

## **Air Alert in effect thru Wednesday**

Staff reports

Manteca Bulletin, Tuesday, Aug. 20, 2013

In an effort to thwart increasing ozone levels, the air basin's first Air Alert episode of 2013 began Monday and continues through Wednesday. The Air Alert is effective in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern County.

Air Alerts are declared when conditions that lead to ozone formation – increased emissions, high temperatures and stagnant air flow – materialize in the Valley. High ozone levels are harmful to health and also put the Valley at risk for exceeding the 1-hour federal ozone standard, which can trigger an annual \$29 million federal penalty. This penalty is paid by Valley drivers in the form of a \$12 addition to their DMV registration fee plus increased fees on Valley businesses.

Episodes of late-summer high ozone are correlated to back-to-school traffic and increased vehicle idling.

“Since this program was initiated two years ago, we have had positive response from Valley residents and businesses, who understand that cooperating to minimize 1-hour ozone pays big dividends year-round,” said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive officer and air pollution control officer.

Steps residents can take to reduce ozone levels include refraining from idling when dropping off/picking up students, carpooling, vanpooling and using alternate transportation, and refraining from using drive-through services.

Businesses and municipalities can reduce emissions by shifting operations to early morning or late evening, when ozone levels are lower, offering flexible work schedules, promoting carpools and vanpools for employees, and becoming a Healthy Air Living partner.

To receive notification of an Air Alert, please call 1-800 SMOG INFO (766-4463), visit the Air District's website at [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org), or subscribe to the free automated Air Alert email list at [www.valleyair.org/list.list.htm](http://www.valleyair.org/list.list.htm).

For more information about Air Alerts, visit [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org), [www.healthyairliving.com](http://www.healthyairliving.com) or call the District office in Modesto (209-557-6400).

## **UC report explores high-speed rail challenges, opportunities**

By Tim Sheehan, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Aug. 20, 2013

A report issued Tuesday by the University of California describes the state's embattled high-speed train proposal as an opportunity for environmental and economic benefits in the San Joaquin Valley.

If, that is, the region can overcome the fractious politics that surround the controversial bullet-train plans.

Tuesday's report was jointly produced by the law schools at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California at Los Angeles. The release of the report coincided with a panel discussion Tuesday afternoon in Fresno where representatives from agriculture, development and the California High-Speed Rail Authority discussed how to manage the economic and environmental impacts of high-speed trains in the Valley.

The report and the panel discussion come on the heels of two important developments Friday: a judge's ruling that the rail authority's November 2011 business plan and funding plan failed to comply with provisions of a 2008 state bond measure; and the rail agency signing a contract with a team of contractors to design and build the first 30-mile segment of the statewide train system in the Fresno-Madera area.

The high-speed train, which would link San Francisco and Los Angeles by way of the Valley, presents both challenges and opportunities, wrote Ethan Elkind, the report's author. Elkind is a climate policy associate with the UCLA School of Law's Environmental Law Center and the Center for Law, Energy and the Environment at the UC Berkeley law school.

"The system has the potential to worsen California's development patterns -- and therefore the environment, economy and public health," Elkind wrote. In the Valley, that potential stems from a history of low-density, car-oriented housing developments that chew up valuable agricultural land. Such development, he said, leads "to traffic congestion, poor air quality and the ongoing loss of the region's invaluable agricultural resources."

High-speed rail, he said, could increase such growth. "To heighten the challenge," he added, "the Valley has been divided politically over high-speed rail while experiencing some of the worst effects from the recent recession."

But there are opportunities for economic and environmental benefits, the report suggests, "if Valley leaders can develop and implement supporting policies." In addition to jobs building the rail system, Elkind wrote, "the system could create new business opportunities in Valley cities connected to the major economic hubs in the state."

Traffic congestion and air quality could also be improved if the system were to be successful in attracting motorists and airline passengers as an alternative for travel to the Bay Area and Southern California.

#### **Lack of Valley-wide organization cited**

The report outlines four key barriers to efficient development of high-speed rail and proposes possible solutions:

- No Valley-wide organization to help guide decision-making on the rail project.
- A lack of money for cities' planning of development around high-speed train stations.
- Continuing financial and policy promotion of automobile-oriented development.
- Lack of funds for development projects in cities to connect high-speed rail to the rest of the community.

Elkind also proposes several solutions, most focused on Valley-wide collaboration, regional planning and policies for more efficient patterns of urban development.

These include:

- Enlisting businesses, community and government leaders across the Valley to craft a regional vision and policies for economic growth and environmental protection around high-speed rail.
- Supporting local and regional planning efforts using sophisticated computer modeling programs and other "best practices."
- Better explaining the long-term costs of traditional automobile-oriented, spread-out development relative to city budgets, and impacts on agricultural and air quality.
- Exploring financing programs to spur private development in mixed-use, transit-oriented development with connections to transportation hubs, such as high-speed train stations.

At Tuesday's panel discussion, Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin said that cities along the rail line must work closely with the state rail authority to ensure the best outcomes for residents and businesses that will be affected by the train route.

"If they are going to be impacted, we want to make sure they get every penny and every bit of respect and courtesy," she said. "At all times, the city is looking for a win-win" for both the property owner and the rail project.

#### **Kings County group not keen on collaboration**

For representatives of the Citizens for High-Speed Rail Accountability, a Kings County coalition of property owners who oppose the rail project, Swearingin's call for collaboration with local governments struck a sour note. The group coalesced after a 2011 incident in which Curt Pringle, then the authority's board chairman, publicly dressed down Kings County Farm Bureau director Diana Peck at a rail agency meeting in Sacramento. Peck was taking the authority to task for failing to coordinate its efforts with the Kings County Board of Supervisors.

Alan Scott, a CCHSRA co-founder, said Kings County residents remain distrustful and dissatisfied with the rail authority's efforts to work constructively to address the county's concerns.

Frank Oliveira, another co-founder, added that the UC report's call for a regional effort to explain and promote the benefits of high-speed rail was less a blueprint for managing challenges and "more of a solicitation for reorganizing the way we live in the Valley." Oliveira chaffed at the notion of additional layers of regional planning to mandate denser urban development in cities.

The report, however, could end up being a largely academic exercise, depending on the ultimate outcome of a judge's ruling Friday in Sacramento that the rail authority's 2011 business plan violated key provisions of Proposition 1A, a 2008 high-speed rail bond measure.

The judge stopped short of blocking work on the project, but has asked attorneys for Kings County and two of its residents, who brought the lawsuit nearly two years ago, and for the rail authority to submit written arguments over potential remedies to the violations.

Elkind, whose report was written before Kenny issued the ruling, said he's read the court document and doubts that Kenny would order work stopped. "I'm not sure the judge is ready to go there," Elkind said.

[Manteca Bulletin commentary, Wed., Aug. 21, 2013:](#)

### **Breathable air or drive-thru windows?**

By Dennis Wyatt, Managing Editor

Enjoying the air quality of the last few days?

If you do, keep finding opportunities to idle your vehicle as much as you can.

The fact we live in either the No. 1 or No. 2 worst air basin in the country depending upon the type of pollution isn't debatable. Nor is the fact there has been a 97 percent reduction of the San Joaquin Valley exceeding one-hour ozone standards since 1995.

And while new federally imposed standards are impossible to meet even if you banned all gas or diesel powered vehicle movements in the nine county region, we still need to do better.

That said it is amazing the lip service paid by Manteca, Ripon, and Lathrop — and all other cities in the San Joaquin Valley — to air quality attainment goals adopted in state-mandated general plans that serve as blueprints for growth. Part of it has to do with the fuzziness of the goals and part of it has to do with the lack of political will.

The biggest ways to reduce ozone pollution aren't exact a secret. They involve refraining from idling vehicles when dropping off or picking up students, carpooling, public transit, and refraining from using drive-through services.

A repertoire of illness such as asthma and other breathing disorders are attributed to high levels of air pollution significantly made worse when we reach Air Alert status as we have since Monday.

If drive-thru facilities have been identified as being a primary source of idling that make the ozone layer worse, why not ban any new ones outright? Instead cities like Manteca keep adding them. Outlawing drive-thru windows, though, would be about as easy as getting people to sit still for the city doing away with residents being able to have dogs and cats. It isn't going to happen.

So why not adopt an ordinance that addresses those days when Air Alerts are projected and force the temporarily closure of drive-thru facilities as a health and safety issue?

The conditions that set up an Air Alert based on ozone problems typically happen near the end of summer when Mother Nature combined with back-to-school traffic spikes air woes. Currently that is less than a half dozen days a year although it will get worse as the valley grows.

Would three to six days a year of not being able to use drive-thru windows kill us?

With today's technologies businesses with drive-thru windows could easily be notified. Code enforcement officers could be assigned exclusively to enforcing the drive-thru closure rule on Air Alert days. The city could make the incentive for compliance high by establishing fines of \$25 for every vehicle spotted by code enforcement using a drive-thru window. Those fees would be assessed against the business.

Public schools are a different animal since much of what they do is out of the city's jurisdiction and under state control. Pressure should be placed on the school board to come up with a solution. As for private schools such as St. Anthony's, all you have to do is try to drive down Fremont Street when school lets out to understand the problem. Vehicles are lined up in both directions on the street trying to turn into the parking lot effectively blocking through traffic. The stop and go movements is vehicle idling at its worst.

The way for cities to reduce long-term ozone issues are obvious. Passive solutions such as roundabouts where feasible end the stop-and-go traffic movement that traffic lights and four-way stops create.

If staff fails to do so, the Manteca Planning Commission needs to push roundabouts at every opportunity. There is no debate whether the commission has such authority. It is suppose to make sure that projects comply with the general plan. Unless all that verbiage about air quality and ways of reducing pollution through such elements as development design and roundabouts are hogwash, the commission has a legal obligation to put its collective foot down.

With 1,156 homes proposed in the same area in southeast Manteca there will surely be intersections with significant traffic controlled by stop signs in all directions or traffic signals. If projections warrant such controls at Pillsbury Road and Woodward Avenue a roundabout would be a better answer. And why not use roundabouts when possible on the extension of major roads in the Austin Road Business Park?

Manteca's elected leaders and others in the region should join forces to pressure the state to eliminate one of the biggest sources of stop and go driving in the area — Deadman's Curve on the eastbound 120 Bypass transition to southbound Highway 99. Not only is it a safety hazard for traffic coming to a stop and then starting up and stopping again like a giant Slinky but it also adds unnecessarily to the valley's ozone woes.

And if we do exceed the ozone level as established by the federal government, we are going to pay for it immediately in the form of increased fees on business and a \$12 surcharge on the annual registration of any vehicle garaged in the nine-county San Joaquin Valley.

Violate the ozone levels enough and the San Joaquin Valley loses all federal highway and transit funds except, of course, for the high speed rail.