

Your idea to fight smog could pay off

Air district's \$4m fund aims to reduce emissions

By Mark Grossi

[Fresno Bee and Modesto Bee, Saturday, April 23, 2005](#)

Build a bike path. Start up a commuter van pool. Set up a video-conferencing system so you can hold a meeting without leaving your city or even your office.

If you have such ideas to keep people out of their cars, now is the time to ask for a piece of a \$4 million fund aimed at reducing vehicle emissions.

The money, which comes from vehicle registration fees, is offered by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Pollution from vehicles is the No. 1 air problem in the Valley, where state authorities say motorists drive 94 million miles daily.

Though pollution from vehicles amounts to almost 60% of the Valley's air pollution, the local air district does not have direct control over it. Federal and state authorities regulate fuels and engine standards.

The air district promotes pollution reduction from vehicles by making money available to help pay for bike lanes, public transportation, telecommuting and other strategies. "Government regulations alone are not enough to clean up the air in the San Joaquin Valley," district spokeswoman Kelly Malay said. "It'll take public participation and voluntary changes to get where we need to be. And we've seen incredible success in the past when we provide incentive funds to achieve those changes."

Government agencies, cities, educational institutions and businesses are encouraged to approach the district about the funds, which will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis.

To get an application, call (559) 230-5850 or go to the district Web site at www.valleyair.org. Applications also may be obtained at the district office, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. in Fresno.

Galt could see major changes over next few decades

By Ross Farrow

[Lodi News-Sentinel, Monday, April 25, 2005](#)

Galt could look a lot different in the next 20 to 50 years, especially on what is now farm land with crops, horses and cows.

A Wal-Mart Supercenter could dominate the landscape east of Highway 99 between Boessow and Simmerhorn roads. Hundreds of homes could end up behind the Supercenter.

The north end of town may be dominated by a movie theater complex, upscale restaurants, large stores and 400 homes draping Highway 99.

An upscale retirement community with 2,600 homes with a golf course could dot the landscape on Twin Cities Road west of Highway 99.

And, the city's northeast corner could be home to a 1,200-unit subdivision surrounding a new high school. With at least two other developers casting eagle eyes on Galt's eastern boundary, more than 3,000 homes could end up there.

The idea for what could be a greatly expanded city makes some residents nervous. Galt has already transitioned from a small farm town of 7,500 in 1988 and about 15,000 in 1995 to a suburban city now of about 23,000.

And thirsty developers want to dot the landscape with as many as 6,000 homes.

"That's called sprawl," Gail Hall, who owns five acres on Cherokee Lane, told the City Council earlier this month. "This affects our neighbors and our rural setting."

City leaders say they will try to balance the city's economic needs with the desire to maintain Galt's small-town charm.

Six potential developers who own nearly 2,500 acres among them outside the city limits will jointly finance a city-commissioned study on how each of the development proposals would affect traffic, water, sewer, schools and the environment.

"Traffic will be horrendous," City Councilman Tim Raboy said. "If people are concerned about traffic on flea market day, you're going to have that every day everywhere in the city."

Galt's business area is known for its bumper-to-bumper congestion each Tuesday and Wednesday, when the Galt Market on Caroline and Chabolla avenues are open. Traffic is so bad that residents avoid shopping in the area on those days, and they use alternate routes to Highway 99 and other parts of town.

In addition to traffic, some residents are concerned about how to fit children from that housing growth in their schools.

While still others are alarmed about what developers want to do in Galt, Mayor Darryl Clare maintains that the council isn't likely to approve all the subdivisions that developers want to build. However, a majority of its members want to study all developments that are on the table, officially or unofficially.

Five subdivisions on the table

At least five major subdivisions are proposed by potential developers, though only one of them -- Del Webb -- has submitted a formal application to the city Planning Department. And all of them are outside the city limits.

Raboy, a staunch slow-growth advocate who has served on the council since 1999, thinks Galt could end up with more than 6,000 homes because Del Webb is understating its desires. Del Webb's file with the city says 2,600 homes, but Raboy expects it to be amended to a larger number of units.

Del Webb is proposed on 887 acres about 1 1/2 miles west of Highway 99 on Twin Cities Road opposite Christensen Road. Developers there have become active in the Galt District Chamber of Commerce and pledged to help finance upgrades to the sewer plant next door to its property and to Twin Cities Road and the Highway 99 interchange at Twin Cities.

Two other subdivisions adding a combined 2,200-plus homes are proposed on farmland between Marengo Road and Cherokee Lane. And an undisclosed number of homes by Pacific Union Homes are proposed east of Highway 99 between Simmerhorn and Boessow roads.

Galt planners can't pin a number on what Pacific Union Homes wants to build east of the proposed Wal-Mart Supercenter northeast of the Central Galt exit, said Principal Planner Sandra Kiriu.

And, Pete Gibson, Pacific Union's assistant project manager who has attended at least two Galt City Council meetings, said he isn't allowed to provide that information, deferring to superiors within the company.

"Isn't that interesting what these out-of-towners want do in our community?" Raboy asked. He would rather see two- and five-acre ranchettes because they produce few additional students in the schools and little additional traffic.

Clare staunchly supports annexing the Highway 99 corridor between Twin Cities and Arno roads to bring property tax and sales tax revenue into the city.

"I think it's the financial future of our city," he said. "We couldn't financially sustain ourselves" if Galt doesn't expand its city limits.

Another property owner, Allied Developers, also known as Twin Cities Partners, owns 438 acres on the west side of Highway 99. Although the partnership is contributing to the cost of the traffic/water study with five other developers, Mark Vespoli of Allied Developers said he doesn't have any development in mind.

Twin Cities Partners owns 438 acres along the western Highway 99 corridor between Twin Cities Road almost to Arno Road and west along Twin Cities to the city sewer plant opposite Midway Road.

Vespoli said his partnership, who has owned the property since 1987, may develop the land if it is ever annexed into the Galt city limits.

While he supports commercial and industrial development north of Twin Cities Road, Clare opposes adding homes there. He also questions whether subdivisions in eastern Galt will ever get the green light.

What might actually be approved

What developers have in mind and what the City Council actually authorizes appear to be two different things.

Like Raboy, Clare sees Del Webb as a legitimate applicant because it wouldn't produce children to crowd Galt schools. He will also give YCH significant consideration because of its promise to help finance the new high school off Twin Cities and Marengo roads.

YCH has offered to front \$43.5 million to help build a new high school near its subdivision, plus additional money for a new elementary school. The money would be financed through a fee to be assessed on homebuyers within the subdivision, to be called Liberty Ranch.

Meritage and Pacific Union are another story, Clare said, because the proposed homes and the children that come with them won't alleviate school congestion.

Clare projects that students generated from the YCH subdivision, plus ranchettes that Sacramento County approves in rural areas would fill the new high school planned at Marengo and Twin Cities roads. Clare added that he isn't likely to support Meritage and Pacific Union, he said, because a third high school would be required to serve those developments.

Before making any decisions about Galt's ultimate boundaries and how many new homes will dot the landscape, the city's General Plan consultant will study in detail how these residential and commercial developments would affect all aspects of life in Galt if they're built.

The study will include traffic, water, sewer, schools, environmental issues and requirements by Sacramento County's Local Agency Formation Commission, which makes decisions on boundary changes. The study will also investigate the feasibility of doubling the city's sewer capacity to 6 million gallons per day.

Six potential developers have pledged to share the \$152,000 cost of the study. However, the city's contract with the developers stipulates that the developers' investment does not guarantee City Council approval of their projects.

"Why study it if you're not looking to approve it?" Raboy asked. "That's why the majority pro-growth voting block are considering it."

Raboy labels Clare, Vice Mayor Randy Shelton and Council members Tom Malson and Barbara Payne as the pro-growth voting block.

Clare and Darren Suen, land acquisition manager for Meritage Homes, said there is no cause for alarm because construction of any subdivisions the City Council may approve will be spread out over several years.

"That's often a common perception -- 'Oh my God. It's all happening at once.'" Suen said. "We're not going to bombard the city with everything all at once. It would happen over a 10-year period."

A pro-growth advocate

Elk Grove Realtor Gyan Kalwani isn't bashful when he says he wants a lot of new homes. He owns 145 acres east of Highway 99 to McKenzie Road between Twin Cities and Mingo roads.

Kalwani said he wants every subdivision -- 5,000 homes or more -- approved by the city. That's so he can build a miniature version of a Hilton hotel within the next five years. He also envisions a movie theater with six to eight screens, nice restaurants, a small outpatient medical clinic and professional offices within 10 years.

"Galt has a great chance right now to do things right," Kalwani said. "Galt has no tax base. They need some commercial property. Why not keep all the (tax) money in Galt so we can hire additional police protection?"

Galt needs to develop Twin Cities Road on both sides of Highway 99, Kalwani said.

"It's the only road in the area connecting Highway 99 with I-5. We need to take advantage of that."

LAFCO representatives will discuss its potential requirements for the city of Galt to annex and develop land north of Twin Cities Road at a special Galt City Council meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday at City Hall, 380 Civic Dr.

Development projects proposed in Galt

- A hotel, movie theaters, restaurants, retail businesses, medical and professional offices and 400 homes on 166 acres east of Highway 99 to McKenzie Road between Twin Cities and Mingo roads. The developer is Capitol Realtors from Elk Grove.
- An upscale Del Webb complex restricted to residents 55 years and older west of Galt's wastewater treatment plant on Twin Cities Road, 1 1/2 miles west of Highway 99. Features include 2,600 homes, businesses, walking trails toward Laguna Creek to the north and possibly a golf course on 887 acres.
- Liberty Ranch, a 1,200 to 1,300-home subdivision on about 350 acres south of Twin Cities Road between Marengo Road and Cherokee Lane.
- Meritage Homes, which proposes about 1,000 homes on 279 acres south of YCH. Just south of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, the subdivision would extend south almost to Simmerhorn Road and from Cherokee Lane west to a point between Cherokee and Marengo Road.
- Pacific Union Homes, which owns about 305 acres east of Crystal Way to Marengo Road and between Boessow and Simmerhorn roads. It would be located just east of a Wal-Mart Supercenter proposed northeast of the Central Galt exit off Highway 99. Number of homes projected has not been disclosed.

-- *News-Sentinel staff.*

Earth Day Focuses on a Better Valley

By David Chircop

[Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, April 24, 2005](#)

Green party stickers, 100 percent recycled toilet paper, vegan muffins, anti-Starbucks flyers and an array of educational recycling displays were items surrounding the Sierra Presbyterian Church's sanctuary Friday evening.

The Merced church played host to an Earth Day celebration, which included games for children, informational booths and speakers who detailed the economic impact of the San Joaquin Valley's notoriously unhealthy air.

"At the heart of the problem is the physical environment that we live in," said David Lighthall, research director Relational Culture Institute, a Fresno sustainable development group. "Pollution has a greater effect here than it would in other places."

Lighthall, who earned a Ph.D. in environmental geography from the University of Iowa, said the federal Clean Air Act should offer more incentives to encourage Valley businesses to pollute less.

Because the air rules don't recognize the Valley's geography works as an incubator for smog, Lighthall said federal air regulations unfairly penalize the region.

"The Valley is like a child with a learning disability, and it is being graded on the same curve as the rest of the students.

"When student fails, instead of getting the help that's needed, the student gets punished. That's being done by the federal government," he said in an interview before speaking to the church.

Lighthall said churches and other civic groups should help combat deep-rooted structural problems in the Valley, including air pollution and poverty.

He also said the regional air district, the most local air quality regulatory body, should be expanded to include voices beyond bureaucrats, industry and environmentalists.

He said local air districts are insider's groups that shut the public off from "political struggle in clean-air black boxes."

And while the Valley gets a bad rap for its dirty air, Lighthall said the region produces fewer air emissions per square mile than the Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

Reframing the air quality debate around economic issues can reveal sectors of the economy with profit-margins being attacked by air pollution.

The spillover effects of bad air, include an increased need for health care, high asthma rates, missed school days and reduced productivity.

Earlier in the day, elementary schoolchildren planted a few dozen trees at five city schools with the help of the city's public works department.

Children at the church also had a hand building an asthma awareness display.

Lisa Kayser-Grant, one of the event's organizers, said working on eco-friendly projects in Merced "can be frustrating, lonely and tiresome."

But she said the 30 or so like-minded people who gathered for the event is encouraging.

"There is quite a community of conscience in our area," she said.

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Inland Empire emerges as national population hub, state economic engine

By ALEX VEIGA, AP Business Writer

[San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, April 24, 2005](#)

Fontana, Calif. (AP) -- Drive down the main drag of this wind-swept foothill town 50 miles east of Los Angeles and the signs are everywhere. The area is booming.

Hundreds of new tract and luxury homes are going up throughout the city, where the population has doubled in 15 years to about 170,000.

Many of the newcomers are refugees from cities closer to the coast, where soaring housing prices have sent people packing to the region known as the Inland Empire, an area about the size of Virginia that includes San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

New census numbers show Riverside was the second-fastest growing county in the nation last year, drawing an average of 244 newcomers a day. San Bernardino County ranked fifth, with 160.

More than 3.8 million people now live in the two counties -- a figure expected to hit 5.1 million by 2020.

The transition from Hollywood hinterland to vibrant population center has brought big-city problems -- traffic jams, air pollution and skyrocketing home prices that threaten to leave many people unable to afford the homes they hope to find.

"If anybody ever told you that you were going to build a house for \$750,000 in Fontana, you would have been in hysterical laughter," said John Husing, an economist who tracks the Inland Empire. "It's a market that's just exploded."

Since 2000, the median cost of a home in both counties has more than doubled. Riverside went from \$160,000 to \$379,000, while San Bernardino jumped from \$136,000 to \$298,000, according to DataQuick Information Systems.

"The Inland Empire is about where Orange and L.A. counties were about 20 years ago," said Frank Williams, head of the Building Industry of Southern California chapter that covers San Bernardino County.

"The other counties are building out, housing prices are outrageous, so there's really no place else to go but out here," he said.

Regional planners saw the boom coming and in the late 1990s began designating space for new subdivisions and wilderness areas. But they've been overwhelmed by the onslaught of traffic.

Last November, San Bernardino County voters approved a measure adding a half-cent to the sales tax to fund highway improvements. Riverside County's voters did the same a few months earlier.

But it could be years before highways are built and frustrated commuters notice much difference.

"When we moved here it was pretty empty," recalled Renee Velasquez, a sales clerk who moved from Los Angeles to Fontana a decade ago in search of an affordable home and a simpler life. "Now it's just like L.A. Now it's congested."

Husing estimated that 350,000 people commute between the Inland Empire and coastal counties every day. For many, that means two hours in traffic -- each way.

Among them is Fontana Mayor Mark Nuaimi, who moved to the city a decade ago and commutes 43 miles each way to Anaheim.

"The regional freeways are death," he said.

Such growth in the region would have been hard to fathom a decade or so ago, when Fontana was still suffering from the shutdown of the Kaiser Steel mill and the Inland Empire in general was reeling from military base closures.

Last year, however, the region generated 35 percent of all new jobs in California - gains fueled largely by new home construction and demand for workers at giant distribution centers for Target, Costco, Wal-Mart, Toyota and other firms.

The flow of tractor-trailers hauling cargo to those centers from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach has contributed to air pollution and prompted calls for the warehouses to cut down on diesel exhaust from idling trucks.

Many of the new jobs have popped up in the eastern reaches of the region, where the most affordable homes are being built. Half of all building permits being pulled in San Bernardino County are in the high desert about 90 miles east of Los Angeles in cities like Hesperia and Victorville.

But the influx of residents is making commutes there even tougher.

Joe Minasso, 39, sold his house in Victorville when his 50-mile drive west to Ontario grew from 40 minutes to two hours. His new home in Fontana will save him time but add about \$125,000 to his mortgage.

"The drive for me is worth the extra money to pay for the house," he said.

As growth spreads in the desert, more populated areas on the western rim of the Inland Empire, such as Rancho Cucamonga and Temecula, are beginning to run out of land for new homes, said Scott Laurie, president of the Inland Valley division of KB Homes.

"Supply is not keeping up to the demand," he said.

Homebuilder John Young said interest in his firm's tract housing throughout the Inland Empire remains high, with prospective buyers often signing up on waiting lists.

"More jobs are coming out this way, more shipping is coming out this way," he said. "Now it's 'well, I'll go there,' where maybe 10 years ago you'd say, 'no, I'm not going out there. There's nothing to do.'"

Owners charged up over electric cars, but manufacturers have pulled the plug

Michael Taylor, staff writer

[San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, April 24, 2005](#)

It can make you dizzy, watching those numbers on the pump whiz by in such a blur that by the time you've pumped a measly 15 gallons of gasoline into your pickup truck, you've spent nearly \$45.

But wait. What if you left your house in the morning, drove your 20 miles to work and 20 miles back -- by then, you'd have burned up \$7 worth of gas -- and the whole trip cost a mere 50 cents?

That would be about the price of the electricity it costs to recharge your Ford Ranger electric-powered truck overnight. That's the truck that will go about 80 miles between charges, the one that looks the same as a gas-powered Ranger.

And there are other vehicles in this electric-powered class: the most original is General Motors' EV1, built from the ground up as a fast, economical two-seater, along with the Honda EV-Plus, the Ford THINK, Toyota RAV4 EV, Nissan Altra, Chevrolet S10 Electric and Chrysler Epic.

Pretty nifty cars, if you want to get out from under the thumb of the oil companies. There's only one problem: For the most part, you can't have them.

GM and other manufacturers have recalled most of their cars, leaving some in public agency fleets and others in museums or universities. In fact, GM has been hauling its EV1s out to the Arizona desert and crushing them.

For all intents and purposes, the hugely expensive electric car program -- created in the 1990s by the California Air Resources Board's mandate that the major automakers build a certain number of pollution-free cars -- is just about dead. The law requiring manufacturers to offer those cars for sale has long since been modified -- hybrids, compressed natural gas and "SULEV" cars (super ultra-low-emission vehicles) have taken up the environmental slack.

The automakers, saying all-electric vehicles occupy a tiny and economically worthless niche, simply stopped making, leasing or selling the cars.

And the people who leased the cars and wound up adoring them, only to see them called back in at the end of the lease period, are livid. Many wanted to buy the autos, but all but one manufacturer said no.

Over the past few months, the electric car enthusiasts have conducted noisy protests and held round-the-clock vigils against Ford and GM in front of auto dealerships or storage yards, most of it to no avail.

David Raboy, however, was one of the lucky few -- when Ford told him he had to turn in his beloved truck because the lease was up, he conducted a well-publicized vigil in front of Senator Ford in Sacramento. Ford finally relented and sold him and other lessees their Rangers for \$1 each.

Raboy and his wife, Heather Bernikoff, both 34, plug the Ranger into a charging device on their ranch in Mariposa County. It costs them pennies to recharge it each day.

And the truck is hardly a slouch. With half a ton's worth of batteries slung under the pickup bed, lowering the truck's center of gravity, it handles more like a Mustang than the workhorse it was designed to be, taking corners marked for 30 mph at more than 65. Raboy said that in the past four years, the truck "has cost me nothing to run. No maintenance, no oil changes, no gas."

That, of course, is the point of the electric vehicle aficionados in California, a group of several hundred people who are, without exaggeration, fervent evangelists for their cars. Many of them look at the auto industry as a tribe of idiots who will never break their reliance on the dwindling supply of fossil fuels, despite experimental forays into fuel cell technology.

"Electric vehicles are loved by the people who drove them, almost universally," said Marc Geller, a San Francisco photographer who had a Ford THINK until Ford took it back, then spent \$38,000 to buy a used Toyota RAV4 EV. Geller concedes that the car needs to be plugged in each night, but says that once people get used to an electric car, they love it.

The electric RAV4s, small SUVs that have their batteries under the floor, are still being sold, but only as used cars by individuals. Toyota discontinued its electric RAV4 program.

Some electric cars can still be found in public utility and city government fleets. Vacaville, for example, turned the niche craze for zero-emission, no-gas cars into public policy, largely through the efforts of the city's transportation systems manager, Ed Huestis.

Huestis bought a GM EV1 in 1998 and brought it to "ride and drive" events. He found that if he walked away for an hour, its window would be "covered with fingerprints, where people were looking inside to see what it's like."

Vacaville became "the first city in the nation to take federal air-quality money, normally for bike paths and things like that, and apply it to alternative fuel vehicles," Huestis said. He coordinated a program of getting 100 electric vehicles leased to Vacaville residents -- "it was the most number of electric vehicles per capita of any city in the nation," he says -- and 20 more for the city's use. Those who managed to buy one of the elusive cars got a \$6,000 rebate from the city.

The city has a waiting list of about 100 people who want electric cars, and this affinity has become so well known that Vacaville is sometimes referred to as Voltageville. Cars become available when, for example, a lessee who has a Toyota RAV4 electric decides not to buy it and uses the purchase option to sell it to someone who does want it.

For himself, Huestis finally bought a Toyota RAV4 EV for \$42,000, after the leases for his three GM EV1s expired and GM took the cars back. At more than twice the price of a gasoline-powered version of the same car, that price for the RAV4 may seem a bit stiff -- until Huestis points out that he got a \$9,000 rebate from the state air board and a \$4,000 federal tax credit, as well as the \$6,000 city credit.

The state rebate expired at the end of 2003, but the \$4,000 tax credit and \$6,000 city credit are still in force, Huestis said.

Honda's EV Plus, which was leased by the big Japanese automaker in the late 1990s, was so popular that one woman who had one still mourns the day she had to turn it in, four years ago.

"Those long scratches down the side of the car were from my fingernails, from trying to drag the car back into my garage," Sacramento attorney Martha Schwartzmann said the other day.

"It was a great car," she said. "It was a pleasure to drive, it was efficient, it was perfect for the short-term driving you do around town. There were plenty of places to plug it into. It was big enough to carry people and belongings. It was stylish. And I felt safe.

"I had to get used to going to gas stations again," Schwartzmann said. "It was all very sad."

Maybe so, but the automakers, while politely thanking those who took a flier on their brief journey into the world of watts and volts, insist that the future of personal transportation lies elsewhere -- hybrid gasoline and electric, and, further down the line, fuel cells.

GM stopped EV1 production, spokesman Dave Barthmuss said, because "after spending over \$1 billion over a four-year time frame, we were only able to lease 800 EV1s. That does not a business make. As great as the vehicle is and as much passion, enthusiasm and loyalty as there is, there simply wasn't enough at any given time to make a viable long-term business proposition for General Motors.

"If we're really going to make a difference in environmental auto issues, we have to be able to see vehicles in the hundreds of thousands of units, instead of hundreds," Barthmuss said.

Asked why GM didn't just sell the cars to the clamoring motorists, as Ford finally did with the Rangers, Barthmuss said that "parts are no longer available." Even though buyers might waive the right to sue GM over any design or production defects, he said, "in today's litigious society, there is no such thing as no liability." This aspect of electric vehicle ownership did not seem to be high on the concern list of the people who love these cars. Besides, there are numerous helpful Web sites catering to the electric vehicle community.

At Ford, spokesman Niel Golightly took a different tack. The company essentially gave the Ranger trucks to the faithful, he said, because "we recognized there was a strong feeling around this vehicle. People were very, very keen to keep them.

"We made a conscious decision we would risk liability and parts concerns (for the sake of) customer satisfaction," he said. Ford, like GM and other automakers, is making hybrids and has given up on pure electrics.

One industry veteran has his own ideas about why the manufacturers have dumped electric cars by the wayside.

Tom Gage, who was a manager in Chrysler Corp.'s regulatory strategy office for eight years, said automakers were unenthusiastic about making electric cars because it was the first time a government agency -- in this case, the state air resources board -- had told them specifically what to do.

"The air board made them build a small percentage of cars for zero emissions," Gage said. The only car with no tailpipe emissions, he noted, was powered by electricity.

"The automakers saw this as a precedent they didn't want, something where regulators could tell them what to make," Gage said. "(They) fought it very hard, and one way to kill the mandate is to say it's a bad product, nobody wants to buy it, it's too expensive and its range is too short."

Gage is now president of AC Propulsion, a Los Angeles County firm that makes electric cars. For a while it made the T-Zero, a superfast electric sports car. One of the three models the company built ended up in Berkeley with David Wilner, a 51-year-old former software engineer who says the T-Zero satisfies his twin passions of environmentalism and driving fast. He paid more than \$100,000 for it.

"I like it better than any car I've had," he said after a blindingly quick drive through the Berkeley hills. Riding with Wilner is like being thrown forward in a rocket sled, a few inches off the ground, pinned to the seat by a four-point racing harness.

After toting up his daily electricity usage, Wilner says the cost is about equivalent to a gas-powered car that gets 100 miles per gallon.

AC canceled production of the T-Zero, however, because, Gage said, "it was too costly to go through the federal government safety certification." More accessible, the firm says, is its upcoming conversion of Toyota's Scion xB and xA cars from gas engines to electric motors. The cars will cost about \$45,000 to \$65,000 each, depending on their accessories and battery power.

But there won't be many of these electric Scions. Each year, the big automakers sell a bit more than 16 million cars a year in the United States, nearly all of them with gas-powered engines. Gage figures he'll produce about 250 electric Scions a year. But if demand warrants, he can ramp up production to 500.

Electric car aficionados favor a hybrid that you plug in overnight

Michael Taylor, Chronicle Staff Writer

[San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, April 24, 2005](#)

It seems like the best of both worlds, assuming one world is pure electric and the other is hybrid.

It is called "plug-in hybrid," and it's the latest popular wrinkle among the alternative fuel cognoscenti. They're the folks who believe that ideally we should all be driving pure electric cars, but short of that, we should capitalize on the electric portion of a hybrid as much as possible.

In simple terms, what they have in mind is plugging in your hybrid to your home's electric power supply at night. The next morning, the first 10, 20 or even 60 miles would be driven solely on electricity, rather than the combination of electric motor and gas-powered engine that propels hybrids now on the market.

Car companies, with the exception of DaimlerChrysler, have been, if not cool, at least neutral on the subject of plug-ins. They're still concentrating on developing a fuller product line of the hybrids.

Professor Andrew Frank, director of the Hybrid Electric Vehicle Center at UC Davis and a man who has been experimenting with hybrids and plug-ins for 25 years, says plug-ins are clearly the way to go.

"The bigger the electric motor and the smaller the gas engine, the more efficient the overall vehicle is," Frank said.

Three years ago, he and his students converted a standard Mercury Sable to plug-in hybrid using a small four-cylinder gas engine and a 100-horsepower electric motor. After an overnight charge, the car could go 60 miles on its electric motor.

The average U.S. driver goes about 38 miles a day, the federal government says. Frank thinks most of that could be done only on the electric part of the hybrid equation.

"We'd go to a gas station about five times a year, as opposed to 35 times a year with a conventional car," Frank said.

Two years ago, DaimlerChrysler joined with Palo Alto's Electric Power Research Institute, a nonprofit funded by the nation's utilities, to build a handful of plug-in hybrid-powered delivery vans. One van is already running on German streets; Bob Graham, the institute's program manager for sustainable technologies, says four more will come to the United States in June for testing.

"We hope there's a strong enough case to justify this becoming a full-time product," Graham said, "and then (we can) migrate it into the mass customer market."

All-hybrid bus fleet for Yosemite Valley

[San Francisco Chronicle, Saturday, April 23, 2005](#)

The free, half-hourly shuttle bus in Yosemite Valley has expanded to 18 stops, but there's even better news for visitors: By mid-May, the entire fleet will have hybrid electric engines, reducing both air and noise pollution in the national park.

Park authorities are planning to release details of the program at a press conference Monday, but the buses are expected to reduce exhaust emissions by 90 percent and noise by up to 70 percent, according to park concessionaire Delaware North Companies (DNC). The new hybrid buses will also have air-ride suspension, larger windows and skylights.

Getting around the information superhighway in the valley is also getting easier: The Ahwahnee and Yosemite Lodge at the Falls now have Wi-Fi Internet access in several public spaces. The lodge also has two Internet kiosks in its lobby that cost \$.25 a minute with instructions in six different languages.

-- Jeanne Cooper

Yosemite gets fleet of hybrids

By Francis P. Garland

[Stockton Record, Sunday April 24, 2005](#)

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK -- A noisy bus engine is about the last thing an exhausted camper wants to hear after crawling into a sleeping bag.

Yet, that's just what many a camper has heard over the years at Yosemite National Park's Upper Pines campground. There, some campsites are just a stone's throw from the road between Curry Village and Happy Isles -- and clearly within earshot of the lumbering old diesel shuttle buses that roam Yosemite Valley as late as 10 on some nights.

Park officials say campers won't have to deal with that noise nuisance much longer, thanks to the arrival of a new fleet of ultra-quiet hybrid-powered shuttle buses.

The new diesel-electric hybrids will be phased in over the next two months to replace the old diesel buses. When all the hybrid buses arrive, supposedly by mid-June, Yosemite will be the only national park with an all-hybrid shuttle fleet.

A few of the new buses, which cost about \$500,000 each, already are being used, and visitors like what they see and hear, park officials say.

The federal government purchased 18 of the buses, manufactured by Gillig Corp., with an assist from General Motors. Twelve will be used for the east valley shuttle system, and the other six will be used elsewhere, including Wawona and the Badger Pass Ski Area.

The new hybrid models, similar to two the San Joaquin Regional Transit District uses, are touted as cleaner, quieter and easier on fuel consumption.

Joyce Eden of Friends of Yosemite Valley is among the critics who say the National Park Service erred in settling for diesel-electric hybrids when it could have gone a step further and gone all-electric.

Eden said she's concerned the hybrids will be used to stock a broader busing system, which she fears will "turn Yosemite into an urban transit area."

George Whitmore of the Sierra Club said his group pushed the Park Service several years ago to avoid any diesel-type engines when it went shuttle-fleet shopping.

"The diesel engine by its very nature is dirty," said Whitmore. "Diesel emissions are dangerous -- they're carcinogenic, and they kill people. But they insisted it had to be diesel."

Whitmore said he doesn't believe the Park Service has adequately explained just why it had to have the diesel-electric hybrids.

Park spokesman Scott Gediman, though, said when park officials considered all the factors, including the shuttle system's capacity needs and frequent stops and starts and the park's weather extremes and topography, the diesel-hybrid proved the right choice.

An all-electric fleet, for example, would have required building charging stations -- and environmentalists are sensitive to any new structures being built in the valley.

Other alternative fuel vehicles might not have been able to make some of the grades, Gediman said.

"Right now, this is the best available technology that's out there," he said.

Tim Grewe, chief engineer for the General Motors hybrid bus program, called the new diesel-hybrid design "one of those triple wins."

"It's a winner for the environment because it's a very low-emissions vehicle," he said. "It's a winner for the park maintenance staff because it has standard maintenance operations and costs are low. And it's a winner for the passengers. Essentially, it's the smoothest, quietest, cleanest bus out there."

Grewe said the electric motors do most of the "launching" when the bus leaves the curb and the diesel engines kick in when the buses operate at a normal speed. As the bus stops, the transmission also serves as a generator, putting juice back into the electric motors.

Gediman said the hybrid systems get 60 percent better gas mileage than a straight diesel engine. Kerri Holden of DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, the concessionaire that operates the buses, said the hybrids are 70 percent quieter, and emissions are about 10 percent of what a straight diesel engine produces.

The noise factor is a big reason why DNC is excited about the new fleet, Holden said.

"Guests in the past have had to put up with buses accelerating and decelerating," she said. "That's not something that necessarily ruins your experience, but it's not what you expect to hear in a national park environment."

Although the Sierra Club has been critical of the Park Service's new shuttle choice, John Buckley, the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center's executive director, praised the decision.

"This isn't totally ideal because you're still relying on petroleum fuel," said Buckley. "But on the other hand, they are extremely quiet, and they are a great improvement over what's been in place. And they are a great transition from the buses of the past to the buses we hope they'll have in a decade or so.

"Given the technology and the need to get something in place now, we feel this is a very, very positive step."

Use of fireplaces fizzling in Bay Area, survey finds

By Denis Cuff

[Contra Costa Times, Monday, April 25, 2005](#)

Fireplace use in the Bay Area is declining slowly, while public support is growing fast for banning old-fashioned fireplaces in new homes, according to a new poll commissioned by the region's air pollution district.

The trend reflects growing health concerns about wood smoke, in addition to the increased use of stoves and fireboxes that burn much more cleanly than open-hearth fireplaces, officials said.

Nearly two of every three Bay Area residents have a fireplace or wood stove at home.

Pollsters interviewed 700 Bay Area residents in nine counties in January and February.

Some 43 percent of those with fireplaces or stoves did not plan to use them last winter, up from 39 percent in 2004 and 37 percent in 2002, the air district reported.

"It's a slight change, not a huge one, but we believe people are burning less," said Emily Hopkins, a spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. "We're seeing a much stronger trend that people are aware of the negative health effects of wood smoke."

The percentage of people who believe wood smoke can be harmful has grown to 67 percent.

Just 49 percent shared that view in 2001.

Scientists and government regulators are paying more attention to the health risk from tiny particles in smoke that can lodge deep in lungs and damage them.

Open-hearth fireplaces spew the particles in the air, while federally certified stoves or fire inserts with pollution controls emit a fraction of the smoke. Natural gas fireplaces emit even less.

Pollsters found that 62 percent of Bay Area residents favor enactment of city and county laws that bar developers from equipping new homes with open-hearth fireplaces.

The figure was 54 percent in 2003, and 47 percent in 2001.

Seven of nine Bay Area counties have adopted wood-smoke ordinances, but only one third of the cities in the region have done so.

Contra Costa and Alameda are among the counties with smoke ordinances.

Cities with ordinances include Clayton, Lafayette, Benicia, Dublin, Livermore and Berkeley.

"It's important to reduce health risks from wood smoke. Most people live near a fireplace, not near an oil refinery," said Mark Ross, a Martinez city councilman on the Bay Area air pollution board.

Some critics have ridiculed bans on open-hearth fireplaces in new homes as government meddling.

Ross disagreed. The bans apply to new homes, not current houses and apartments where owners could continue to burn fires in their fireplaces, he said.

"We're not banning burning," said Ross, who plans to introduce a smoke ordinance in Martinez this summer.

The poll found many people were willing to switch to natural gas fireplaces from open-hearth fireplaces or wood stoves not certified as low-polluting.

One-third of the owners of fireplaces or non-certified stoves would switch to gas fireplaces even if not offered a cash rebate to do so.

Of those who didn't want to switch, 9 percent said they would switch to natural gas fireplaces if offered a \$200 rebate.

Santa Clara and Marin counties have rebate programs.

Some 19 percent of those surveyed said they believe their neighborhoods periodically "experience" wood-smoke pollution.

Among that group, 12 percent called the problem small, while 5 percent said it was moderate, and 1 percent described it as big.

During cold winter nights when pollution is trapped near the ground, the air district advises people not to burn fires in open-hearth fireplaces.

More information about wood-smoke pollution can be obtained at the air district Web site at www.baaqmd.gov.

Stormy Earth Day for Bush

Nasty weather scuttles the president's plan to visit Smoky Mountains National Park.

By Edwin Chen, Times Staff Writer

[L.A. Times, Saturday, April 23, 2005](#)

TOWNSEND, Tenn. - A severe thunderstorm in the Great Smoky Mountains thwarted President Bush's plan on Friday to mark Earth Day by participating in a trail restoration project and delivering a speech on the environment.

Instead, Bush made brief remarks in an almost empty airport hangar in Knoxville, about 30 miles away.

Bush had hoped to become the first sitting president to visit Great Smoky Mountains National Park since it was dedicated by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940. But the storm dashed Bush's hope of paying his 22nd

visit to a national park. No sitting president has made that many visits to national parks, the White House said.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the nation's busiest, with more than 9 million annual visitors.

But it is also polluted by emissions from power plants, pulp and paper mills, chemical factories and cement facilities in the mid-Atlantic region, with visibility in the park sometimes cut severely.

James L. Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, acknowledged the park's long-standing air pollution but said the air quality "has been improving or at least has been remaining stable."

In his 10-minute remarks, Bush said Earth Day was a good occasion to "recommit ourselves to being good stewards of our land. We didn't create this Earth, but we have an obligation to protect it."

He maintained that his so-called clear skies initiative would cut air pollution from coal-fired plants by 70%. The act proposes cutting power plant emissions by that amount by 2015 and 2018. Environmental, health and labor groups say emissions could be reduced by as much as 90% by 2008 under existing law if the administration would issue tighter regulations.

The president's initiative was rejected by a Senate committee this year, with critics saying it would grant polluters too much time to meet new emissions standards and do too little to address global warming.

The Environmental Protection Agency later enacted a broad rule aimed at tightening air quality standards.

Bush has been criticized for allowing a maintenance backlog to persist at the national parks. The president said, however, that he had proposed \$4.9 billion to end the maintenance backlog.

Democrats were not convinced by Bush's words.

"Bush has been a polluter, not a promoter, of the environment," said Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean. "Since taking office, he has put the profits of special interests ahead of the health and well-being of Americans."

Student Curiosity, Ingenuity Put to the Test

A solar-powered go-cart and a pollution study compete for honors at L.A. County science fair

By Erica Williams, Times Staff Writer

[L.A. Times, Saturday, April 23, 2005](#)

What do you get when you mix a curious 13-year-old who's a car buff, a mom with a strong desire for a hybrid car and the 55th annual Los Angeles County Science Fair?

You get Robert McRae, whose solar-powered go-cart was the talk of the fair this year. His design won second place in the junior division engineering category Friday.

With the casual, distracted air of a teenager, the eighth-grader donned a scuffed black helmet and took the stripped-down go-cart for a spin several times Friday to satisfy curious onlookers.

Robert, who attends St. Paul the Apostle School in west Los Angeles, built the solar-powered vehicle from a go-cart he received for Christmas several years ago.

His was one of more than 700 projects exhibited at the Los Angeles Convention Center this week. About 1,200 middle and high school students from 150 public and private schools studied an array of scientific topics, from the behavioral and social sciences to engineering, ecology and microbiology. They competed for medals, scholarships and cash prizes.

Students taking top honors will continue on to the California Science Fair in May.

Other student projects included Viewpoint High School senior Evan Gates' Rubik's cube-solving robot, which won the sweepstakes prize, and a project called Egg-Citing Osmosis that studied how much corn-syrup solution diffuses through shells of eggs.

This was Swati Yanamadala's third year in the fair. She placed first in the senior division of the ecology category this year. Her research found that the Ballona Wetlands could be a source of fecal

contamination to beaches on Santa Monica Bay. "It's a really important human health concern," said the 14-year-old, who is in the ninth grade at Chadwick School in Palos Verdes.

Swati spent several 12-hour days from November to January collecting samples every half an hour from the wetlands. Then she took the samples to a lab at nearby Loyola Marymount University, where she spent another three hours testing for bacteria levels.

Swati said she didn't mind the long hours spent alone in the field or stuck in a lab while other teens were out having fun.

"I never doubt my reasons for being down there or think I'd rather be somewhere else," she said. "It's where I want to be."

The environment has been a passion of hers since a science teacher sparked her interest in the seventh grade, she said.

That kind of passion is exactly what the nonprofit science fair wants to nurture, said Dean Gilbert, the fair's director and a science curriculum consultant for the Los Angeles County Office of Education.

"Activities like this encourage kids to take their natural ability to question and solve problems," Gilbert said. "These are our future scientists and engineers."

Swati and Robert say their interest in science will not wane. Swati isn't sure what she plans to study in college, but knows that she will remain in the sciences. Robert says he wants to do something in the area of building and designing cars in the future.

To make his solar-powered go-cart, Robert first removed its fiberglass body to make room for the solar panels. That left just the plain black frame.

He then replaced its gas-powered motor with a donated 1,200-rpm electric motor and two 12-volt batteries. Solar panels mounted on the front and back absorb energy from the sun and direct it to the motor, powering the car, Robert said.

"The motor uses the solar energy as it comes in," he explained. "It saves the batteries and helps [them] last longer."

Robert tested the solar-powered go-cart, which he built over a two-month period, in an empty Torrance parking lot in several 2 1/2 - to 3-hour test drives. He found the car traveled 22% farther and spent 17% more time on the road with solar panels than without.

His mother, Bobbi McRae, said Robert worked hard, never got flustered and took any problems in stride.

"He loves taking apart things," she said. "Everything in the house is a potential tool for another project."

Safety of air cleaners suspect

By Edie Lau -- Bee Science Writer

[Sacramento Bee, Sunday, April 24, 2005](#)

Bothered by dust from construction around her home in Sun City Lincoln Hills, Carole Russell ordered an air purifier she'd heard promoted by a popular radio talk show host.

Shortly after setting up the unit in her living room, Russell found that the air seemed even worse. A sharp smell like chlorine hung in the air. Her nose felt irritated, her throat raspy.

"I've almost turned the whole thing off, but it's kind of futile to spend \$794 and turn the thing off," she said. The experience was bewildering to Russell, but to scientists in the field of indoor air pollution, her story is not surprising.

For well over a decade, independent and government researchers have suspected that certain types of indoor-air cleaners actually pollute their surroundings, potentially harming the people exposed.

The types of air cleaners in question generate ozone gas, either deliberately or as a byproduct of a process called ionization. The federal and state governments regulate ozone as a pollutant outdoors, but for the most part, no rules apply to ozone in the home.

That may change. A booming consumer market in air purifiers - valued at \$1 billion a year and rising - and new scientific evidence that even tiny increases in exposure to ozone may be unhealthy have at least two agencies seeking limits.

Last month, the California Air Resources Board - which long has been concerned about ozone generators but lacks the power to regulate indoor air - appealed to the state attorney general's office to step in.

The board asked the attorney general to determine whether air cleaners that emit ozone pose an environmental or consumer protection problem and if so, whether legal action is warranted. The attorney general's office is reviewing the request.

"Basically, we're asking, do these things work? Are they hurting people? Are they making false health claims?" said Gennet Paauwe, an air board spokeswoman.

The federal Consumer Product Safety Commission wants to know, too. It contracted last fall with Richard Shaughnessy, head of an indoor-air research program at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma, to summarize the science on the subject, determine whether standards are needed and if so, what those standards should be.

Shaughnessy said he expects to make recommendations by the end of summer. Depending on the outcome, the product safety commission could call for voluntary or mandatory emissions limits, safety alerts and/or labeling, said agency spokesman Steve Forde.

Air cleaners come in many varieties, including some that use filters, others a process called ionization, some a combination. Shaughnessy noted that not all are a potential source of trouble.

"There are many indoor air cleaners that are capable of providing improved air quality indoors," he said. "(But) it's a buyer-beware market right now."

Consumers Union weighed in on the subject in the May issue of Consumer Reports magazine, warning shoppers away from several models of air cleaners that it judged to be ineffective in cleaning and to have relatively high ozone output.

The types of air cleaners under government scrutiny produce ozone either deliberately or as a byproduct of ionization.

Depending on the type and the conditions under which measurements are taken, ozone emissions can vary greatly, from nearly zero to levels that would trigger smog alerts outdoors.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found in a 1995 study that some ozone generators set on high in rooms with closed doors produced concentrations up to 300 parts per billion - well over the federal pollution standard for ambient outdoor air, which is 80 ppb averaged over eight hours.

Ozone is a gas produced in nature and through human activities. A layer of ozone above the atmosphere protects life on Earth from the sun's harsh ultraviolet rays. But down where people live, ozone stings eyes, burns noses and inflames lungs.

Ozone is a Jekyll-and-Hyde cousin of the oxygen we need to live. Oxygen is composed of two atoms of oxygen; ozone, three. That third atom makes it unstable and apt to react with other molecules.

That reactivity can be a useful tool. Ozone is considered an effective disinfectant for drinking water, for example.

At the same time, ozone's reactive nature does damage, cracking tires, fading blue jeans and reducing rubber bands to crumbs.

Advocates of using ozone to clean the air tout its ability to kill germs, but the EPA counters that at concentrations needed to kill viruses, bacteria, mold and other biological contaminants, the environment would be unsafe for people.

Simply put, ozone can be beneficial as long as you're not breathing it, said William Nazaroff, an environmental engineer at the University of California, Berkeley, who studies indoor-air quality.

As many residents of urban areas such as Sacramento know, ozone is created in sometimes hazardous volume when sunlight reacts with automotive exhaust. The federal government has treated ozone as a pollutant for 35 years.

But when it comes to ozone generators for household use, government action has been less decisive.

In 2001, the Federal Trade Commission won a \$1.5 million judgment against Alpine Industries, a company in Tennessee that designed and sold ozone generators. A jury found that Alpine had made hundreds of unsubstantiated claims about its machines, including claims about health benefits.

The company went out of business shortly afterward.

But the suit did not address the central question now dogging the industry: Can any level of ozone be considered safe?

"It better be safe, because that's the world we live in. These are levels that you and I are being exposed to right now," said James Marsden, a food-safety researcher at Kansas State University.

Marsden recently was contracted by EcoQuest, a maker of ozone-emitting air purifiers that acquired some of Alpine's assets, to test whether its technology can successfully zap harmful bacteria in food.

EcoQuest maintains that when properly set, its home units produce ozone at concentrations of 20 ppb to 40 ppb - levels it calls both safe and refreshing.

The Sharper Image, which sells the market-leading air purifier, the Ionic Breeze, also strongly defends its product.

In documents provided by the company, officials maintain that the amount of ozone emitted is "insufficient to cause concern" and below existing federal guidelines.

Tom Lynch, director of sales for P3 International, a company in New York City that manufactures and imports a variety of electronic products, including ionizing air purifiers, said those existing government standards on ozone suggest low exposures to the gas are fine.

For example, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration limit for worker exposure is 100 ppb on average over an eight-hour workday.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has a limit of 50 ppb on indoor medical devices.

"I would have to believe that (it's safe), just based on what OSHA and FDA and all these other agencies say," Lynch said.

"We're just trying to follow government guidelines at this point," agreed Tom Ferguson, a public relations contractor for EcoQuest.

FDA spokeswoman Julie Zawisza said the medical-device standard is decades old and should not be used as a guide for household units.

Many air pollution scientists say it's not a good idea to add even trace levels of ozone to the environment - particularly when the exposure comes on top of exposure to ozone from traffic and other industrial sources.

Research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in November by Yale University scientists linked increases in outdoor ozone as tiny as 10 ppb with a small but significant increase in the average daily death rate in 95 urban communities.

Dallas Hyde, a pulmonary researcher at the University of California, Davis, who studies how ozone affects the lungs of monkeys, said he and his colleagues have not seen obvious problems in animals exposed to levels below 80 ppb.

However, Hyde said, the researchers have not looked for subtle effects, such as whether levels of ozone as low as those discharged by some air cleaners might aggravate respiratory problems in people with asthma or similar conditions.

"If it were me, I wouldn't have one," Hyde said.

Nazaroff, the UC Berkeley environmental engineer, said the chemistry of air inside modern homes makes ozone potentially more dangerous indoors than out.

Ozone can react with gases from carpeting, furniture or household cleaners to produce secondary pollutants - things such as the carcinogen formaldehyde, as well as fine particles that can pass through the lungs into the bloodstream, triggering heart disease.

Seven weeks ago when she ordered her air purifier, Carole Russell knew nothing of the controversy over ozone. But after reading a recent Bee article that referred to some air cleaners possibly contributing to indoor pollution, Russell started doing some research.

She found that the EPA, the American Lung Association, the California Air Resources Board and the state Department of Health Services all warn consumers to avoid ozone generators.

Russell turned off her machine.

HOW TO GET HELP

For more information about air purifiers and ozone, go to:

- www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/ozonegen.html
- www.arb.ca.gov/research/indoor/aircleaners.htm
- www.cal-iaq.org

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Sunday April 25, 2005 \(previously published in The Fresno Bee\):](#)

Air district dithering on new pollution rule

The valley's air district board did what many of us do when we find ourselves between a rock and a hard place: It tried to step sideways. It probably won't work.

The board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District signed contracts with a pair of large developers designed to mitigate or pay for additional pollution caused by their projects. Castle & Cooke California Inc. plans 7,500 residential units in Bakersfield. Tejon RanchCorp wants to build a 15-million-square-foot warehouse and industrial complex 20 miles south of Bakersfield.

As mitigation, Tejon would pay the air district nearly \$532,000 to upgrade engines and pollution-control devices for businesses and industries in the area.

No amount has been set for the Castle & Cooke contract.

The idea of contracting with each developer to reduce pollution seems sound. As usual, there's more to the story.

The developers in this case were praised lavishly by air district board members for "volunteering" the contracts. In fact, the developers pushed very hard for this approach, some believe, in order to continue stalling the adoption of a comprehensive rule the district is supposed to have for all projects, a rule already many months overdue.

The rule would govern what are called indirect sources, such as the pollution coming from added traffic that results from a residential development. Under such rules, developers can either take steps to limit the additional pollution or, when that isn't practical, contribute fees to a fund that would be used to make other pollution reductions in the area.

Environmentalists have been pressing hard for adoption of the rule - and it makes sense. We don't need a haphazard, piecemeal approach to new pollution sources anymore than we need leapfrog development. One comprehensive rule that forces significant reductions in new pollution is the best approach.

The building industry has made it clear that it's likely to sue if builders don't like any rule finally adopted. Environmentalists are likely to do the same if the delay continues.

Welcome back to that rock and hard place.

[Tulare Advance-Register and Visalia Times-Delta, Editorial, Saturday, April 23, 2005:](#)

Planning our county's future

Officials are looking at outlines now; here's a look at the pros and cons of each

Tulare County is in the process of updating its general plan, which is the blueprint that guides the county's growth and development.

The general plan sets guidelines for where different kinds of business and industry should be located, what areas should be reserved for agriculture, recreation, environmental use and residences, and how the county should provide for development of its resources. Among the many things it provides direction for are: land, water, different ecological, historical and landscape features as well as its infrastructure, including sewer and water systems, power, roads, bridges and waterways and other public spaces, such as parks.

As a way to determine what kind of profile the county should aspire to, planners have devised three scenarios for its future development:

- City centered development
- Rural Community development
- Proportionate growth development.

These scenarios are not meant to be considered as general plans for the future. Rather, each scenario emphasizes features and choices that would direct the county's development in a very specific direction. None of the three would be able to exist as is, however, because each would require compromises.

Each of the scenarios makes the following assumptions:

The population of Tulare County is expected to grow from about 400,000 people today to more than 600,000 by 2025.

That growth will be accompanied by pressure on county resources, both natural and human-developed.

Existing plans for incorporated cities will accommodate only about 36 percent of the projected population growth, leaving 150,000 people without an existing place to locate.

County planners, advisers and related experts are not reviewing the three scenarios to determine which features they find most attractive and would like to incorporate into the county's general plan update. Next they will combine the best features of each of those scenarios into a synthesis that will form the philosophical basis for the general plan update. County planners will then write a draft general plan based on that concept.

The following is a review of each scenario that includes pros and cons of each.

City centered development: This scenario assumes that the cities will accept nearly all of the additional population growth by increasing density, expanding their boundaries, and adopting policies that allow for growth. The cities would then provide nearly all the opportunities for business and industry, including opportunities for employment for the growth population.

Implications of this scenario:

Cities would have to add to their populations and densities, so they would also have to provide for services, such as sewer, water, roads and public safety.

Cities would also have to make aggressive provisions for providing business and employment opportunities.

The county would have to agree not to develop along the Highway 99 corridor and thus divert commercial opportunities from the cities.

Pattern of development would be compact. Transportation between cities would be important.

PROS: This scenario is the best for preserving agricultural land and maintaining the agricultural character of the county.

It minimizes urban sprawl while strengthening the economic positions of the cities.

It directs growth toward areas that already have infrastructure such as sewer and water in place.

Public transportation that relieves air pollution is viable under this scenario.

CONS: This scenario also puts more pressure on cities to develop wisely and compactly as well as further strain on city services.

It makes little provision for development of unincorporated areas, which could suffer from shortages of housing, infrastructure and opportunities.

Rural community development: This scenario presumes that new growth will take place in unincorporated areas and existing cities would hold the line on growth. It would not only direct new residential development to rural areas but force creation of commercial and business opportunities in the Highway 99 corridor and elsewhere to pay for the county development.

Implications: The county would need to provide for some major growth, including developing new infrastructure in areas that are not now equipped with it. It would also force some redirection of land use away from agricultural use.

The county would become more involved in urban planning in all phases, including commercial and economic development.

PROS: It relieves growth pressures on cities and spreads the population growth among a wider area.

It provides new opportunities for rural areas.

It strengthens the county's tax base and economic opportunity.

CONS: The county at present has little or no experience in infrastructure such as wastewater treatment.

This scenario will require some dedication of agricultural land. Of the three scenarios, it would most hasten the conversion of ag land to urban use.

It would create competition for property taxes and sales taxes among the cities and the county.

It would accelerate development in foothill areas.

Proportional growth: Growth in cities and in unincorporated areas would take place in proportion to their existing population distribution. Major industrial and commercial development would stay in the cities, where roads, water, sewer, schools, etc., can support them.

Implications: This presumes cooperation between cities and county on development and distribution of resources, including revenue sharing. Development policies in the cities and in unincorporated areas would need to be uniform, if not identical. Compact design, "smart growth" and minimal impact on farmland would need to be maintained.

PROS: Balances growth among all elements.

Allows for moderate loss of ag land.

Creates opportunities for small communities while maintaining the lead position for development in the cities.

Concentrates most growth in areas that are already prepared for it, so that don't have to start from scratch in building infrastructure.

CONS: Could create further competition and tension among cities and with county.

Requires widespread investment in some infrastructure throughout the county, especially for roads and water and sewer services.

[Bakersfield Californian, Community Voices, Saturday, April 23, 2005:](#)

Haste doesn't solve sludge waste problem

By MARSHALL HOLLOWAY, Ridgecrest

It is with great concern that I read letters criticizing Bakersfield City Councilman Zack Scrivner for his recent vote against Dean Florez's sludge bill.

As mayor of a city that unanimously refused to support the bill I was looking for insight and direction from both the Bakersfield City Council and the Board of Supervisors to convince me that I may need to re-examine my stance.

I have a hard time with the "symbolism over substance" posture that so often permeates politics.

Of course, no one wants to contaminate our groundwater, [reduce air quality](#) and contaminate fertile farmland. The fact is that sludge is a permanent by-product of our way of life -- finding a permanent solution, not moving the problem somewhere else would be a preferred course of action.

I understand the recent political pressure this has brought upon both supervisors as well as council members and I don't criticize them for reacting to the enormous hysteria resulting from the Florez publicity campaign. I don't even disagree that this is a step in the right direction, but in its present state we simply don't know enough.

Scrivner, as well as our council, has specific concerns as to what precedent this creates regarding private property rights and local control. Scrivner and I know how a bill can change dramatically during consideration. He was wise to be cautious and ask tough questions. This prudence and courage in light of the easy way out should be applauded, not condemned.

I have been frustrated for six years by federal and state roadblocks as I have worked locally with a physicist who holds numerous patents on a process that may very well be the solution to this problem.

Finally, with the help of Rep. Bill Thomas, R-Bakersfield, and Assemblyman Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, Sen. Roy Ashburn, R-Bakersfield, Supervisor Jon McQuiston, Hisam Bikay and Zach Scrivner, we are now at a point where final testing can begin. Yet when I presented this information to Sen. Florez's staff I did not sense any interest.

Florez held a conference call recently with League of California Cities' Environmental Quality Committee members to garner support for this bill. After over an hour-and-a-half discussion, many questions and concerns remained and the committee voted overwhelmingly not to support the bill.

It is not my intent to criticize anyone. I think we are all dedicated to achieving a solution, and the high profile of this case should help that cause.

Instead of writing legislation and endorsing something that we all know will ultimately end up in court, let's look at all options as well as possible future ramifications.

I would think that at the very least identifying a funding source for research and development would be a minimum. I, for one, would rather see my tax dollars go to research than court costs. Zack, keep asking the tough questions and I assure you the knee jerk reactions to your concerns will succumb to genuine realization that a simple ban may not be the best solution.

Marshall "Chip" Holloway is mayor of Ridgecrest. Community Voices is an expanded commentary that may contain up to 500 words.

[Tulare Advance-Register and Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, April 23, 2005:](#)

Act would harm region

The Clean Air Act is under attack. The administration again is proposing to cut back key provisions in this landmark legislation.

The administration's plan, the so-called "Clear Skies" legislation, would move the country backward. It delays deadlines to meet the health standards in the Clean Air Act while relaxing pollution reduction requirements for power plants and other major pollution sources.

Under the proposed legislation, pollutants from smokestacks such as nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide and mercury would increase to dangerous levels. These increased levels result in more harmful air for those most at risk — the elderly, children and people with asthma. The proposed legislation does nothing to curb global warming-causing carbon dioxide emissions. Power plants are the greatest source of carbon dioxide emissions, responsible for 40 percent of CO2 emissions in the United States. The new plan relies on ineffective voluntary approaches to reduce pollution, which could allow CO2 pollution to continue to increase.

All Americans have a right to breathe clean, healthful air. That is the promise of the landmark Clean Air Act. This promise should never be broken.

We call on citizens to contact Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein to oppose the administration plan to increase pollution and ask them to support the Clean Air Act.

DENISE NELSON

President, Tulare County League of Women Voters

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, April 25, 2005:](#)

Bill cleared the air

San Joaquin Valley agribusiness and the public utilities were unable to agree on the cost of a year's supply of electricity. Therefore, you and I breathe dirtier air. At one time, irrigation pumps were powered by electricity.

Agribusiness complained that it was billed for electricity even in months they did not use any. The result of the inability to agree on price was that the irrigation pumps are now powered by diesel engines that produce much more air pollution than the same amount of energy from electricity.

The agricultural industry was exempt from the Clean Air Act until last year when Sen. Dean Florez successfully sponsored laws that told the air district to make rules that would decrease air pollution from farming.

If diesel engines must be used, they should pollute as little as possible. Most of the cost of installing the engines would be paid by taxpayers through the Carl Moyer program.

Please ask the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to make rules that sharply reduce the adverse health effects of agricultural diesel engines. Ask state legislators not to weaken the rules requiring farmers to reduce air pollution. Thank Florez for helping to clean the air.

-- MONTE HARPER, Bakersfield

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, April 25, 2005:](#)

Beltway and aroma

I see the newest route proposal for the South Beltway goes right through property owned by the Borba (dairy) family. I hope Caltrans will put up signs warning people to roll up their windows and turn on their air conditioners prior to entering that area.

If that is the chosen route and the dairy built, then the odor will affect everybody who drives through there, as well as businesses and homes in the area.

One way or another, the dairy-air coming from the cows' derrieres will be noticeable to everyone. Cow-nt on it.

-- DAVID WALKER, Bakersfield

[Fresno Bee, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, April 23, 2005:](#)

Better, cheaper bus service will cut air pollution

Here's a partial solution for Fresno's traffic and smog problems: Expand the public bus system (FAX) with more routes and more frequent service. Replace all existing diesel buses with cleaner natural gas ones. Lower bus fares to 25 cents. To pay for all this, impose a permanent 25-cent-a-gallon local gas tax.

These measures will make public transportation more attractive and less harmful to the environment. Excessive vehicles will be removed from the road, making traffic move faster, which further reduces air pollution. The increased price of gas will force many to reconsider driving huge trucks and SUVs, and will also stimulate more carpooling.

Riding the bus together can provide social benefits, too. It will remove us from our solitary metal boxes and allow us to have increased contact with our fellow Fresnoans.

Daniel Schwartz, Fresno

[Fresno Bee, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, April 24, 2005:](#)

'Good first step'

This is in response to the article, "Madera plant pollution," on April 21.

I'm glad to see that air pollution restrictions and codes are being enforced. This is very important to us in the Valley because we complain so much about getting the Bay Area's pollution, but what happens to ours? It just goes somewhere else, too.

It is important for us to make a first step, just like this glass plant in Madera is doing, to show other places that it is possible to clean up.

These restrictions and codes are a good first step, but to make our lives better we must keep the requirements coming and improve our air.

Michael Horwitz, Fresno