not have a "significant effect on the environment," the city's 2002 report says.

But when environmental attorney Patience Milrod and then-Planning Commission Member Lee Brand complained that the project was being reviewed in segments instead of as a whole, the developers withdrew their request to have the environmental review approved.

Yovino later met with Kashian to discuss how the city would review the project. At the time, Yovino said Kashian twice threatened to have him fired, although Kashian said he was just joking.

"I did not take it as a joke because it didn't seem funny," Yovino said at the time.

The city staff eventually required a full environmental review of Fancher Creek, which was approved by the City Council.

Milrod, representing a group of doctors called Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, challenged the council's decision in Fresno County Superior Court. The group accused the city of failing to fully consider a number of environmental effects, including air quality and traffic.

CEQA requires cities to consider the concerns of the public and other government agencies before making a finding. But Milrod and others said they've had to sue to get Fresno to listen.

The city and the Fancher Creek developers settled the lawsuit, agreeing to conduct a transportation study and install emission-control devices on some city buses, among other things.

Caltrans also got a better response from Fresno by going to court, Stites said. Caltrans sued Fresno in 2004 over fees for increased highway traffic from new development.

Previously, Caltrans had only sued Irvine over the highway fees, but has since filed lawsuits against Monterey County and Elk Grove, according to the department's public affairs office.

Fresno also settled two cases filed by Madera County in recent years over concerns about traffic from two shopping centers approved by the city.

Fresno settled the Caltrans lawsuit, too, agreeing to a formula to determine how much the city should collect from developers for highway fees. Stites said he spent less time haggling with the city as a result.

"When I first started at Caltrans, Fresno didn't stack up very well," Stites said. "Toward the end of my time there, things had changed 1,000%. ... I saw a lot of changes after the lawsuit."

Fresno developments push the boundaries

Numerous projects passed through zoning changes are undermining a goal of Fresno's general plan -- reducing sprawl.

By Brad Branan / The Fresno Bee
Sunday, Sept. 28, 2008

A 2002 master development plan for Fresno has failed to make good on promises to curb urban sprawl, public records and interviews show.

Experts say sprawl -- poorly planned development scattered far from the city's heart -- could add to some of Fresno's biggest problems by creating more traffic and air pollution, depriving core neighborhoods of development and straining the city's budget for road maintenance.

The city's latest general plan, a blueprint approved in November 2002 for growth through 2025, brought promises to control the problem, which has been a concern for decades.

Mayor Alan Autry said at the time that the plan was a "defining moment in the history of our city," marking "the day when our city's leaders said 'no' to continuing urban sprawl."

But experts say the plan was flawed from the beginning, allowing construction of housing projects on agricultural land on the city's fringe, isolated from jobs and shopping.

In addition, the City Council has routinely approved developer requests for exceptions to the plan or the city's zoning code, city records show.

Experts say such case-by-case tinkering with development plans only worsens sprawl.

From January 2003 through June 2008, the council approved about 400 zone changes or general plan amendments and denied just four.

The approvals included more than 300 projects around the city's edges -- in most cases allowing more intense development. The Bee analysis excluded zoning changes requested before 2003.

Over those 5 1/2 years, the city let developers convert more than 11 square miles around Fresno's edges for residential, commercial and other types of development. That includes two of

the biggest projects approved in recent years: Copper River Ranch subdivision, which added a square mile to Fresno's northern tip, and the Fancher Creek development, which converted almost a square mile on the southeastern side.

Despite the promises of 2002, "It looks like business as usual," said Hal Tokmakian, a former Fresno County planning director and professor emeritus of planning at California State University, Fresno.

Tokmakian and several other planning experts reviewed the city's land-use decisions at The Bee's request.

Nick Yovino, Fresno's recently retired planning director, disagrees with their assessment. Most of the land-use changes were rezones allowed under the general plan, said Yovino, who wrote it. Plan amendments have made for more "judicious use" of land, he said.

"The plan is working exactly as it should," Yovino said.

But Tokmakian and other critics said the plan was flawed to begin with -- and that the repeated amendments prove the point.

Among similar-sized cities in California, the few that amend their plans more than Fresno have decided to start over and make new development plans.

In Fresno, the "plan is cockeyed," said Tokmakian, who taught Yovino when he was a student at Fresno State. The plan fails because it doesn't work well with the city's zoning code, which is based on planning ideas from the 1950s, he said.

Others contend that sprawl is a sign that Fresno's traditionally cozy relationship with developers has not changed.

Fresno completed the development plan the same year federal authorities were wrapping up cases from Operation Rezone, which ensnared former City Council members for accepting bribes for land-use decisions. Since then, critics contend, legal money from developers -- service fees and campaign contributions -- has continued to tilt the system in their favor.

Crowded edges

On Fresno's western edge, subdivisions are starting to fill the landscape, standing alongside orchards and farms, many of them dilapidated. Roads are lined with signs advertising new homes.

Converting farmland into subdivisions has been a dominant building pattern in the central San Joaquin Valley. Several experts who reviewed land-use changes since the plan was approved found that the pattern of sprawl has continued.

Fresno has approved conversions for more than 140 single-family housing projects around the city's edge, including Copper River Ranch and Fancher Creek, since the 2002 plan was adopted.

The decisions created sprawl by replacing farmland with isolated housing tracts often distant from shopping and work, experts said.

"They're turning agricultural districts into low-density housing, which by most people's definition is sprawl," said Rob Wassmer, a public-policy professor at California State University, Sacramento. Wassmer has written extensively about sprawl in the West, including a report that found Fresno was one of nine California metro areas with the biggest increases in sprawl in the 1990s.

His assessment of Fresno's record in the last six years: "It doesn't look like there's been a concentrated effort to stop sprawl."

Fresno's recent land-use decisions look like "piecemeal zoning -- they're dealing with each project in isolation," said Reid Ewing, research professor at the National Center for Smart Growth at the University of Maryland. He pointed to a list of residential subdivisions approved without commercial projects to serve them.

Carol Whiteside, founder of the Great Valley Center, a Modesto think tank focused on growth issues, sees a similar pattern in the city's development decisions.

"They seem very opportunistic, based on landowner desires and without a goal in mind," she said. "The problem with plan amendments is that they're done without looking at the big picture."

City defends record

Yovino disagrees. He said the development plan checked sprawl by approving only a slight increase in the city's "sphere of influence" -- the zone of unincorporated land around the city designated for future annexation.

The area covers 50 square miles, potentially expanding the city by 45% to accommodate an anticipated 60% increase in population by 2025, Yovino said.

By contrast, Sacramento expects to vote on a development plan this year that would keep all but 1% of future growth in its existing city, said Jim McDonald, a senior planner in Sacramento. As part of a nationally recognized effort to curb sprawl, cities in the Sacramento region have agreed to limit suburban growth.

Fresno officials also have touted their development plan as a sprawl-control measure.

"The very first thing we must do to prevent sprawl is to implement the city's general plan," City Council Member and mayoral candidate Henry T. Perea said earlier this year.

"The key in controlling sprawl in Fresno is to continue to follow the 2025 general plan," Council Member Jerry Duncan said when he was running for mayor.

But some council members are reticent about the land-use changes they've approved since adopting the plan. Perea, for example, failed to respond to repeated requests for an interview.

Duncan and Council Member Brian Calhoun said the plan needs to accommodate growth, not prevent it. Said Calhoun: "People are going to move here unless we put up a fence. And we have to have an economy."

"If our goal was to 'stop sprawl,' that would involve a new general plan," Duncan said. "We needed single-family housing. We didn't want to stop the housing industry."

But Council Member Mike Dages, who represents southeast Fresno, said land-use changes have undermined the plan.

"There is sprawl, no doubt about it. We've also taken productive farmland," he said. "We haven't put our foot down and said, 'Developers, you are going to build here.' "

Asked why he supported most of the changes, Dages said he tended to view each decision in isolation, without seeing the big picture. He faults the Planning and Development Department for not providing the council with more comprehensive information about all the changes.

Fresno has received praise for some of its efforts to control sprawl. In October 2006, the city reduced the lot-size minimum for single-family homes from 6,000 to 5,000 square feet, a move expected to lead to more efficient land use.

The city also hired an internationally known planner, Peter Calthorpe, to come up with a blueprint for the Southeast Growth Area. The city hopes to direct 120,000 new residents by 2050 to the now-unincorporated area south of Clovis and east of Sanger. The plan differs from other fringe development because it would have places to live, work and shop.

Paying for sprawl

One of the fastest-growing parts of Fresno lies west of Highway 99. Builders like the relatively low cost of land. Residents can afford a home they couldn't buy in other areas.

Living on the edge of town comes at a cost, though -- longer commutes, for one. In the last year, rising gasoline prices have made commuting much more expensive.

Holly Rodriguez, 23, has felt the pain since buying a home in a new subdivision at Polk and Clinton avenues last year. Rodriguez and her husband couldn't afford a home near the insurance company where she works in north Fresno.

"It's about a 35-minute drive," she said of her daily commute. "There's a lot of stop signs along the way. There's a lot of traffic."

Rodriguez and other west side residents said area roads aren't built for all the traffic. There are too many potholes and stop signs, not enough traffic signals or sidewalks. Narrow and deteriorating rural roads carry urban traffic.

The city, Fresno County and others have formed a committee to identify transportation needs on the west side.

But Fresno has limited funding for road improvements and other infrastructure. Former City Council Member Tom Boyajian, who was the only member to vote against the development plan, said he was opposed because the city wasn't bringing in enough revenue to pay for improvements needed to serve new development.

City officials have acknowledged that projected revenue will fall short of the needs created by the plan.

For instance, the city has estimated the cost of needed street improvements at around \$4 billion. But street fees approved by the city last year are expected to raise just \$415 million.

State law prevents the city from using the fees to fix streets that are already deficient, according to a study commissioned by the city. Sections of some of Fresno's busiest roads -- Herndon, Shaw, Bullard, Ashlan and Shields avenues -- can only be fixed with other transportation funding.

Sprawl and smog

Driving is tied to another effect of sprawl -- dirty air. People driving longer distances create more vehicle emissions.

Two years ago, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District became the first agency in the state to create an air rule for new development. The district charges a fee to developers for new buildings on the edges of cities.

Vehicle emissions have gone down because of improved technology and stricter state requirements, said Tom Jordan, a district administrator.

But reductions would have been greater if not for fringe development, which leads to more driving.

In Fresno County and across the air district, the number of miles driven by all motorists is expected to increase at a greater rate than population growth, an indication of sprawl, Jordan said.

In three court cases, a group of Valley doctors accused Fresno of not paying enough attention to air quality when approving development. Concerned about respiratory illnesses, Medical Advocates for Healthy Air challenged the city's approval of the master development plan, and the Fancher Creek and Copper River Ranch projects.

The city settled the cases, agreeing to perform transportation studies and make improvements, such as installing emission-control devices on city buses, among other things.

Kevin Hamilton of Medical Advocates was surprised to learn that the city has approved so much development on the edges of Fresno. He also was upset, he said, because the decisions contradict his understanding of the development plan's goals.

"With all of the public health problems, it makes sense for them to stick to the plan," said Hamilton, director of special population services at Sequoia Community Health Centers.

... and poverty

Researchers link poverty to sprawl, because continued suburban development means less investment in the inner city.

Fresno has the nation's highest rate of concentrated poverty, The Brookings Institution found in reports in 2005 and this year. When one of the authors, Alan Berube, presented his findings in Fresno two years ago, he pointed to the city's development pattern as a central reason for poverty.

While the city's poorest neighborhoods are on the south side, Berube said, most of the city's new development has been on the north side, where new housing is aimed at upper-income residents.

Fresno's development plan calls for revitalization of the city's core, which covers an area generally between Chestnut and West avenues, and Ashlan and Jensen avenues. The city has offered incentives to attract builders to the core, such as lower street fees.

But with a few exceptions, residential builders haven't been interested in the urban core, said Michael Prandini, president and CEO of the Building Industry Association of Fresno/Madera Counties. Land costs more, isn't available in large parcels, and homebuyers don't want to live there, he said.

Developers won't build much in Fresno's core until all other land is developed, and that's only if the city sticks to its planned growth boundary, he said.

What went wrong?

Boyajian and other critics said they're not surprised sprawl continues under Fresno's development plan.

Before leaving office in 2006, Boyajian served on the City Council when three former council members were convicted in the federal Operation Rezone bribery and fraud cases. The influence of developer money is more pervasive now, even if it's legal, Boyajian said.

That's because the city's rapid growth has made development more lucrative, he said.

From January 2002 through May 2008, real-estate developers and subdividers donated \$565,000 to the campaigns of City Council members and Mayor Autry, far more than any other group, according to a Bee analysis.

The next leading donor group, public officials, contributed less than \$200,000 during the same period.

Some of the top donors -- Granville Homes, homebuilder Robert McCaffrey and Bonadelle Homes -- also were some of the top beneficiaries of land-use changes, each receiving at least several council approvals in the last six years.

Some City Council members said the donations didn't influence their votes.

"Bob McCaffrey has been very generous with me, but does that mean I would vote for his project? No," Calhoun said.

Council Member Dages, however, said campaign contributions influence the council, including himself.

"It shouldn't, but it does," he said. "Most politicians will tell you it doesn't. But if someone writes you a \$3,600 check, you feel an obligation to them."

Dages said he wouldn't vote for a project just because the developer contributed to his campaign, but he would "listen more" to the developer's proposal.

Council members often rely on recommendations from the Planning and Development Department, and bias exists there, too, some say.

Until 2003, it was just called the Development Department. And the department has been funded by development fees for years -- \$13 million in the current budget.

"As long as the fuel is growth, guess which way the car is going to go?" said Fresno environmental attorney Richard Harriman. "The fees create a bias in favor of the client -- the developer."

But Yovino said the funding only makes the department run "like a business" and doesn't influence planning decisions.

Plan problems

Planning experts provide another reason for the city's failure to better manage growth -- flaws in the development plan and the zoning code.

Plan amendments have contributed to fringe growth. Of the 110 amendments approved through June, 82 were for projects around the city's edges.

The Bee surveyed planning departments in the state's 20 largest cities, except Los Angeles. In an average year, only Sacramento, Bakersfield and San Jose approve plan amendments more often than Fresno.

In its guidebook on development plans, the state Governor's Office of Planning and Research says "frequent piecemeal amendments" to a plan can indicate "major defects." Cities should consider plan revisions in such cases.

Sacramento, Bakersfield and San Jose are all updating their development plans, and expect to approve them in the next two years.

"If you amend the plan too much, it loses its meaning," said McDonald, the Sacramento planner. "It encourages people to come in and amend the plan."

Fresno's plan needs to change, said Tokmakian, the former Fresno County planning director.

The plan tries to be too specific about what kinds of development should be built on individual pieces of property, he said.

The plan should regulate development through policy, not a map, he said.

Almost all of the plan amendments were needed because proposed development differed from the plan map, Yovino conceded. But having a detailed map allows the city to better plan for infrastructure needs, he said.

The city's zoning code also needs updating, Tokmakian said, because it was approved in 1960 and likely doesn't "translate the goals of the plan effectively." The zoning code is the law cities use to regulate land use.

Yovino said the city has made many amendments to the zoning code since adopting the development plan. Holding up the development plan for a new zoning code would have taken too long.

The result, according to Tokmakian, is that Fresno uses a system incapable of bringing promised change. Instead, the city continues "the same pattern of piecemeal changes on the fringes, concentrating on open space," he said.

New Dairy USA exhibit at the Fresno fair is a gas

By Paula Lloyd / The Fresno Bee
Sunday, Sept. 28, 2008

Shhh -- listen! What's that sound?

It's coming from that plastic cow on top of the ag building at The Big Fresno Fair.

Is it the wind? No.

To put it as politely as possible, it's the sound of a cow, er, making methane.

Every few seconds the sound emanates from the life-sized cow standing beside an outhouse.

"It's a methane gas sound," Lauri King, deputy manager of the fair, said more or less straight-faced.

Methane gas is given off from manure and belching of real cows.

The unnamed plastic cow is part of the new Dairyville USA exhibit sponsored by Producers Dairy and Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

The cow stands above a model of a methane gas digester next to a giant milk bottle. Under the bottle is a "milk" fountain constructed of galvanized milk buckets.

The dairy exhibit meets the Fresno fair's goal to "educate, celebrate and have fun," King said. Educational materials will be given out at the display.

Learning and laughing about how cows make methane gas meets the goals of education and fun, King said.

The fair will meet its celebration goal by marking its 125th anniversary this year. The first Fresno fair on Oct. 7, 1884, ran five days and included horse racing, a few small produce exhibits and some livestock on display.

This year, at a new exhibit, Modern Marvels in the Central Valley, fairgoers can stroll among historic farm implements and 8-foot-tall photos of Fresno County agriculture. The exhibit is the work of the Fresno City and County Historical Society.

The fair's history also is reflected in the new entrance gate on Kings Canyon Road leading to the infield parking. The gate was designed in the style of the fair's 1890 wood grandstand.

Another new feature on the Kings Canyon Road side of the fairgrounds is a permanent roof to provide shade and a safer entrance area. The structure provides a safer place for fairgoers to line up and keeps more people off the sidewalks on Kings Canyon, King said.

Two waterfalls and seating benches under the open-air structure were constructed using 600 tons of natural rock.

Also new this year are increased discounts for the fair.

In response to the tight economy, the fair is adding two new discount days -- a \$3 admission day Oct. 6 and a 2-for-1 admission on the last day of the Fair, Oct. 13.

Coupons are required for the Oct. 6 reduced admission and for the \$2 admission day on Oct. 7. To get coupons, visit the fair's Web site at www.fresnofair.com.

Los Banos 'Rail Trail' bike path will grow City seeking grants to extend trail to Ward Road

By Corey Pride, Los Banos Enterprise

In the Merced Sun-Star, Friday, September 26, 2008

[javascript:mi_story_tool.closeTool\(\);](#)City officials are pursuing funding that will allow Los Baños' Rail Trail to be extended.

Last week the City Council gave its permission for staff to seek grant funding to complete construction of the Rail Trail from Mercey Springs Road to Ward Road.

The project is estimated to cost \$891,800. Of that amount \$80,498 in money and services will be provided by the Public Works Department and Redevelopment Agency. State grants from Caltrans, the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are being proposed to pay for the remainder of the project.

Public Works Director Dwayne Chisam said the extended portion of the Rail Trail will differ slightly from its current look.

"It's a little different. It's not exactly the same type of design, but it'll be close enough," Chisam said.

The extension has been broken into two sections. The first portion will stretch from Mercey Springs Road to Place Road. The city plans on paving the a rail path and installing benches, garbage cans, vegetation, dog waste stations, lighting and drinking fountains.

The second section from Place Road to Ward Road will have the same items as the first section, but trees were added to the area in 2004, providing a different look from the rest of the trail.

A more extensive irrigation system will be added to both sections.

The land proposed for the Rail Trail between Mercey Springs and Place roads is owned by Union Pacific Railroad. The RDA has a lease agreement with the company through 2021.

Chisam said not owning the land will not prevent the city from completing the Rail Trail extension. "We got the approval of the (company). It's not like there's going to be a railroad there," Chisam said.

Mayor Tommy Jones said he looks at the project as a way of following the design that's been laid out for the city.

"It's just an advancement of our general plan," Jones said.

He said he believes the extension will give residents greater access to biking, walking, jogging and other activities along the rail corridor.

Chisam said once grant funding is received the completion of the Rail Trail extension should take about 18 months.

Chisam is optimistic about getting the grant money.

"There's no chance of getting what you don't apply for," he said.

Kings GWF Power Plants to Expand, Run Cleaner

By Miles Shuper

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, September 29, 2008

Kings County - GWF Energy, LLC will expand its two power plants in Kings County with the company filing for approvals in coming weeks with the California Energy Commission for both its Hanford and NAS Lemoore area facilities.

"The plants will be much more efficient," says Riley Jones, spokesperson for the company converting the gas turbines to so-called combined cycle units that recover waste heat.

The conversion of both power plants so they can utilize steam will generate another 50 megawatts of power in total. Right now each plant site generates 90 mw and this will mean each location will add 25 mw.

One megawatt of power can typically produce enough electricity to power 750 to 1,000 homes.

The company plans to file with the Energy Commission to amend the existing license submitting its plans Sept. 26 for the Hanford plant and Oct. 8 for the Lemoore plant called Henrietta. Already the Valley Air Board granted authority to construct licenses as of Aug. 1, says Jones.

The improved efficiency of the plant will mean better air quality with a reduction in NOx, CO2, VOCs and greenhouse gases vs. single cycle plants, says GWF.

The company says the air-cooled condensers at the plants will use no water for cooling the systems and will need just eight acre-feet per year increase over what they take now.

Jones says each plant will now hire an additional 14 people as they generate more electricity during more months of the year. Currently, these peaker plants operate only in summer months when power is scarcer and demand high. Using combined cycle technology, it's likely the plants will operate during more months of the year, but not likely to exceed 4,000 to 5,000 hours, says Riley.

GWF has recently gone through a similar upgrade of its power plant in Tracy, as all California power facilities seek efficiency and cleaner burning operations.

Jones says the plant currently has a contract with the state Department of Water Resources but it's likely that GWF will seek a utility contract for this power.

The expanded plants could be in operation in 2012. In addition to these improvements, Jones says the company is looking at the possibility of adding solar power generation at the Henrietta site across Highway 198 from the naval base. That plant is located right next to a utility substation making it easy to hook up to the grid.

Since 1989, GWF Power Systems Company, Inc. and GWF Energy LLC have constructed, owned and/or operated nine power plants/cogeneration facilities in California, with a combined generation capacity of approximately 500.

Edison Plan Foes Offer EIR Testimony

By Miles Shuper

Valley Voice Newspaper, Monday, September 29, 2008

Tulare County - Organizers of the opposition to Southern California Edison's proposed first choice for its high voltage power line route are optimistic their concerns will have an impact on the Environment Impact Report to be drafted for the controversial project.

George McEwen, chairman of PACE (Protect Agriculture, Communities and the Environment), said he was pleased with the turnout and comments at both the Farmersville and Woodlake so-called scoping sessions where testimony of environmental concerns was taken.

More than 100 persons attended each of the two sessions conducted by consultants preparing the draft EIR for the California Public Utilities Commission. Jensen Uchida, the PUC project manager, expects the draft EIR to be complete as early as January 2009. Public comment meetings on the draft EIR scheduled in February will be followed by other hearings on social and economic impacts. The PUC tentatively has May 2009 scheduled for a decision. Although it is not yet scheduled, a public hearing on the SCE plan is expected to be heard by Administrative Law Judge Hallie Yacknin, possibly as soon as November.

Each of the more than 20 persons who spoke at the Woodlake urged that Alternate 3, a 24.3-mile route generally referred to as the Stokes Mountain Route, be used for SCE new 220 Kv transmission line. Edison looked at that route but picked the 19-mile Alternate 1 route from Lemon Cove to Visalia passing near several schools and a day care center and bisecting Farmerville's planned economic development area.

Edison officials say Alternate 3 is too costly and would be more environmentally damaging than Alternate 1.

At the Woodlake session, Kent and Gail Kaulfuss, whose Lemon Cove property is near the Alternate 1 path, said they would be hemmed in on three sides with the addition of the new line close to an existing 60 Kv line. They were not notified on the right-of-way for the Edison proposal, Gail Kaulfuss said, because an adjacent property, not theirs, is involved.

Brian Blain was among those who cited the impact of a 100-foot wide swath which would cut through productive agricultural land. Not only would mature citrus and other trees be taken out of production, but irrigation and other water-related systems would be impacted.

Blain said conversion to row crops isn't practical because of the terrain. He also the creation of dust and other air quality issues resulting from barren land which attracts ATVs and other vehicles would be a problem. Blain said access to towers could also produce problems which would not be factors in the Stokes Mountain alternative route.

Robert Baker, whose family has been farming in the area since 1910, said the line would ruin orchards not only by wiping out productive trees, but be costly for redesigning and installing irrigation systems.

Judy Fisher was adamant in her plea to select Alternate 3 rather than having prime ag land removed, much of it farmed for several generations. She also cited the negative impact the tall and massive towers which have where they would cross Highway 65, the main entrance to Exeter. Citing Exeter's murals and other features, Fisher said, "tourists don't come to see towers."

In his presentation, McEwen questioned whether SCE has considered using advance aluminum transmission wire, developed by 3M, which could be carried on existing towers rather than crating entirely new transmission lines.

As he noted at previous public sessions, Uchida said the PUC will look at not only Edison's favored route but also other alternatives not limited to those submitted by the utility.

Calif. bond would launch bullet train project

By Steve Lawrence, Associated Press Writer

In the Washington Post, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, September 26, 2008

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—A century and a half after California built its first railroad, the Golden State may be about to launch the most ambitious rail project undertaken by any state—a nearly 800-mile system of bullet trains that can top 200 mph.

On Nov. 4, California voters will decide whether to authorize the sale of \$9.9 billion in state bonds to help pay for a 465-mile high-speed rail line linking Anaheim, Los Angeles, Fresno and San Francisco. Planners say it would be the first leg of a system that would complement air travel and eventually include stations in Sacramento, San Diego and Oakland.

Planners say the first trains could be running within six years in some corridors and that the entire 800 miles of track could be completed by 2020 if sufficient financing is available.

"This is the next big thing that's going to transform the state," said the project's executive director, Mehdi Morshed, a former state bridge engineer who likens high-speed rail to construction of the transcontinental railroad and California's freeway system. "I think this will be the beginning of a very big transformation in transportation, not only in California but the nation."

A Field Poll taken in July found that 56 percent of likely voters supported the bond measure, Proposition 1a, and 30 percent opposed it. The telephone survey of 672 likely voters had a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 5.6 percent.

So far, no opposition group has surfaced to pay for a campaign against the proposition.

"We thought about it," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, who signed ballot arguments against the proposition. "I checked the cushions behind the sofa and couldn't find \$500,000 to jump-start the campaign."

The measure's supporters had raised more than \$580,000, most of it from construction and engineering companies, by Sept. 23, far below what they hope to take in.

Despite the lack of organized opposition, the project faces some potential problems that could weaken support.

The state's poor economy and seemingly endless budget deficits could discourage voters from agreeing to take on more debt, although supporters tout the project as a way to create jobs. Paying off the bonds over 30 years with interest would cost about \$19.4 billion, according to the state Legislative Analyst's Office.

Voters might also be nervous about approving a massive new rail project following the crash of commuter and freight trains Sept. 12 in Los Angeles that killed 25 people. High-speed rail trains, however, wouldn't share tracks with freights.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has been hot and cold on the project. He twice supported legislation that postponed sending the bond measure to earlier ballots, but last year wrote an op-ed piece saying high-speed rail would be a "tremendous benefit" for California.

His spokesman, Aaron McLearn, says the governor hasn't taken a position on the bond measure. Schwarzenegger did agree to sign a bill adding oversight requirements to the proposal, which supporters said would help persuade voters to support the bonds.

The bullet train project has been on the drawing board for 14 years. A commission formed in 1994 recommended construction of a high-speed train system linking the state's biggest cities.

Legislation passed in 1996 created the California High-Speed Rail Authority, the nine-member board that has been overseeing planning for the trains.

Lawmakers approved the bond measure in 2002. A statewide vote was planned in 2004 and later in 2006, but was postponed both times out of concern that California had more pressing infrastructure needs.

The proposition includes \$9 billion for high-speed rail and \$950 million for conventional commuter and intercity rail, including trains that would connect with the bullet train system.

Voters in three counties in Washington also will vote this November on a major rail project: a \$17.9 billion light rail proposal linking surrounding counties to Seattle and the city's downtown to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. The 15-year plan would involve a sales tax increase of 5 cents per \$10 purchase.

California's entire 800-mile system is estimated to cost about \$45 billion, with the authority counting on federal funding, private investments and some local government money to help cover expenses. About 30 companies or consortiums have expressed an interest in investing in some fashion, Morshed said.

Supporters, citing use of high-speed rail in Europe and Asia, tout it as a proven way to supplement highways and air travel, ease oil use and air pollution and fight global warming as California's population climbs toward a projected 60 million by the middle of this century.

But opponents label the project a boondoggle and say the bond money would be better used for water projects, to expand the state's highway system or to spend more on existing commuter rail service. They warn of big cost overruns, contending the price tag could hit \$90 billion.

"We're not against high-speed trains, per se," said Coupal, of the taxpayers group. "At some point, California might be ready, after a little bit more study, to look at different transportation systems and a high-speed rail line might be part of the mix."

He argues that California doesn't have the population density to support a profitable high-speed rail system and that the trains would need state subsidies to keep running.

But Morshed says the authority's ridership projections are based on train use in California and throughout the U.S., not on ridership in more densely populated countries such as Japan.

The authority predicts the high-speed trains, unlike commuter rail, wouldn't need operating subsidies from the state because their fares would be competitive with those for airlines.

"Just look at evidence in other parts of the world," Morshed said. "In every one of those countries, the commuter rail and urban rail and buses are subsidized. In every one of them, the high-speed train service makes money."

Environmental groups' enthusiasm for the project has been dampened by the route proposed for the rail line between the Central Valley and the San Francisco Bay area: the Pacheco Pass southeast of San Jose. The Planning and Conservation League says that plan would encourage sprawl, and has filed a lawsuit calling for a more urban and northerly route through the Altamont Pass.

Morshed said the Pacheco Pass would be a more direct route to Southern California, and that the Altamont Pass would draw more fights with cities over construction.

Despite its lawsuit, the league is part of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition, which has endorsed the bond measure.

"If Proposition 1a doesn't pass it would be the death knell for high-speed rail for at least a decade and probably forever because it's just going to get too expensive to build," said Stuart Cohen, the coalition's executive director.

On the Net: <http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov>

UC Merced enrolled in environmental program to track carbon use 230 campuses, UC Merced included, haven't yet turned in report

By Danielle Gaines

Merced Sun-Star, Friday, September 26, 2008

UC Merced is one of the more than 230 colleges across the country that didn't submit initial reports required by the Presidents Climate Commitment, an agreement dedicated to cutting higher education net carbon emissions to zero.

The agreement, created in June 2007, charges colleges to achieve a "carbon neutral" status by decreasing overall greenhouse gas emissions and buying carbon credits to offset those that remain.

"We are very much committed to the program, and we are working on the objectives already," Merced's campus energy manager John Elliott said. "We are actually ahead of the Climate Commitment -- our report is just not in."

Though UC Merced hasn't filed its report, that shouldn't be seen as a sign that the school isn't taking the agreement seriously, said Lee Bodner, executive director of ecoAmerica. "In some cases, it just took colleges a little longer to get the paperwork together," Bodner said.

The university already participates in a similar program called the California Climate Action Registry. The most recent report filed with that organization was in March 2007, documenting the university's greenhouse gas emissions for 2006 which were 2,764.17 metric tons at that time.

Elliott is now in the process of filing that report for last year's emissions, and it will be available publicly by the end of the year, he said.

The overdue report is the initial inventory required of each college that signed the agreement to establish current emissions at the campus.

A second report that details specific actions toward climate neutrality is due Sept. 15, 2009, but that will also be filed by the end of this year when the university system requires it as part of its own plan, Elliott said.

Despite the fact that committing to several climate change programs can get confusing, Elliott said the effort is worth it. "A national commitment has a lot of value," he said. "This is a global problem, a national problem, and colleges are the ideal organizations to lead the way on this."

There are some major differences between two of the programs, Elliott said. For instance, the Action Registry requires that emissions reports are verified by a third party while the Climate Commitment does not. UC Merced will submit its verified report to the Climate Commitment, which is part of the reason for the delay, Elliott said.

The Climate Commitment is more stringent in other areas, requiring the college to include auto emissions from student and faculty travel as well as emissions from the delivery of supplies to the campus in its total numbers.

"That requirement is pushing the boundary for how to define climate neutrality," Elliott said. "But that is good."

Elliott and others on campus are trying to steer residents away from car-oriented lives to improve the air quality of the Valley. Elliot said the university considers air quality and commuting requirements in how it develops campus, trying to house as many students on the grounds as possible.

Melissa Kelly-Ortega is a member of the Merced Bicycle Coalition, which sponsored a bicycle maintenance workshop and group ride on campus last Saturday.

"I think it is great. It is what we all need to be doing -- pushing for zero carbon emissions," she said of the program at UC Merced.

In addition to encouraging less driving, Elliott said groups on campus are in the process of setting up a competition to find the dorm that conserves the most energy and other programs.

As part of the Climate Commitment, the university must buy carbon credits to offset any continuing emissions.

"Offsets will hopefully be a pretty small component at the end of the day," Elliott said. "We will be looking at ways to push renewable energy as far as we can to get as close to zero net emissions in the first place."

Systemwide, the University of California aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 2000 levels by 2014 and to 1990 levels by 2020.

Texas oilman T. Boone Pickens backing Prop. 10's alternative fuel bond

By Terence Chea, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, LA Daily News and other papers, Friday, September 26, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO-T. Boone Pickens, the Texas billionaire oilman who says he wants to break America's addiction to foreign oil, is betting that Californians are willing to help pay for cars and trucks that don't run on petroleum.

Pickens' natural gas fueling company, Clean Energy Fuels Corp., is the chief sponsor of a Nov. 4 ballot initiative that authorizes a \$5 billion bond to fund alternative energy development and provide rebates up to \$50,000 for buyers of vehicles that run on natural gas and other non-petroleum fuels.

Backers say the measure would help reduce California's greenhouse gas emissions blamed for global warming, improve air quality and jump-start the market for alternative-fuel vehicles.

"Proposition 10 will put California on the road to energy independence by lessening our use of petroleum-based fuels for transportation," said Marty Wilson, manager of the Yes on Prop 10 campaign.

But opponents say California can't afford the bond measure, which would cost \$9.8 billion - about \$325 million annually - over 30 years.

They say the initiative is designed to mainly subsidize cars and trucks that run on natural gas sold by Pickens' Seal Beach, Calif.-based company, which has donated more than \$3 million to the Proposition 10 campaign.

"It's a classic case of a wealthy special interest using the California ballot initiative system to enrich itself," said Richard Hober, who heads the Consumer Federation of California. "California is literally going broke and cannot afford another major cost that will result in reduced public education, public health and public safety."

Proposition 10 is one of two alternative-energy initiatives on the crowded Nov. 4 ballot. The other, Proposition 7, would require utilities to generate half their electricity from renewable sources such as wind and solar by 2025. That measure is opposed by utilities, as well as environmentalists and much of the renewable energy industry.

Proposition 10 appears to fit well with Pickens' highly publicized plan to end the country's dependence on foreign oil. The so-called Pickens Plan calls for building more wind farms to replace electricity produced from natural gas, which then could be used to replace petroleum to fuel cars and trucks.

The bond measure would provide \$2.5 billion in rebates to buyers of vehicles that run on natural gas, hydrogen, electricity, biomethane and propane. Another \$340 million in rebates would be set aside for high-mileage vehicles such as the Toyota Prius, although detractors say there's no need to offer incentives to buy them.

The rest of the bond money would be used to fund research and development of alternative energy technologies, as well as for training, education and demonstration projects.

Backers say it would help California reach its goals of cutting its greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020, producing more electricity from renewable sources and reducing the "carbon intensity" of transportation fuels.

"This measure is trying to create a market for low-carbon fuel vehicles," said Todd Campbell, public policy director for Clean Energy. "It will create an incentive for companies ... to pour more capital and apply more risk to create an alternative vehicle system for California drivers."

But critics say most of the rebate money would go to buyers of natural-gas trucks because there are few commercially available vehicles that run on hydrogen, electricity, propane or biomethane.

The market for natural gas vehicles, by contrast, is already well-established. There are more than 150,000 natural gas vehicles in the U.S. and more than 5 million worldwide, according to Natural Gas Vehicles for America. Honda Motor Co. makes a natural gas version of its popular Civic, and there are many fleets of taxis, airport shuttles, transit buses and industrial trucks that run on natural gas.

Increased sales of natural-gas vehicles would lead to business for Clean Energy, which calls itself the "largest provider of natural gas for transportation in North America."

Environmentalists aren't opposed to natural gas vehicles, which emit fewer greenhouse gases than those powered by petroleum, but they question whether taxpayer money should be used to subsidize them.

Taxpayer groups say California, which faces ongoing budget deficits, simply can't afford another big bond.

"We're outrageously in debt. It's lunacy to even consider taking on even more debt," said Kris Vosburgh, executive director of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. "The losers will be state taxpayers with less money for services they value."

Clean Energy's Campbell said there's no guarantee his company would see a big spike in business if the initiative passes. They say the rebate money would encourage manufacturers of other types of alternative-fuel cars and trucks to bring those vehicles to market faster.

"I don't think it's a given that Clean Energy is going to cash in," Campbell said. "We're definitely going to be a beneficiary, but I don't know if we're going to be a significant beneficiary."

Cargo fee bill OK urged

By Kevin Smith, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Saturday, September 27, 2008

State Sen. Alan Lowenthal and a group of port, air quality and transportation leaders urged Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Friday to sign a bill aimed at reducing air pollution and traffic congestion at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

The officials came together at a press conference in Long Beach in support of Lowenthal's Senate Bill 974, which would impose a \$30 fee on cargo containers moving through the ports.

It's estimated that the fee would generate \$350 million a year for improvements in air-quality and goods-movement infrastructure in California, and most of the money would be spent in Southern California.

"The goods movement sector of transportation is growing at a tremendous pace, and the ability of the San Pedro Bay ports to finance essential upgrades to freight infrastructure is vital to the health of our regional economy," Lowenthal said in a statement.

"This bill allows Southern California ports to continue to meet burgeoning trade demands, and we look forward to working with a growing list of supporters for its enactment next year."

The amount of container volume moving through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach is expected to nearly triple to more than 42.5 million 20-foot equivalent units (TEUs) by 2030.

Half of the Southern California funds are earmarked for air quality improvements that would be overseen by the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

The remaining money would be divided up among Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties for up to 130 grade separations and a pilot project to study the use of zero-emission technology to move containers from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Some container fee proposals have already been implemented at the ports, but SB 974 would adopt a more "systemic" statewide approach to the problem while improving the environment at the same time, according to Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster.

"It contains a decent amount of funding for grade separations throughout the region and for safety and traffic congestion," he said. "The good thing about this is we're doing something smart and right by looking at the goods-movement system as a whole."

SB 974 was approved by both houses of the state Legislature and is awaiting approval by Schwarzenegger.

Industry lobbyists, including the California Retailers Association, oppose the bill because of the additional money it would cost to ship products.

But El Monte Mayor Ernie Gutierrez said the fee is a "small price to pay" to offset trade-induced traffic congestion and air pollution.

"Experts have calculated that the cost of a DVD player would increase by no more than a couple of pennies, or a pair of shoes by less than half a cent," he said.

Fate of Steinberg warming bill up in the air

By Tony Bizjak

Sacramento Bee, Sunday, September 28, 2008

For two years, Sacramento Sen. Darrell Steinberg coaxed builders, environmentalists and housing advocates into agreement on an ambitious plan to cut global warming pollutants in California.

Now, he needs one more signature to make it law, and he's got two more days to get it. But that would-be signer, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, is balking.

The deadline is Tuesday.

Senate Bill 375 directs the state Air Resources Board to set greenhouse gas reduction targets for each of the state's 17 regional areas, including Sacramento. It offers incentives for cities and builders that turn growth inward, away from sprawling suburbs.

It's inspired by the Sacramento region's recent Blueprint to reduce car commutes with more urban-style housing and more transit.

Proponents call it far-reaching. Opponents say it overreaches.

Schwarzenegger administration officials reportedly fear the bill could thwart billions of dollars of already planned major road projects in the state, such as carpool lanes on freeways.

In a Friday meeting with administration officials, Steinberg, the state Senate's president pro tem-elect, disagreed, but promised to clear that up with further legislation, if need be.

He pointed out the bill will fast-forward Schwarzenegger's oft-stated desire of leading the world in reducing greenhouse gases, blamed for global warming.

"This is not just another bill," Steinberg said Saturday. If the governor vetoes it, Steinberg warned it would be very hard to resuscitate next year. "The coalition is a fragile one."

Administration officials declined to comment Saturday.

In a Friday speech, however, Schwarzenegger voiced reservations.

"It will be a huge bill," Schwarzenegger acknowledged, a follow-up to landmark AB 32 two years ago, requiring California to reduce greenhouse gas emissions dramatically by 2020. "The

important thing is, again, that it is written the right way. I'm going to look at that bill very carefully, because in principle, I love that idea."

If the bill becomes law, proponents say the next generation of Californians will drive less and live closer to work and closer to each other.

Call it California Condensed.

The plan instructs metropolitan areas to put a belt around growth plans and cinch it up a notch or two.

Sacramento transportation official Mike McKeever said the bill could put California at a historic tipping point – when it starts making as much financial and social sense to build inward as outward.

"It's a way new era," said McKeever, Sacramento Area Council of Governments chief.

But state Sen. Tom McClintock, R-Thousand Oaks, has called it a case of "authoritarians on the left" telling Californians where and how to live.

"Is the public ready to give up mobility in the name of greenhouse gas reductions?" added Contra Costa Transportation Authority director Robert McCleary. He fears lawsuits against major road projects.

Steinberg countered the plan does neither. Instead, he said, it is an obvious next step for California to meet its self-imposed 2020 goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide from cars, which scientists say play a role in global warming.

Thirty-eight percent of California's greenhouse gas emissions come from cars ferrying residents to work, stores, schools and chores, and from trucks carrying goods to market, state Air Resources Board data show.

The bill instructs metropolitan areas to meld housing and transportation plans into a single document, then to estimate how much greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles that growth will produce.

The Air Resources Board, in turn, will set targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions for each region.

But the bill notably stops short of telling cities and counties which direction to grow. Nor does it require regions to meet ARB greenhouse gas emission targets.

Instead, the bill offers what Steinberg calls a "hard carrot."

Regions that blend land-use and transportation planning in a way that reduces vehicle emissions will be a step ahead in qualifying for state and federal transportation project funds.

Steinberg argues his plan isn't meant to be a death knell for California's suburban lifestyle.

"This is not going to eliminate backyards," he said. "It's more about ensuring that people don't have to spend more time in their cars."

Sacramento's early experience with its 4-year-old Blueprint plan, however, indicates old growth habits are hard to break.

Sprawl in Sacramento has slowed but not stopped. Infill development is happening, but slowly, and transit remains too skeletal to give many residents reason yet to get out of their cars.

To push past those problems, Steinberg says SB 375 offers additional incentives for "smart growth," including relief from certain onerous state environmental review laws for some infill projects and developments near transit stops. Richard Lyon of the state Building Industry Association said those incentives could reduce the number of projects stalled by lawsuits.

The group that put the bill together – dubbed the "coalition of the impossible" by Steinberg – includes builders, environmentalists, cities, housing organizations and transportation planners.

"We're in a new realm," said Sacramento developer Mike Winn, head of the local Building Industry Association chapter. "The (building) model that worked in the past is broken. Even new suburban areas around fringes are going to have to be served by alternative transportation."

Ports gear up for Clean Trucks Program

By Art Marroquin, Staff Writer

LA Daily News, Sunday, September 28, 2008

Cesar Olivarez climbs into the cab of his 1992 big rig and turns the key.

Black fumes spew from the exhaust pipe as he settles into the driver's seat and prepares for another haul from the Port of Long Beach to a local warehouse, a ritual he's practiced for the past 27 years.

A week's worth of work brings the independent trucker \$1,500, but a third of his earnings are guzzled up by rising fuel costs. On top of that, Olivarez shells out money for repairs to his 16-year-old rig, parking fees and the occasional traffic citation from police patrolling the ports.

"There are so many expenses just for work that it's hard to pay the rent and buy food sometimes," said Olivarez, 49, of Long Beach. "We're living in very hard times right now."

Beginning this week, new challenges are in store for truckers serving the twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The Clean Trucks Program, a \$1.6 billion initiative designed to reduce diesel truck emissions by 80 percent within five years, takes effect Wednesday.

Under the plan's first phase, trucks built before 1989 will be banned from the ports beginning this week. By 2012, all trucks entering the twin ports will be required to meet 2007 vehicle emissions standards.

The truck replacement program is funded by a \$35 cargo container fee. To help get cleaner-burning big rigs on the road, the Port of Los Angeles is offering grants to trucking companies, while Long Beach also extends the monetary assistance to independent drivers.

Under the program's terms, Olivarez won't have to give up his truck until Jan. 1, 2010. In the meantime, he's trying to land a permanent job with a trucking company.

"I thought I would make more money by having my own truck, but I was wrong," Olivarez said with a tone of regret in his voice. "I would like to become an employee driver, but I hope the companies don't think I'm too old."

Under the program, both ports are requiring trucking companies to obtain "concession contracts" to access port terminals. As of Friday, nearly 600 trucking companies with about 18,000 trucks had applied for concessions with the Port of Los Angeles, while the Port of Long Beach collected applications from about 600 motor carriers with some 8,000 trucks.

Both ports have enough trucks to get the program started without any major disruptions in delivering cargo, according to officials.

"Our principal goal is making sure we don't affect the flow of commerce in any way," said John Holmes, deputy executive director of the Port of Los Angeles. "The last thing we need is a back-up in deliveries, but I don't see that happening."

The Clean Trucks Program is part of the larger Clean Air Action Plan adopted by the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach as a way to allow for expanded operations while also reducing harmful diesel emissions.

Over the coming months, officials at both ports plan to roll out a series of terminal expansion proposals that heavily rely on pollution-reduction steps outlined in the Clean Trucks Program.

"I always felt that this was something that had to be done," said Jim Hankla, president of the Long Beach harbor commission.

"There's no denying that the ports provide a toxic footprint because of their reliance on diesel fuel," Hankla said. "The trucks that service the port are among our biggest polluters, so we focused our attention on fixing that problem."

Port officials are gearing up for full enforcement of the Clean Trucks Program by Wednesday. Police from both ports started pulling over trucks on Sept. 15 for a series of "courtesy stops" to remind drivers that the program's start date was around the corner.

On Wednesday, port police officers will closely examine vehicle registrations to make sure pre-1989 trucks don't slip by. Police will also make sure port-issued stickers are prominently displayed on the windshields of preapproved trucks trying to access terminals.

"We're ready to roll it out," Holmes said. "There's no going back from here."

The Port of Los Angeles plan requires the trucking firms to hire drivers as employees, leading to a gradual ban of independent owner-operator truckers within five years. Currently, 85 percent of the 16,800 drivers at the ports work as their own boss.

The Port of Long Beach chose to go down a separate road and adopted a plan that allows both employee and independent owner-operator truckers to continue hauling goods to the port, as long as their vehicles meet the program's new emissions standards.

"We have different philosophies, but it doesn't mean that either of us is wrong," Hankla said.

"We believe that an independent owner-operator can own their own clean trucks and that they should have as much access to the port as an employee driver," he said. "Essentially, it's the way we operate now, so we don't see any problems with that."

The American Trucking Associations warned that the ports' costly concession contracts and expenses associated with hiring drivers as employees would eventually drive small trucking firms out of business. A federal judge turned down the ATA's request to temporarily block the program from starting. A federal appeals court issued the same ruling last week.

"The reporting requirements and concession fees will significantly increase costs that the little guys simply can't afford," said ATA spokesman Clayton Boyce. "The concessions will lead to fewer trucking companies serving the ports, and that is an improper and illegal incursion to free market operations."

"Joe," the owner of a Long Beach trucking company, said he deals with 10 independent owner-operator drivers that haul goods for him. They provide the trucks, and Joe pays for the insurance and supplies them with a steady stream of work orders.

The cost of hiring those truckers as full-time employees would force Joe to close the business he's worked to build over the last dozen years, he said.

"I can't afford to hire these guys as employees and offer them benefits and health insurance," said Joe, who asked to go by an assumed name out of fear of retaliation from port officials.

"A lot of local companies are going to go out business real quick because of this program," he said. "I'm all for cleaner air, but this isn't the way to do it."

After much soul-searching, Joe said he reluctantly submitted the necessary paperwork recently, along with a \$250 fee to the Port of Long Beach and a separate \$2,500 fee to the Port of Los Angeles.

Joe said he intends to stay in business for only another year, allowing enough time for him and his drivers to find jobs elsewhere.

"We're going to go with the flow and see what happens," Joe said. "I'm just trying to buy us enough time to find something stable."

Critics of the program said that larger trucking firms will gradually squeeze out smaller companies, like the one owned by Joe. Port officials had said that they hoped to weed out companies that can't keep up.

"The fees are not out of line to ask from responsible companies wanting to work in the drayage market, no matter how big they are," the Port of L.A.'s Holmes said.

Last month, the Port of Los Angeles boasted a coup when Swift Transportation and Knight Transportation - two major national carriers based in Phoenix - agreed to sign up for a concession, collectively bringing along 2,000 new trucks meeting 2007 emissions standards.

The freight haulers are members of the American Trucking Associations, but a lawsuit filed by the agency did not stop Knight and Swift from wanting to do business at the ports.

"We think that the ATA had raised some legitimate points that need to be heard," said David Berry, a spokesman for Swift Transportation. "But in the final analysis, we decided to sign up because the air needs to be cleaned up and customers have goods that need to be moved."

A report released earlier this year by the Boston Consulting Group had warned that adopting the employee mandate could lead to a 3 percent loss in business at the Port of Los Angeles. Shipping companies would likely move to the neighboring Port of Long Beach or another West Coast harbor to avoid the high costs associated with the plan.

Economists had predicted that anticipated growth in cargo volumes would absorb losses and higher wages for drivers. However, both ports have suffered a significant decline in cargo shipments this year as the country's economy continues to falter.

"At this point, it's too early to sort out the net effects of how this program will play out for the local economy, given the slump we're experiencing," said Nancy D. Sidhu, vice president and senior economist for the Los Angeles Economic Development Corp.

"The high cost of purchasing clean trucks will lead to higher shipping rates and, to that extent, the shippers might try to find other ways to bring goods into the United States," Sidhu said. "Both ports have a lot at risk with this plan, but there are no hard figures at this point, and it's too hard to tell what the long-term financial impact will be."

The bleak outlook was not shared by environmentalists, who said that reductions in diesel emissions will lead to healthier lives for those living near the ports and across the region.

Each year, about 1,200 deaths are attributed to port pollution, according to the California Air Resources Board.

"Economists and trucking associations made a lot of doomsday predictions that shippers would leave and the industry would collapse, all in the name of clean air, but I don't see that happening," said Melissa Lin Perrella, staff attorney for the National Resources Defense Council, which helped the ports craft the Clean Trucks Program.

"Truck pollution from the ports is taking people's lives and we needed to find a way to stop it," she said. "I'm relieved to see this finally taking hold on Wednesday."

Transportation bill draws union opposition

From staff reports

LA Daily News, Friday, September 26, 2008

The union representing West Coast dockworkers voiced its opposition Thursday to a bill that would raise funds for air and transportation improvements at the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach and Oakland.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union is opposed to tacking another fee on cargo containers entering the ports, according to spokesman Craig Merrilees.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger must decide by next week whether to sign SB 974, which calls for a \$30 fee on cargo containers entering the ports. The bill's author, Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, said the funds would go toward air pollution programs and improving road and railway access throughout Southern California.

The ILWU's opposition comes just days after 10 members of California's congressional delegation sent a letter to Schwarzenegger urging him to approve the bill.

Schwarzenegger: Any president better than Bush on global warming

By Josh Richman, Oakland Tribune

In the Contra Costa Times, Saturday, September 27, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO — Either John McCain or Barack Obama would do a better job of dealing with global warming than President Bush has done, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said Friday.

The governor addressed the Commonwealth Club of California at the Fairmont Hotel on the eve of the two-year anniversary of AB32, California's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. Ten other states have enacted similar laws since, he said, all realizing "Washington is asleep at the wheel, we cannot look for leadership there."

Asked later what climate-change advice he has for the next president, he replied, "It doesn't matter who is going to get in, it is going to be better than this administration."

The next president must set realistic, firm goals for reducing greenhouse-gas pollution, he said, and encourage a panoply of renewable energy sources without putting too much stock in any single one. And he said the next president not only should overturn the Bush administration's denial of California's request for a waiver letting the state regulate automobile tailpipe emissions but should adopt those stringent regulations nationwide.

Schwarzenegger endorsed John McCain in January, before McCain had clinched the Republican nomination. McCain has advanced a global-warming plan, but his running mate, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, has said she doesn't believe global warming is caused by human behavior.

AB32 requires that the state's greenhouse gas emissions be reduced to 1990 levels by 2020, a roughly 25 percent reduction under business-as-usual estimates.

The Western Climate Initiative last week announced final design recommendations for a regional cap-and-trade system for reducing carbon emissions in seven Western states and four Canadian provinces.

And Schwarzenegger said his office is planning a world summit on global warming for November in California "to form a broad international alliance" in advance of December's United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Poland.

As nations argue about who is to go first in reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, he said Friday, "California is already there. "... We are already a model for the rest of the world."

Critics urging California to slow its climate-change work because of the sour national economy and the state's whopping budget deficit don't see the big picture, he said. "The problem is, as far as I'm concerned, too serious to get stuck in that kind of short-term thinking ... California will not wait, and America also should not wait."

Responding to audience questions read by Commonwealth Club Vice President Greg Dalton, Schwarzenegger said he believes a federal bailout of the financial industry is warranted so long as taxpayers get money back when the industry turns around. "It's inevitable that you have to intervene, that you have to help. "... Sometimes government is needed."

The governor also vowed to keep opposing oil drilling off California's shores, despite the GOP's steadfast advocacy and a poll showing a majority of Californians now support it.

He recalled the oil tar that marred his beloved Muscle Beach in Venice from 1969's oil platform disaster off Santa Barbara.

"The people of California don't want to go through that again. We must protect our pristine coastline," he said. "I have promised to do all I can to reduce offshore drilling, and I will keep my promise to the people of California."

And the governor said he'll take a close look at two pollution-reducing bills on his desk: SB375 by incoming state Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, to enable regional land-use planning and direct state funding to reduce suburban sprawl and passenger-vehicle mileage; and SB974 by state Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, to levy a fee on containers entering through California's ports to pay for traffic and air-pollution reduction around those ports. Palin has urged Schwarzenegger to veto SB974.

Schwarzenegger to convene global climate summit

By Samantha Young, Associated Press Writer
Merced Sun-Star, Friday, September 26, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is trying to cast himself in a new role: an international leader on global warming.

The Republican governor, who has become a national pitchman by challenging many members of his party on the issue, announced Friday he would convene a summit in California for his contemporaries from around the world.

Schwarzenegger said he will invite lawmakers and government executives from China, India, Australia, Europe and other countries in the hope of forming an international alliance of community and regional leaders.

He is planning the conference for November, a month before the United Nations holds its next round of international climate talks in Poland. Governors from all 50 states also will be invited.

"The real action for any new ideas is always on the local level," Schwarzenegger told a gathering of the Commonwealth Club of California, a nonpartisan educational organization. "This is how we can push the agenda."

Schwarzenegger has been at odds with the Bush administration over environmental policy, criticizing what he calls a failure of leadership on global warming and other matters. California and other states sued the federal government after the administration denied their attempt to impose stringent vehicle emission standards to improve air quality.

Earlier this year, legislation seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions stalled in Congress.

Schwarzenegger said he conceived the summit in large part because of the failure of the U.S. to take the lead on initiatives seeking to slow or reduce the rate of global warming.

"Like I said, we are not waiting for the federal government," he said. "We will continue on to push forward."

How much sway Schwarzenegger and other local leaders will have on an international climate change treaty is unclear. Some foreign leaders earlier this week expressed doubt about the future success of a new global warming accord if the United States continues to refuse to participate.

New numbers released earlier this week showed the world's output of carbon dioxide continues to grow, with India and China accounting for the largest increases. Factories, power plants, cars and other polluters in the United States spewed 2 percent more carbon in 2007 than the year before.

Schwarzenegger's office said the summit will be scheduled Nov. 18-19 in Los Angeles but said it did not yet have a list of leaders who would be invited.

His address to the Commonwealth Club came the day before the second anniversary of his signing of California's global warming law, which requires the state to cut its emissions by roughly one-third by 2020.

State air regulators have spent much of the past two years designing California's massive new program and are scheduled to release the framework at the end of the year.

But California is still years away forcing large polluters to scale back their greenhouse gas emissions. The 2006 law doesn't require sweeping reductions until 2012.

Some industries and Republican lawmakers have sought to slow the process, saying it could cost too much at a time when the economy is in peril.

"The problem is, as far I'm concerned, too serious and the opportunities too great to get stuck in that kind of short term thinking," he said.

During the speech, Schwarzenegger also touched on a number of related environmental issues.

He said California ought to revisit its ban on nuclear power plants, and noted that improved technology might make nuclear power safer to operate. His spokeswoman Lisa Page added that the governor had not made a decision on whether that ban should be lifted.

He also reiterated his opposition to offshore oil drilling on the West Coast, a position that puts him at odds with GOP presidential candidate Sen. John McCain, who has made drilling a key component of his campaign.

Maine study weighs impact of more wood heating

By Francis X. Quinn, Associated Press Writer

In the Washington Post, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Saturday, September 27, 2008

AUGUSTA, Maine—Burning more wood for heat could save homeowners money in oil-dependent Maine, but a task force in the nation's most forested state cautioned that care is needed to avoid health problems and damage to the wood products industry.

Les Otten, chairman of a wood-to-energy task force formed by Gov. John Baldacci, suggested that a 10 percent shift from oil to wood would be significantly beneficial.

"Before we do anything else, we have to look at conservation and efficiency," Otten said Friday as the task force issued its report.

Maine has about 17 million acres of woodlands that could be harvested commercially, officials said. It is also the state with the highest dependence on No. 2 heating oil, with more than 80 percent of its homes using oil-based heating systems, according to the task force.

Some 440,000 households in Maine use an average of 900 gallons of oil a year, the report said. At current prices, that means each family will spend an average of \$4,100 on heat this winter.

"Conservation and looking out for each other could be vital this winter," Baldacci said.

With heating oil costs expected to remain high, many homeowners may use wood stoves as a secondary heat source, the report said.

"They are a viable wood-to-energy solution if they are modern, efficient and clean-burning, and there is already a developed market for wood stoves and cordwood delivery in Maine," the report said.

At the same time, the report warned, "this situation presents potential serious public health concerns. The amount of air pollution emitted by woodstoves this winter could approach record levels."

The report proposed that the state encourage the conversion of old polluting oil-fired and wood-fueled systems through tax incentives or a direct "buy-back" program to help homeowners and small businesses replace older furnaces, boilers or stoves with more clean-burning equipment.

Increased use of wood for heat could also lead to an increase in wood prices, the report said, calling on the state to educate youth about the benefits of a career in wood harvesting.

The governor said the report could lead the state toward "more reliance on wood energy and away from fossil fuel."

Fairbanks wants more time to study smog

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Friday, September 26, 2008

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—Fairbanks officials are asking federal regulators to hold off on air pollution rules until an air quality study is completed.

The Environmental Protection Agency is set to draw pollution-prevention maps in December. The mapping is part of a process that will restrict fine particulate pollution in a few years.

The Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly on Thursday asked the agency to postpone the mapping process for one year. The Fairbanks City Council, the borough's Air Pollution Control Commission and a local transportation board have all made similar requests.

The groups note air-quality specialists are only halfway through a \$2.6 million study to identify exactly where the soot and dust come from.

PNM must explain fly ash release to state

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Friday, September 26, 2008

WATERFLOW, N.M.—The Public Service Company of New Mexico will have to explain to the state Environment Department why fly ash was released from its San Juan Generating Station.

The utility also will be required to report within 10 days whether it violated air quality regulations during the release yesterday in Waterflow.

PNM spokeswoman Susan Sponar says the release was small, but local residents say they are angry about it.

Fly ash contains silicon dioxide, aluminum oxide and iron oxide particles.

Environment Department spokeswoman Marissa Stone says the department wants to make sure residents are protected and that air quality regulations weren't violated.

Sponar says workers upgrading a unit at the plant disturbed the ash that had accumulated between some boiler tubes.

Model T turns 100; it was truly an engine of change

By Sharon Silke Carty

USA Today, Monday, September 29, 2008

DEARBORN, Mich. — Industry experts believe that by the next century, cars may no longer run on fossil fuels. We may have tiny personal mobility vehicles powered by the sun and air. Cars might drive themselves, letting commuters sit back and read the paper. Crashes may seem a relic of a barbaric past.

"We don't even know who our competitors will be," says Larry Burns, General Motors' vice president of research and development.

Saturday marked the 100th anniversary of the Model T, the first simple, inexpensive car to be mass-produced and marketed to the masses. Within a few years, half the vehicles on the road were Model T's.

Just as it's a struggle today to guess what the industry will be like in 2108, it would've been nearly impossible in 1908 to predict how the Model T would change the world.

On Saturday, 50 Model T's paraded from Ford's headquarters here to the Piquette Avenue plant in Detroit where the cars were first assembled, marking the end of a year-long celebration of the Model T and its storied past.

When the Model T first hit America's roads, cities were choked with people and horses, and the top public health nuisances were horse manure and urine and flies. One New York forecaster warned that by 1930, manure would reach the third story of Manhattan's buildings.

The Model T, and cars to follow, became the unlikely solution, causing an explosion in the number of automobiles. The 79,000 vehicles in 1905 had grown to 244.2 million in 2006 and also led to air pollution, a vast network of paved roads and the birth and growth of suburbs.

But even now, only 13% of the world's population owns a car. Global development is expected to change that rapidly, with the world market increasing from 70 million cars and trucks a year to 100 million within years.

Energy will be a leading concern as more drivers use oil and gas reserves more quickly. Donald Hillebrand, director of transportation research at Argonne National Laboratory, says the world consumes about 1 cubic mile of oil a year and there's an estimated 45 cubic miles left.

Industry and governments need to find solutions that can be easily integrated into the current energy infrastructure, he says. There may be more opportunities for light rail in cities, and traffic flow could be eased by having cars talk to each other.

At least in the near future, electricity seems to be the answer for powering cars. Cars will use lithium batteries charged by household plugs and onboard generators. Engineers will continue work on alternative fuels such as ethanol, hydrogen and natural gas. "High fuel prices are really opening up these ideas for us to look at again," Hillebrand says.

Electric cars that charge with a plug and can be driven as far in a day as petroleum-fueled cars are a ways off. Chrysler and GM plan to have advanced electrics on the road in 2010, but those may be plug-in hybrids with a gasoline engine to help power the car and recharge batteries or all-electric cars with a gas-powered generator to recharge batteries when the plug-in charge is spent.

Such electric cars fit the current infrastructure because no new pipelines or fueling stations are needed, and they can be plugged in at night, when power plants have unused capacity.

The buzz around electric cars is growing, says Chris Payne, director of the documentary *Who Killed the Electric Car?*

"This is a time for public education on electric cars, to build pent-up demand," Payne says, "so when the cars hit the market, they can really take off."

How to drive a Model T: It's harder than you think

Step one in learning to drive a Model T: Forget everything you think you know about driving and listen.

That pedal in the middle? That doesn't stop the car, it puts it in reverse. Those levers on the steering column? Mess them up and you could ruin the car, or lose a finger. Oh, one is the accelerator.

At The Henry Ford, a museum and group of restored buildings across the street from Ford Motor's research and development campus, drivers take visitors for jaunts in Model T's on the narrow roads, showing off historical houses and shops Henry Ford collected with wealth made selling his car for the masses.

It took Linda Trygg, a Model T driver for four years, three one-hour lessons and nearly three weeks of practice to really get comfortable in the Model T. "I love it now," says Trygg.

She starts the car with the hand crank, making sure her thumb is tucked out of the way in case it kicks back, which could break an arm. The motor was balky, so she popped inside and used the electric starter, an invention added to T's in 1919.

The car is loud. And hot. It shudders when taken from low gear into high. Top speed is about 35 mph, a great leap into the future when the Model T first rolled out in 1908. By horse, the 11-mile trip from Dearborn to Detroit took about four hours. Still, early T drivers had to plan trips to return home before dark. The acetylene headlamps did little to illuminate the road.

Trygg's 1914 Model T, like all from 1914 to 1925, is black. Though Ford reputedly said Model T buyers could have any color, as long as it was black, the vehicles came in red, green and navy until then. But the colors were so dark, they could seem black.

States in Northeast put pollution up for sale

Karen Matthews, Associated Press
In the S.F. Chronicle, Friday, September 26, 2008

New York -- Greenhouse gases went on sale Thursday as 10 Northeastern states held the nation's first auction of pollution credits aimed at curbing global warming.

"It is time really to turn the tide on global warming," said New York Gov. David Paterson, who opened the auction by ringing the ceremonial bell at the New York Mercantile Exchange. "And we hope that we've done this today."

The program puts a price on carbon dioxide pollution, giving power plants a financial incentive to cut emissions.

Auction proceeds will go toward energy conservation and renewable energy programs in each of the 10 participating states: New York, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Vermont.

The program seeks to hold carbon dioxide emissions steady through 2014 and then gradually reduce them; it is widely viewed as a model for future programs nationally and around the globe.

"It's historic," said Lance Pierce, climate program director of the Union of Concerned Scientists. "The carbon markets have arrived in the United States. And carbon markets, if designed correctly, hold the promise for development of cleaner energy ... and reductions in global warming pollution that benefit consumers, businesses and the environment, as well."

The Northeast effort, called the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, limits the total amount of carbon that power plants in the 10 states can pump out of their smokestacks at the current level - 188 million tons.

Electric power generators must pay for allowances covering the amount of carbon they emit, and the initiative will provide a market-based auction and trading system in which the generators can buy, sell and trade the emissions allowances.

The initiative covers more than 200 fossil fuel power plants, requiring that the owners of those plants pay for the carbon dioxide they emit.

It will gradually reduce carbon emissions by reducing the emissions limit in a series of steps, until it is 10 percent below the current level a decade from now. The companies that don't reduce emissions can buy allowances from companies that have, thereby creating a financial incentive to reduce pollution because the more environmentally friendly plants won't have to buy as many credits and because they can sell any they don't need.

Dale Bryk, senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said, "This new energy plan is straightforward, highly cost-effective and creates a clean energy pathway for the rest of the country to follow. It is the shape of things to come."

Carbon dioxide trading already exists in Europe. Some carbon dioxide allowances also are being traded in the United States on a voluntary basis through the Chicago Climate Exchange. But the Northeast effort is the nation's first mandatory effort to limit carbon dioxide.

Thursday's auction was run by World Energy, an operator of online green exchanges. Results will be released Monday, pending review by an independent monitor.

Greenhouse gas sold for \$3.07 a ton

By Mary Esch - Associated Press Writer
Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, September 29, 2008

ALBANY, N.Y.—The nation's first cap-and-trade greenhouse gas auction sold the right to pump carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at \$3.07 a ton.

The results of Thursday's sealed bid, online auction by the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative were released Monday. All 12.5 million allowances were sold and 59 bidders representing energy, financial and environmental interests participated. A minimum price of \$1.86 had been set.

Most of the allowances were purchased by electric power producers, according to RGGI.

The auction is viewed as a model for a national cap-and-trade program to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, blamed for global climate change.

The 10-state RGGI consortium includes Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont. All power plants in the region must buy credits to cover the carbon they emit.

Six of the states participated in the first of a series of planned quarterly auctions. The next is scheduled for Dec. 17. Carbon credits have traded in commodities markets, but this was the first government-mandated auction in the U.S.

Thursday's sale brought in \$38.5 million, which will be distributed to Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Vermont. The states plan to invest the funds in energy efficient and renewable technologies as well as programs to benefit utility rate payers.

"The first RGGI auction has successfully used market forces to set a price on carbon, and this will send a clear market signal to support the investment in clean energy technologies," Pete Grannis, commissioner of the New York state Department of Environmental Conservation and RGGI chairman, said in a prepared statement.

RGGI (pronounced Reggie) caps the total amount of carbon that power plants in the 10 states can pump out of their smokestacks at 188 million tons, which is slightly higher than the current level. The cap will be lowered by 10 percent over the next 10 years.

More than 200 fossil fuel power plants in the region must buy allowances for the carbon they emit.

Other regional greenhouse gas coalitions, such as the Western Climate Initiative and the Midwestern Greenhouse Gas Accord, are in earlier stages of development.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, Sept. 29, 2008:](#)

Climate change storm brewing faster than expected

In recent weeks, the crisis in the world's financial markets has eclipsed concern over climate change. When your house is on fire, it's hard to get worked up about a hurricane on the horizon.

But the hurricane is coming, and a study by the Global Carbon Project, a consortium of scientists based in Australia, suggests that the storm is building faster than expected. Nations set a record for annual releases of greenhouse gases in 2007 -- surprising experts who assumed that a slowing economy might curb emissions that are heating the Earth.

Worldwide emissions of carbon dioxide -- the main gas linked to global warming -- increased 3% in 2007. The main reason for the jump was increased burning of coal and other fossil fuels in China, India, Brazil and other developing countries.

Developing nations now account for more than half of all carbon dioxide released annually, having doubled their output in less than 20 years. And the United States -- the largest overall polluter since the 1990 -- is also increasing its output.

What does this mean for efforts to stem the worst possible outcomes of climate change? It's bleak. The worst expected impacts -- sea-level rise, more intense droughts and storms, heat deaths, crop damage -- could occur sooner than scientists have previously thought.

Bigger reductions in emissions will be needed, partly because the carbon dioxide already dumped in the atmosphere won't quickly dissipate.

On Friday, the California Air Resources Board is scheduled to release its final scoping plan for reducing greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020.

Industry groups are worried about the tough plan CARB may institute. They claim it may force some manufacturers to relocate to China.

That's a legitimate concern, but as Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has noted, there's more economic opportunity than economic risk in fighting global warming.

Congress is expected to establish a national cap on greenhouse gases. After that, it will be easier to prompt China and India to grow on a greener path, and California will be in a strong position to tap those markets.

Last week, seven states and four Canadian provinces joined California in an effort to reduce CO₂. California has been out in front on fighting global warming, but we're getting help.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sat., Sept. 27, 2008:](#)

Celebrate progress cleaning air with modicum of restraint
How you measure our success depends on factors you look at.

The Valley has met a federal standard for dust and soot, and is now officially regarded as healthy in that respect -- depending on who you listen to.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency made the announcement this week, and there was considerable fanfare. It's the first time the Valley has met a federal air standard since the 1990s.

Not so fast, say environmentalists. The EPA was able to make the ruling only because it waived several readings of so-called PM-10 pollution that exceeded the standards. Turns out it was windy on those days. Such waivers are allowed under EPA rules.

Environmentalists sued the EPA earlier this year over the practice, so we likely haven't heard the end of this. and the Valley still faces a tough struggle to meet new standards for the smaller PM-2.5 particles, which can lodge deep in human lungs and other tissues, and cause all manner of pulmonary and cardiovascular illnesses.

And there's still the problem of smog-forming ozone, which we're a long way from controlling.

In fact, the Valley air is less polluted than it once was, and that's good news. But this is a classic glass-half-full or glass-half-empty situation. Officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, ag and business interests focus on the good work that's been done; environmentalists and medical experts focus on how much more there is to do.

They're both right. For instance, the air district, with state help, has rid the Valley of thousands of older, dirty diesel engines used as static power sources on farms -- but diesel pollution is still the single biggest pollution threat to the health of Valley residents.

Farmers have reduced dust by wetting dirt roads and making fewer passes in their fields with heavy machinery. Urban dwellers have reduced the use of fireplaces in the winter. But soot and dust are still a problem, the EPA's cheery designation notwithstanding.

We have always known that cleaning the Valley's air would be a lengthy and very expensive task. But the cost of doing nothing is staggering. Several hundred people die prematurely each year because of our polluted air. We have one of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the nation. Valley residents spend an additional \$3 billion-plus each year on extra health costs directly related to dirty air. Crop losses run into the millions, and even the once-pristine forests of the Sierra Nevada are being hammered.

Celebrate the progress so far, to be sure. The Valley's air is cleaner. But temper the cheering with the sure knowledge that we have a very long way to go before the air in the Valley is truly clean.

[MediaNews Editorial, Monday, September 29, 2008:](#)

Time to clear the air

A REPORT RECENTLY released indicates that while public health and environmental concerns have been focused on West Oakland, specifically targeting heavy truck and rail traffic from the Port of Oakland, air quality officials may want to pay more attention to the other side of town.

The study, paid partially by the California Air Resources Board and conducted by various college professors, reports that East Oakland residents are facing potential health problems due to high concentration of industry, particularly near residential areas within the Hegenberger Road corridor.

The report uncovers a disturbing trend in East Oakland where 216 stationary sources of pollution and 49 environmental hazard spots were located near schools and senior citizen centers.

The main culprits are heavy congestion on Interstate 880 combined with a high number of auto body shops and heavy industry.

In addition, the report gives the Bay Area failing marks in overall air quality, thus putting the area in violation of stricter new federal health standards, and what's going on in East Oakland doesn't help the situation.

What's really disturbing here is that children who are outside playing and the elderly, who are vulnerable, are directly affected by East Oakland's deteriorating air quality, and action needs to be taken by the state air board who arranged this study along with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

It's time these two agencies come together and follow recommendations presented by the report, such as the reduction of diesel truck emissions and a reexamination of emissions inventory and hazards lists, while keeping a focus on West Oakland and the port.

Truckers and commuters from outside the area must contribute their part, and stronger emission standards need to be implemented and enforced. Businesses that pollute must be thoroughly investigated, issued warnings and fined, if necessary.

East Oakland residents deserve to live under better conditions. We expect more from our air quality agencies.

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Sunday, September 28, 2008:](#)

Editorial: As emissions grow, so does opportunity

In recent weeks, the crisis in the world's financial markets has eclipsed concern over climate change. That's understandable. When your house is on fire, it's hard to get worked up about a hurricane on the horizon.

But the hurricane is still coming, and a study released last week by the Global Carbon Project, a consortium of scientists based in Australia, suggests that the storm is building faster than expected.

According to the report, the world's nations set a record for annual releases of greenhouse gases in 2007 – surprising experts who assumed that a slowing economy might curb emissions that are heating Earth's thermostat.

Worldwide emissions of carbon dioxide – the main gas linked to global warming — increased 3 percent in 2007.

The main reason for the jump was increased burning of coal and other fossil fuels in China, India, Brazil and other developing countries. China's emissions jumped 7.5 percent.

Because of such jumps, developing nations now account for more than half of all carbon dioxide released annually, having doubled their output in less than 20 years, according to the study. And the United States – the largest overall polluter since the 1990s, both on a per-person and a total

basis – is also increasing its output. Emissions in the United States increased 2 percent in 2007, after decreasing the previous year.

What does this mean for efforts to stem the worst possible outcomes of climate change?

The picture is bleak. The worst expected impacts – sea-level rise, more intense droughts and storms, heat deaths, crop damage – could occur sooner than scientists have previously thought.

Bigger reductions in emissions will be needed, partly because the carbon dioxide already dumped in the atmosphere won't quickly dissipate.

This point was driven home last month in a study by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography that was published by the National Academy of Sciences. That study concluded that even if humans stopped generating greenhouse gases immediately, the world's average temperature would "most likely" increase by 4.3 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of this century.

This Friday, the California Air Resources Board is scheduled to release its final scoping plan for reducing greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020. Industry groups are already worried about the tough plan CARB may institute. They claim it may force some manufacturers to relocate to China, adding to that country's output of pollution.

That's a legitimate concern, but as Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has noted, "There is far more economic opportunity in fighting global warming than there is economic risk." California's effort to develop renewable energies, conserve power and redesign transportation will put the state on the cutting edge of new technologies.

During the next presidency, Congress is almost sure to establish a national cap on greenhouse gases. After that, it will be easier to prompt China and India to grow on a greener path, and California will be in a strong position to tap those markets.

The route California has chosen is not without risks, but it no longer is a go-it-alone strategy.

Last week, seven states and four Canadian provinces joined California in an effort to reduce CO2. California has been out in front on fighting global warming, but we won't be alone for very long. We can't be alone. The alternative is too disastrous to imagine.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Saturday, September 27, 2008:](#)

Readers Forum: Punishing BART commuters is ludicrous

Breda Courtney | From the community

I WAS INCENSED to read your article in the Sept. 12 Times saying that BART was considering a rush-hour surcharge on commuters using the BART system.

Isn't using public transit what BART (and everyone) has been preaching for more than a decade? Get out of your car! Use public transportation!

Now, when the public is finally ready to do it, riders will be punished by being required to pay a surcharge?

The overcrowding at the Embarcadero and Montgomery street stations didn't happen yesterday. Fifteen years ago, when I was a daily commuter, these stations were already overcrowded. Meanwhile, BART was spending our tax money on advertising to get us all to use its system.

Didn't BART have a plan to accommodate the public in case its advertising campaign was successful? Or was that all just political posturing?

If indeed BART was serious, it should have made the expansion of those stations and the purchase of additional trains a priority over building the track out to the airport.

Yes, it's nice to be able to take BART to the airport, but it's not as critical to our daily lives as commuting to and from the workplace.

When we vote for board members to oversee the BART system, we expect them to have some commitment to the long-term needs of the communities they serve. The proposed solution to the problem of overcrowding during rush hour is egregious in the extreme.

To punish commuters for following the encouraged and appropriate practice of using public transit when other cities, such as New York and London, are punishing them for not using public transit, is ludicrous.

Perhaps these undoubtedly highly-paid consultants who are recommending this could imagine some forward-looking solutions? In a time when we should be commending people for getting out of their cars and reducing the pollution and carbon emissions, which are destroying our environment, surely we should not be punishing them by increasing their fares and parking fees, etc.

Has it occurred to anyone that people who go to work during rush hour do so because they are required to? Would it not be better to negotiate with the city of San Francisco to provide tax breaks or other incentives to city business to create more flex-time jobs?

In the meantime, our stations are no more overcrowded than transit stations in New York and London; the real difference is that they run more trains.

To the BART board members, I say if you can't manage the system in a way that serves commuters and respects our need to save our planet, get out of the way and let someone else who is more qualified do it.

[Tracy Press Editorial, Friday, September 26, 2008:](#)

Proposition 7 is an alternative energy initiative that deserves turning down.

At first glance, this promise of clean, renewable power without a big increase in energy bills looks like a lily-white answer to our environmental woes. But look deeper.

Who besides actor-activist Rob Reiner and two Arizona billionaires supports this complex, 42-page initiative?

Practically no one. Proposition 7 has an amazing diversity of opposition — from environmental organizations and renewable power providers, business and labor, consumer and taxpayer groups, and both Democratic and Republican parties.

This is a voter initiative that mandates California use renewable energy for half its electrical energy production by 2025. But it amps up the requirements while complicating and potentially jeopardizing renewable power development.

What we really need is a Legislature that will set a similar but more sustainable goal to get more power from renewable sources — solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, small hydroelectric generation — so that we can follow the law to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

Locally, we are just getting started, with small businesses and homeowners who've put solar panels on their roofs and companies that sell wind and solar products. The South San Joaquin Irrigation District uses solar energy to deliver power to its plant. And one of our mayoral candidates proposes turning the old antenna farm on Schulte Road into a solar electricity farm and renewable energy technology park.

With Proposition 7, the language is murky enough to suggest that smaller renewable energy companies that generate less than 30 megawatts would be excluded from being counted in meeting the clean-power goals, which could force them out of the market.

Let's send this one to the Legislature for a better plan. The green vote is a "no" vote on Proposition 7.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses University of California's research discovers that air pollution also affects laryngitis. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Descubren que la contaminación también enferma de laringitis

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, September 25, 2008

Expertos de la Universidad de California descubrieron que la contaminación del aire en combinación con el llamado humo de segunda mano, que alcanza a quienes viven con fumadores, son causantes de laringitis.

Médicos de la Universidad de California en Davis informaron que aunque la laringitis se considera comúnmente como una enfermedad viral, o que causan virus, también el aire enrarecido puede contribuir a ese mal.

Los científicos llamaron a su investigación, "laringitis ambiental", que tiene los mismos síntomas de la laringitis convencional, de afección a la voz, tos y congestión de la garganta.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses carbon dioxide emissions surpass the anticipated international limits.

Sobrepasó emisión de dióxido de carbono límites internacionales anticipados

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Friday, September 26, 2008

Los niveles de emisiones de dióxido de carbono fueron en el 2007 superiores a los que la comunidad internacional se había propuesto, de acuerdo con un reporte que se divulga hoy.

El Panel Intergubernamental de Naciones para el Cambio Climático informó que el dióxido de carbono por consumo de combustibles y cemento aumentó cerca de ocho mil 500 millones de toneladas en el 2007 comparativamente al 2006.

De continuar este índice, la contaminación contribuirá a aumentar una decenas de grados Fahrenheit a la temperatura para finales de este siglo.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Ecological Dialog: The Carbon Footprint.

Diálogo Ecológico: La huella de carbono

La Opinión, Saturday, September 27, 2008

¿Cómo puedo medir y mejorar mi "huella total de carbono"? -- Andrés Fusco, Passaic, NJ

Con el calentamiento del planeta dominando tantos titulares estos días, no es ninguna sorpresa que muchos de nosotros estemos buscando maneras de reducir la cantidad de dióxido de carbono y otros gases de efecto invernadero que nuestras actividades producen.

Determinando cuánta contaminación cada una de nuestras acciones individuales genera—sea fijar el termostato, hacer compras en las tiendas de comestibles, ir al trabajo o volar a alguna parte para vacaciones—te puedes comenzar a darte cuenta cómo el cambio de algunos hábitos aquí y allá puede reducir perceptiblemente tu huella total de carbón. Afortunadamente para aquellos de nosotros que quieran ver cómo andamos en estas cosas, hay una cantidad de calculadoras gratuitas en línea de huella de carbón que ayudan a visualizar justo donde debemos comenzar a hacer cambios.

Una de las mejores es la Calculadora de Clima Fresco de la Universidad de California en Berkeley. Esta herramienta gratuita en línea toma en cuenta los viajes cotidianos a los almacenes y el trabajo, aparte de gastos de electricidad, entre otros factores, para asignar un nivel de generación de carbón que los usuarios pueden comparar a hogares similares a través de las 28 zonas urbanas más grandes de los E.E.U.U. Algunos de los resultados son sorprendentes. Por ejemplo, los residentes de San Francisco, que ostentan un alto nivel de educación con respecto al ambiente tienden a tener huellas más grandes de carbón que los de

Tampa, una zona más conservadora, en la Florida. La razón: San Francisco tiene un costo de vida más alto e inviernos más fríos y mojados (todo lo que requiere más calor derivado de combustible fósiles).

Otra gran calculadora de huella del carbón está disponible en EarthLab.com, una “comunidad en línea de la crisis del clima” que se ha asociado con la Alianza para la Protección del Clima de Al Gore y otros grupos destacados, compañías y celebridades para difundir la noción que las acciones individuales pueden hacer una diferencia en la lucha contra el calentamiento del planeta. Los usuarios sencillamente toman una encuesta de apenas tres minutos y obtienen una cuenta de su huella de carbón, que pueden guardar y poner al día a medida que trabajan para reducir su impacto. El sitio proporciona unas 150 sugerencias de cambio en los estilos de vida todas las cuales cortan las emisiones de carbón—de colgar tu ropa a secarse a preferir postales en vez de cartas normales, y usar la bicicleta cuando se pueda en vez del coche para ir al trabajo al menos algunos días a la semana.

“Nuestra calculadora es un primer paso importante en la educación de la gente sobre donde se encuentran actualmente, y enseguida expandir sus conocimientos sobre lo que pueden hacer para realizar cambios fáciles, simples, que bajarán su cuenta de carbón y afectarán positivamente el planeta,” dice Anna Rising, directora ejecutiva de EarthLab. “Nuestra meta no está sobre el convencimiento de que te compres un híbrido o adaptar tu casa con paneles solares; nuestra meta es presentarte maneras fáciles, simples, que tú como un individuo puedas emplear para reducir tu huella del carbón.”

Otros sitios web, grupos "verdes" y corporaciones, incluyendo CarbonFootprint.com, CarbonCounter.org, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy y el gigante petrolero británico BP, entre otros, también ofrecen calculadoras de carbón en sus sitios web. Y CarbonFund.org incluso permite que determines tu huella de carbón -y enseguida puedas compensar tales emisiones invirtiendo en iniciativas de energía limpia. CONTACTOS: Cool Climate Calculator, www.berkeley.edu/calculator.html; EarthLab, www.earthlab.com; CarbonFootprint.com, www.carbonfootprint.com; CarbonCounter.org, www.carboncounter.org; Conservation International, www.conservation.org; The Nature Conservancy, www.nature.org; BP, www.bp.com.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses “Green” options on wheels. Alternate fuel automobiles attract consumers’ interest.

Opciones ‘verdes’ sobre ruedas

Autos de combustible alternativo atraen interés de consumidores

By Yurina Rico

La Opinión, Sunday, September 28, 2008

¿Cuál debería ser mi próximo auto? Esa es la pregunta que se hacen ahora millones de estadounidenses preocupados por el alto precio de la gasolina y el calentamiento global.

Con esta interrogante en mente y una alta dosis de curiosidad por conocer las alternativas que la industria automotriz está considerando poner en el mercado, miles de personas llegaron a la Feria 2008 de Energía Alternativa y Transporte (AltCar Expo).

En el evento de dos días, que concluyó ayer en Santa Mónica, se presentaron más de cien vehículos de alto rendimiento de combustible o de combustible alternativo, incluyendo autos eléctricos de cero emisiones, híbridos, vehículos clasificados en el rendimiento de hasta cien millas por galón y aquellos que operan con células de hidrógeno, gas natural, propano, biodiésel y etanol estuvieron disponibles para que los asistentes pudieran manejarlos, conocerlos y hasta comprarlos ahí mismo si se decidían por uno de ellos, aprovechando el crédito fiscal que el gobierno federal otorga a los consumidores que optan por un "vehículo ecológico".

AltCar Expo es conocida por su poco común mezcla de automóviles de los principales fabricantes así como de pequeñas compañías independientes.

Durante el evento se ofrecieron conferencias en las cuales se abordaron temas sobre lo último en tendencias globales de transportación y energía, transporte masivo, ingeniería y tecnología automotriz.

"Los consumidores nunca habían sido bendecidos —y saturados— con tantas opciones de transporte, y las decisiones que tomen tendrán un impacto dramático en la calidad de aire que respiremos", expresó Terry Tamminen, ex secretario de la Oficina del Medio Ambiente de California y principal orador de AltCar.

Por ejemplo, Juan González, residente de Lawndale, fue a curiosear con su esposa sobre los modelos disponibles y las innovaciones que ofrecen marcas conocidas como Mercedes, Buick, Toyota, Ford y Honda, entre otros.

"He pensado en comprarme un carro híbrido. No sé, tal vez un Toyota o un Nissan, pero veo que hay muchos más vehículos que son híbridos que podrían ser opciones para nosotros", señaló González.

Los vehículos híbridos de gasolina/electricidad utilizan gasolina como combustible, pero tienen un motor eléctrico. Esto hace que sean más económicos, aunque el combustible continúa siendo la gasolina.

A pesar de la popularidad de los vehículos híbrido gasolina/electricidad, se comienzan a ver en el país vehículos que funcionan incluso con aceite vegetal o grasa animal.

Dick O'rourke, portavoz de la Alianza de Biodiésel de California, dijo que aunque los autos que utilizan biodiésel son más comunes en países europeos, ya están comenzando a entrar al mercado estadounidense.

"Algunos modelos como el Honda Acura NXX o el BMW 3 series y X5 ya están disponibles. Esperamos que en los próximos dos meses logren entrar el Audi Q7 y cinco modelos más de Ford, Chevy y Dodge", señaló O'rourke, quien dijo que existe un convenio con la cadena de restaurantes McDonald's para obtener aceite vegetal usado.

Otros modelos atractivos fueron el Chevy Volt, que es impulsado por una batería que utiliza un motor de gasolina para agregarle fuerza, el SUV de General Motors, que utiliza células de hidrógeno, y el Porsche, que funciona con aire comprimido.

Otra innovación presentada fue una bicicleta de Denmark llamada trioBike, que tiene un compartimento para niños y que puede ser separada y utilizarse como coche para bebé.

Después del evento en Santa Mónica, AltCar irá a Austin, Texas, el 17 y 18 de octubre. Para información sobre la feria y los vehículos con combustible alternativo puede visitar la página web.