

Vision 2020 six years later

By Stephanie Tavares, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wed. Aug. 24, 2005

Six years ago, thousands of Bakersfield residents cried out for a better future. In a series of public forums organized by a grass-roots group, they created lists of hundreds of improvements they would want in their hometown if the area's coffers were bottomless.

The result of those efforts was a nearly 100-page document, a collective vision of what residents and government leaders wanted Bakersfield to look, feel and generally be like in 20 years.

In the years since, Greater Bakersfield Vision 2020 has expanded, shrunk and changed to meet the community's needs. Vision task forces meet regularly to update the goals and assess their progress.

And local government officials have been listening.

Dozens of ideas from the vision have been adopted by city, county and, in some cases, state and federal organizations.

"I think it's fantastic that a community can come together and come up with the same plan of where we want our community to be and then have it implemented," said Sheryl Barbich, one of the original Vision 2020 organizers. "So many people have come together to get things accomplished, and that's fabulous, just fabulous."

In six years, the quality of education has improved as the Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office implemented better training for new teachers and state tests created some accountability. The Vision 2020 process played a large role in this by increasing community support and encouraging people to get involved with existing and developing programs, Kern County Superintendent of Schools Larry Reider said.

"Vision 2020 has continually supported the collaboration of education, business and government on strategies that allow a student to graduate from high school and be academically prepared for a career, career training or college," Reider said. "Strategies like these are vital to the success of our community."

The Tree Foundation of Kern has also helped plant thousands of new trees and taught hundreds of people how to keep them healthy.

The number of blighted areas is decreasing thanks to a massive community cleanup effort and increased enforcement of city and county municipal codes, according to an update provided by the quality of life task force.

More importantly, the foundations have been laid for countless small projects as well as several massive long-term efforts on course to create an even nicer place to live by 2020.

"I think it was conceptualized at the perfect time because the economy in the Central Valley -- the development economy -- is very strong," city Economic Development Director Donna Kunz said. "The vision of the wants and the dreams could finally come to fruition that could never be conceived before."

The latest update on Greater Bakersfield Vision 2020 goals shows progress toward a revitalized downtown with a planned canal-side park surrounded by commercial businesses and true urban housing, an international airport terminal, cleaner **air** and a system of highways to meet community needs.

And all because a few thousand people decided to put in their two cents.

REVIEW

Just admire your mileage

It's a kick seeing what Honda's Civic Hybrid can do with a gallon of gas, but that's where the excitement ends.

By Steven Cole Smith, Orlando Sentinel

Printed in LA Times, August 24, 2005

I have yet to join the True Believers who insist that hybrid vehicles are, flaws and all, the answer to our problems of oil dependency, global warming, pollution and the heartbreak of psoriasis.

I like hybrids and admire what the manufacturers have done, both mechanically and with regard to their public spiritedness, because at this point none of them is making money from hybrids, regardless of what they tell their shareholders. No one has yet amortized the cost of developing such an innovative product.

As I spent a week in a 2005 Honda Civic Hybrid, I tried very hard to enjoy the experience, and ultimately I did.

Here's how: You know that with, say, a sports car, you get a certain amount of pleasure from the acceleration, the swoopy styling and the cornering?

In the Civic Hybrid - base price, \$20,950 - you get a certain amount of pleasure from looking at your running fuel-mileage total and seeing that you are getting 38.3 miles per gallon, which was my average over about 380 miles. This is considerably less than the Environmental Protection Agency ratings of 47 mpg in the city, 48 mpg on the highway, but still, 38.3 mpg is pretty good. Right? Right.

I don't think there was any way to get 48 mpg in the Civic, but I know I could have done better if I turned off the air conditioner, which, I understand, some True Believers are willing to do. In August, it might be a bit warmish, but anything to save a gallon.

Actually, I have been in contact with some hybrid owners who did not realize that when you pull up to a stop sign, and the engine stops, the air conditioning does too. The fan keeps blowing, and for maybe 30 seconds, the air is cool, but after that, it gets warmer. With the Civic, the "economy" setting on the air conditioning lets the engine shut down at a stop, but on the regular setting, it won't. The majority of my driving was done with the air on economy, and if it hadn't been, I would have averaged less than 38.3 mpg. But I would have been cooler.

Otherwise, the Civic was just not much fun to drive. Its electric-boosted power steering was notchy and annoying, and there was a remarkable amount of road noise from the tires.

The Civic, like all Honda hybrids, is a "partial" hybrid, meaning it won't move using its electric motor alone; the electric motor just helps Honda's little 93-horsepower engine accelerate, and therefore the engine uses less gasoline. With its 11.88-gallon fuel tank, you could expect a range of about 450 miles between fill-ups.

And with the CVT, or continuously variable transmission, which works like an automatic but doesn't have a set number of gears, acceleration wasn't bad.

Typical of Civics, it was built like a little tank. There is no scheduled tune-up until it reaches 110,000 miles, and I have little doubt that it would be trouble-free for a very long time.

Satisfying? Yes.

Fun? Sorry, not so much.