

[The Bakersfield Californian editorial, Monday, April 9, 2012:](#)

Hits and Misses

HIT: Environmental concern? Report it

Kern County has its share of pollution sources. Some are obvious: tailpipe exhaust, smokestacks, pesticide drift. But some are not. For example, the smelly, black foam a south Kern resident found oozing from a pipe recently. Thanks to a new effort funded by The California Endowment and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Kern residents can now report suspicious environmental concerns and get answers. The Kern Environmental Enforcement Network will launch the program next month, allowing anyone to report concerns and track and view details of the investigations online. A similar effort in Imperial County resulted in \$90,000 in fines the first year. We encourage Kern residents to participate.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Sat., April 7, 2012:](#)

Plan city growth near transit hubs

By Alan Kandel

Now home to 500,000 people, Fresno's population is projected to double by 2040. With available and valuable resources being spread more thinly, accommodating that growth in a sustainable way, that is, efficiently, without causing added environmental degradation or consuming additional tracts of valuable farmland, will be the challenge.

Whatever the challenge, though, it can be overcome. Here is where a concept and practice known as transit-oriented development or TOD can prove helpful.

According to the San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) document "New Places, New Choices," TOD "refers to the clustering of homes, jobs, shops and services in close proximity to rail stations, ferry terminals or bus stops offering access to frequent, high-quality transit services."

TOD's transit component—bus and rail mass transit—to be effective, it must be efficient, frequent, reasonably priced, be of both high quality and high capacity and be both accessible and provide good access. That's key.

Scott Bernstein, founder of the Center for Neighborhood Technology in the book "The New Transit Town: Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development," a book edited by Hank Dittmar and Gloria Ohland, correctly points out, "It is much easier to put a few dollars down on a finance contract for a car than it is to organize to create mass transit."

Financing an automobile "can be done on a personal or household level," Bernstein notes. Creating viable mass transit, meanwhile, usually requires among other things, supermajority voter approval, funding obligation, rights-of-way acquisition and control, and should integrate well with existing and future mass transit projects like the planned state high-speed train. At the same time, TOD can provide benefits unavailable otherwise.

Worth noting is TOD has been hugely popular and successful in familiar places such as California's Bay Area, Portland, Salt Lake City and Phoenix, Ariz., to name just four.

In Phoenix, for example, TOD has leveraged development to the tune of \$6 billion since first taking root in 2008, and now the initial, 20-mile, 28-station light rail starter line is being expanded another 3.1 miles farther east in neighboring Mesa.

Add to this the Phoenix SkyTrain automated people mover that will soon forward light rail riders directly to Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport terminals. In the Phoenix metropolitan areas as in other areas, TOD has been successful in getting people out of cars and in helping to clean the air.

What TOD could do for Fresno is better enable city and downtown revitalization, development and redevelopment that could be teeming with thriving retail and entertainment attractions and provide occupants for currently vacant offices.

Renewed infrastructure building and redevelopment construction, meanwhile, will help reduce the ranks of the area's unemployed. All this plus an improved coalescing of Fresno's urban core with its suburban periphery.

The result would be a much-improved economy, mobility that is both enhanced and less restrictive, [air that would be far cleaner and healthier](#), all the while providing residents with an vast assortment of housing opportunities. Bottom line is general quality-of-life improvement.

Dittmar, with Dena Belzer and Gerald Autler also in "The New Transit Town," insist "Transit-oriented development can respond ... by offering an alternative that is viable in the marketplace while still yielding social benefits.

"Although defining a vision of transit and development that function complementarily is a crucial first step, it is not enough. The next step is to move that vision-in concept and reality-into the mainstream of real estate development."

What I'm not saying is people should give up seeking and living the American Dream.

What I am instead advocating is that there could and should be a better balance of housing along with rethinking in terms of how we get around and how land could be utilized more effectively and efficiently.

I believe the place to start is with viable and proven transit-oriented development.

Alan Kandel is a Fresno-based freelance writer whose contributions on agriculture, travel, transportation and the environment have been widely published.