

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Wednesday, April 25, 2007:](#)

Clean air: long, tough valley battle

Valley air board should adopt proposed cleanup strategy and request to extend the federal compliance deadline to 2023.

The San Joaquin Valley's air should have been scrubbed clean yesterday. Tomorrow is too late. And two decades from now is outrageous. But, regrettably, that is the reality of our situation.

The valley's population growth, its geography that traps dirty air, and its polluting industries, including agriculture and oil, are big obstacles to cleaning up the air to meet state and federal standards.

Our families, friends and neighbors are getting sick and dying because the quality of our air falls below those standards.

Over the past three decades, we have seen one plan after another adopted and then fail to meet required cleanup deadlines. We have seen billions of dollars invested in equipment to make industrial plants less polluting and the air is still dirty. Such programs as vehicle inspection and fireplace burning bans have been inflicted on residents and they have fallen short.

Once again, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Board will consider adopting a new plan to rid the basin of smog.

When board members meet on Monday, they will be asked to approve the new cleanup strategy. They will also be asked to request the federal cleanup deadline be extended from 2013 to 2023.

The plan and extension requests are reasonable. They recognize the reality of the valley's situation.

Why promise compliance by 2013 when the technology and enforcement capability does not exist to meet that deadline? Why adopt another cleanup plan that doesn't work and once again disappoint?

Set a practical deadline. Embark on an achievable cleanup strategy. Encourage all of us to help make it work. Air cleanup advocates are howling over the proposed deadline extension. But the San Joaquin Valley district is not alone. Of the 15 air districts in California that are required to develop a plan for reducing smog, 11 will request an extension.

Here's what's at stake: The district must submit a compliance plan to the state Air Resources Board by June 15. The board will then forward it to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The plan must show how pollution reductions will be achieved and how deadlines will be met. The plan cannot be based on wishes and hopes. It must be based on rock-solid strategies and technology to achieve cleanup results. Those results cannot be realized in just five years. Maybe they can be in 16 years.

Failure to adopt an acceptable plan and meet federally mandated deadlines will result in penalties to the region, including the withholding of federal road money. The valley's air is dirty and harmful. It could be worse. While many of past plans fell short, they achieved a measure of success that has marched the valley forward to cleaner air.

A lot remains to be done:

- Valley residents must keep the pressure on San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials to impose the tough rules and follow their cleanup strategy. Don't disappoint again.
- Apply pressure on federal officials. Much of the valley's pollution comes from the cars and trucks that belch along on our roadways. The federal government has authority over these polluters.
- Quit whining. People talk about wanting clean air, but few are willing to make personal sacrifices to achieve it.

- Make the valley air board less beholden to parochial political concerns by adding members. State Sens. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, and Michael Machado, D-Linden, want to expand the board to include permanent seats for large cities, such as Bakersfield, as well as two governor-appointed air-related professionals, such as a respiratory doctor or an air-quality scientist. The Legislature and governor must agree to this change.

Draft Field Burning Rule to Exempt Most Local Orchards

All Citrus and All Orchards Under 20 Acres Can Still Burn

Valley Voice Newspaper, April 25, 2007

Tulare County- It only makes sense to try to burn orchard clippings, waste wood and ag greenwaste in a biomass power plant where it can cut 95 percent of the air pollution that goes up in our air when we do open field burning.

That was part of the vision when the state adopted Senator Dean Flores bill (SB 705) banning open field burning starting in 2005. The law allows the local air districts to begin specific prohibition dates based on category. Field crop burning was banned here in 2005 for example.

Now comes major milestone, the prohibition on burning of whole orchards in the valley to take place in June 2007.

In recent days the Valley Air Board released their plan and to the relief of some and chagrin of others, they postponed the rule on orchard burning for certain categories from June of this year until 2010 in one category and up to 2015 in others.

One local biomass operator told the Voice that most of the orchards burned in the valley each year won't be prohibited from doing so after June because of a proposed rule that would exempt orchards of 20 acres and under from the open field burning rule. "That's 75 percent of orchards out there," says a biomass plant operator.

George Heinen, supervisor of Rural Development of the Valley Air District says the delay of a burning ban on 20 acre orchards as well as a postponement for all citrus orchards will still remove more than half the pollutants that go up in the air from orchard field burning despite the fact that most "mom and pop" orchards of 20 acres or less will be exempted for now.

In 2005 the district saw just under 12,000 acres of orchards burned resulting in some 918 tons of Nox going up in the air. Postponing the 20 acre orchards and citrus orchards from a burning prohibition will mean the district will still cut more than half the emissions seen in 2005 by their own figures, saying that just 3795 acres out of the 11,769 orchards burned were 20 acres or less.

"We have some large farmers burning several hundred acres and it clearly skews the numbers," explains Heinen.

Postponing the ban on open burning for smaller orchards seems like a good idea to some.

"My family operates a small walnut orchard in Tulare County that is less than 20 acres in size. In the past it has been impossible to get an affordable bid to remove the orchard. Burning is the only viable option as opposed to spending \$4000 to \$6000 an acre for a chipper to come in and remove the trees. For a small operator, this is an impossible price. I am writing to support the exemption," says Dennis Tristao in a letter to the air district.

A few weeks ago the district was planning to postpone the ban on orchard burning under 20 acres until 2015. But with the district's new ozone plan they decided to move that up to 2010 for a reexamination, says Heinen.

Part of the equation is to provide incentives for the farmers to pay the price to have their orchard chipped instead of burning it. A few years ago a state plan paid biomass plants an extra subsidy to take wood waste from ag and burned in a controlled way benefiting our air. But that subsidy ended.

Now some biomass plants report they have limited fuel from farmers.

"We can't ban field burning without knowing the biomass plants are there to take the chipped orchards," explains Heinen, depending on an industry that seems to be on its last leg every time we look around.

One idea is to seek federal help for the biomass industry that will allow more of the orchards to be chipped helping to avoid the dilemma. A trip by local air officials and politicians to Washington will argue for help to help clean the air.

Regarding citrus orchards, Heinen says the postponement comes as the biomass industry itself appears to be divided on what orange wood they will take.

"They don't want the stumps," he notes, because it fouls their equipment apparently because of all the clay. So citrus orchards will be allowed to be torched until 2010 as well.

Also postponed until 2010 are nut tree prunings, grape vines and vineyards. The prohibition on burning rice straw is until 2015.

Officials delay decision on proposed ethanol plant

BY JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 25, 2007

Environmental concerns raised by a lawyer who helped freeze two Wal-Mart supercenters delayed county action on a proposed ethanol plant Tuesday.

The Kern County Board of Supervisors put off project consideration for two weeks after Fresno attorney Richard Harriman accused the county of failing to do a good job of evaluating the plant's environmental impacts.

The Cilion corporation of Goshen plans to build a plant, at Highway 99 and Famoso Road, that would produce 55 million gallons of high-grade corn alcohol -- known as ethanol -- each year.

Ethanol burns cleaner than petroleum and is used as an additive in fuels to reduce emissions.

Harriman, who is also attacking an identical Cilion plant in Keyes, according to *The Modesto Bee*, has demanded a full environmental study of the Kern County project on behalf of a group he identified as Valley Advocates.

Valley Advocates is also the name of a Fresno corporation organized under Harriman's name, according to California Secretary of State office records.

Cilion President Jeremy Wilhelm said his company has done everything it can to identify and address possible environmental concerns at the Bakersfield location.

"We've spent years on this project," Wilhelm said. "Everything has been considered from our standpoint."

Planning officials had recommended approving the 55 million gallon-a-year corn-powered plant on Tuesday.

Kern County planning commissioners approved the project and praised Cilion's plan to create a clean fuels industry in Kern County.

There had been no public opposition to the project, prior to Harriman's letter.

But in light of the letter, county Planning Director Ted James recommended that supervisors give his staff two weeks to investigate the accusations of environmental inadequacy.

Supervisors took his advice.

Harriman said his clients do not oppose the Cilion project in general but think more environmental study is needed.

Harriman's is a familiar name to Kern County planners. He gained notice in Bakersfield in 2003 after he helped launch a lawsuit that stalled two proposed Wal-Mart supercenters.

New Hope for Visalia Stop on High Speed Rail

Study Will Lay Out Options by June

Valley Voice Newspaper, April 25, 2007

Visalia - If California gets a high speed rail train that travels 220 mph up and down California, there is a chance now that the train will stop near Visalia. Tulare County leaders, led by the city, have been the squeaky wheel in the past two years as the state High Speed Rail Authority appeared to ignore hope the train would link to the highly populated east side of the central valley rather than take a route on the west side between Bakersfield and Fresno. That is the current "preferred route" the train is expected to take if voters approve funding for the project as soon as the fall of 2008.

"All our complaining appears to have paid off," admits assistant city manager Carol Cairns of Visalia. Cairns says an earlier study done by a consultant for the High Rail Authority didn't take into consideration growth in this part of the valley as it suggested not enough riders from the area would take the train that would link San Diego with the Bay Area.

But after some heavy lobbying last year the state budget included several hundred thousand dollars to fund an alternative study—called the Visalia study—to reassess ridership, look at route options and consider the best location for a station stop somewhere near Visalia. The existing alignment study has called for no station stop between Bakersfield and Fresno offering limited benefit or access to this area.

"We're happy to be working with local consultants this time who know the valley," says Cairns talking about subcontractors to URS Corp—Fresno based VRPA Technologies who are working on the study expected to be wound up by June.

"They've already begun to collect data" says Cairns noting there is a meeting April 23 for the study's technical advisory group at the Visalia Convention Center. "It looks to me like we could get a station next to the Visalia airport," suggests Cairns making the transportation hub of airport, highway and train a true "intermodal center."

Many people haven't noticed but the airport and UP train tracks can be accessed through a tunnel that runs under Highway 99.

Key to a station location will be what the consultant says about running the high speed train along the Highway 99 alignment or whether to use the BNSF rail alignment to Corcoran and laying out a new alignment north of there to link back up with the Highway 99 route somewhere south of Fresno.

Cairns expects several station stops and alignments will be offered as alternatives.

The study sets out the likelihood that the rail will link to Palmdale over the Tehachapis—expected to be a major international airport in the future.

The future of the high speed rail in California has been very much up in the air as the price tag appeared to climb and the state focuses on other needs that may take precedence Governor Schwarzenegger has said. He does not support a ballot measure to be put to voters next year.

But there is heavy lobbying to include funding this coming state budget year that begins in July.

Supporters say the state needs a high speed rail system because as the population grows existing rail capacity will be a capacity forcing more trucks on the highways. They suggest 68 million passengers will use the train reducing oil consumption in California by 5 million barrels a year. The rail boom will create 450,000 permanent jobs, they say.

The CHSRA recently announced a new study shows ridership and revenue forecast has been increased from 68 million passengers annually as estimated in 2000 to 86 to 117 million passengers in a new study prepared by Metropolitan Transportation Commission. The increased ridership increases the train's revenues between \$2.6 billion and \$3.9 billion.

One estimate suggests a ticket from SF to LA could cost \$70, less than airfare currently.

The train is expected to whisk passengers between major hubs in the state in minutes instead of hours including the route from Fresno to Sacramento in less than one hour and LA to SF in 2 and ½ hours.

Most observers of California believe it is a matter of time before we invest in a modern high speed rail system connecting urban areas. "Wherever it is built we will have a study on the shelf that points to the need and benefits of a station stop in Visalia," suggested Carol Cairns.

Coming meetings with local stakeholders over the next few months will offer feedback to the consultant on the options. This study will be forwarded to the Authority when they carry out the next step—a project level environmental review.

With the cost of the system currently estimated at \$40 billion, support for the rail system appears to be building with news in recent weeks that a French TVG train hit 357 mph on a new run from Germany to France. Tired of long commutes and concerns about congestion and air quality more people are jumping on the high speed rail bandwagon. But the train's high cost worries some who say Californians prefer to drive their own car rather than take public transit anyway. Meanwhile, Governor Schwarzenegger appears to be ready to cut the high speed budget this year rather than maintain it over the next year.

AHSRA meeting later this month in LA will highlight the connections between LAX and Palmdale in just 26 minutes. The trains would run off the electrical grid on special tracks running up to 100 trains a day. It is expected that only a few would stop in Visalia each day.

Located in the middle of the state, Mayor Jesus Gamboa has lobbied for a maintenance station that could be part of the statewide system here.

Efforts to get any kind of passenger rail service for Tulare County have fallen on deaf ears in recent decades with the latest failing effort to lobby Union Pacific Railroad to allow AMTRAK passenger trains on the UP line that runs along Highway 99.

Still local officials are hoping to build a light rail line plan to connect Tulare with Visalia and beyond and have earmarked \$30 million to buy up right-of-way to run the line in the future with funding from Measure R passed last year

Draft to reduce greenhouse gas emissions released

April 25, 2007, The Madera Tribune

SACRAMENTO - The California Air Resources Board has released a draft report on proposed early actions to mitigate greenhouse gases in California, consistent with the landmark Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 signed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on September 27, 2006.

"The impact of greenhouse gases on the world's climate is an urgent problem that calls for prompt action," said ARB Chairman Dr. Robert F. Sawyer. "Discrete early action measures will get that process started while we work on more comprehensive solutions."

The Act mandates that California's greenhouse gas emissions be reduced to 1990 levels by 2020, an ambitious 25 percent cut in emissions compared to business as usual. The Air Resources Board must adopt a comprehensive blueprint for achieving that goal by the end of 2008 and complete the necessary rulemaking to implement that plan by the end of 2011. In the meantime, the Act requires "discrete early action measures" to ensure steady progress in mitigating climate change. As narrowly defined in the law, the discrete early actions must be regulations, adopted and enforceable no later than Jan. 1, 2010. However, there are many other near-term actions underway at ARB that will contribute to the State's ultimate goal.

This early action report identifies three specific greenhouse gas control rules to be adopted and

enforced before Jan. 1, 2010, along with 36 other climate protecting measures the Board is initiating between now and 2011. The report divides early actions into three categories:

- Group 1 - GHG rules for immediate adoption and implementation
- Group 2 - Additional GHG measures underway between 2007-2009
- Group 3 - Air pollution controls with potential climate co-benefits

Three regulations are proposed to meet the narrow legal definition of "discrete early action GHG reduction measures:" a low-carbon fuel standard, reduction of refrigerant losses from motor vehicle air conditioning system maintenance, and increased methane capture from landfills.

A public workshop to discuss the draft report will be held in Sacramento on April 23. After gathering public comments, staff will develop a final staff report for presentation to ARB's Governing Board at its June 20-21, 2007 hearing.

For more information go to: <http://www.arb.ca.gov/cc/cc.htm> .

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The Air Resources Board is a department of the California Environmental Protection Agency. ARB's mission is to promote and protect public health, welfare, and ecological resources through effective reduction of air pollutants while recognizing and considering effects on the economy. The ARB oversees all air pollution control efforts in California to attain and maintain health based air quality standards.

EPA chief criticized for lagging on warming

He won't say if he'll act on justices' ruling

Richard Simon, Los Angeles Times

In the L.A. Times and S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, April 25, 2007

Washington -- The chief of the Environmental Protection Agency came under fire from congressional Democrats on Tuesday for failing to respond more aggressively to the Supreme Court ruling that greenhouse gas emissions can be federally regulated.

The exchanges, during an appearance by EPA administrator Stephen Johnson during a Senate hearing, spotlighted the expected clashes ahead between Democratic leaders who have made passage of global warming legislation a priority and an administration that has resisted mandatory limits on carbon emissions for fear they would damage the economy.

The hearing also showed that, despite the Supreme Court ruling, it may take congressional action -- rather than an initiative from the EPA -- to establish nationwide standards regulating carbon dioxide emissions.

Johnson would not say when or whether his agency would regulate carbon dioxide emissions.

"We will move expeditiously, but we will move responsibly," he told the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

The panel's Democrats, led by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., chided Johnson for lacking a sense of urgency in confronting global warming. "There is no excuse for delay," she said.

It was the first Capitol Hill hearing on the issue since the Supreme Court declared earlier this month that the EPA has authority under the Clean Air Act to regulate carbon dioxide emissions

that contribute to global warming. The White House had disputed that position, and the Democrats were clearly dismayed that, in their view, the administration was not more quickly altering its policy.

Johnson did say that he was moving forward on considering California's request to implement its own law requiring automakers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from new vehicles. He set May 22 for a public hearing in Washington and June 15 as the deadline for public comment on the state's request.

But he also declined to say whether he would approve the state's request, drawing criticism from one environmental group.

"Icebergs are moving faster than EPA," Karen Douglas, California Climate Initiative director of Environmental Defense, said in a statement.

As to whether the agency will move to regulate carbon emissions nationwide, Johnson said the EPA must first determine for itself whether greenhouse gas emissions endanger public health or welfare.

Sen. Joe Lieberman, independent-Conn., who is sponsoring legislation with Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., that would cap carbon emissions, predicted that Congress would act before the EPA.

Big turnout over oil refinery's expansion plan Residents split on issue that will add jobs and emissions

Jason B. Johnson, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, April 25, 2007

Local residents turned out in force Tuesday night at a Contra Costa County Planning Commission meeting, about half opposing and the other half supporting ConocoPhillips Co.'s plan to increase refining capacity and output at its Rodeo refinery by 30 percent.

Supporters said the refinery has been a good neighbor and welcomed the addition of new jobs while critics accused the company of having a checkered safety record.

Under its "Clean Fuels Expansion Project," the refinery would increase production by up to 1 million gallons per day -- 30 percent over current levels -- by upgrading and adding new equipment enabling it to process heavy gas oil (HGO), which is a by-product currently produced at the plant and exported.

The refinery is located just off Interstate 80 in Rodeo, an unincorporated town in Contra Costa County. ConocoPhillips officials asked the commission to approve its plans during the meeting in Martinez on Tuesday. But after 3 1/2 hours, the commission suspended the meeting and its decision until May 8.

The expansion includes construction of a hydrogen plant with a capacity of 120 million standard cubic feet per day, a hydrocracker with a capacity of 23,000 barrels per day, a sulfur recovery unit with a capacity of 200 tons per day, and a butane rail loading facility.

"Our project is going to increase California's supply of clean-burning gas and diesel by 1 million gallons per day," Mark Hughes, spokesman for ConocoPhillips, told commissioners, adding that the changes would not expand the "footprint" of the facility.

Hughes said the expansion would create hundreds of new jobs at the refinery.

Upgrades would also be made to units that blend and process fuel and to the refinery's sulfur recovery plant, and would increase sulfur storage capacity. Further upgrades would be made to pumps, heat exchangers, piping, instrumentation and utilities.

The new equipment would be constructed on approximately 9 acres west of I-80, within the refinery's 495-acre developed area. Critics say the expansion goes against the state's efforts to cut greenhouse gases and increases the risk of toxic contamination of residents in Crocket and Rodeo.

"We have no reason to believe they would keep their promises," said Carla Perez, a member of the watchdog group Communities for a Better Environment in Oakland.

The watchdog group claims the refinery already produces a "toxic soup" that forces its neighbors to live with recurrent odors, high levels of air pollution and increased health risks.

The group said higher production would increase the emission of sulfur oxides, nitrogen and other contaminants, and result in increased flaring -- burning off waste of flammable gas and liquids during unplanned over-pressuring of plant equipment.

It also questioned the quality of a county environmental impact report on the proposal.

"Low income people of color living near this refinery cannot continue to bear such a disproportionate burden in gas production. This is a serious environmental justice issue that the EIR has disturbingly minimized," CBE staff attorney Adrienne Bloch said in a statement.

But about half the crowd, including refinery workers who said they live in the area, said they support the refinery's plans.

Among the supporters was Michael Roth, superintendent of John Swett Unified School District, who said the refinery has been a good neighbor that supports local schools.

County officials said it's not clear that increased production at the refinery would result in more flares. And Randy Sawyer, director of the county hazardous materials program, said the refinery in recent years has had no major safety problems.

"For the last few years ConocoPhillips has been operating from a safety record standpoint very well. They've had some flaring incidents, but the (overall) safety record has been (good)," said Sawyer.

ConocoPhillips has the smallest output of any oil refinery in the county. It produces a little more than 100,000 barrels per day. Chevron's Richmond refinery produces more than 225,000 barrels per day, Shell and Tesoro in Martinez each produce about 160,000 barrels per day.

Virgin seeks to reduce its carbon emissions

Airline orders lighter jets from Boeing, plans to test a form of biofuel next year

David Armstrong, Chronicle Staff Writer

S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, April 25, 2007

Virgin Atlantic Airways' billionaire owner Richard Branson said Tuesday that his airline will experiment next year with biofuel in one of its jetliners in an attempt to learn how to reduce carbon emissions, and buy at least 15 Boeing 787 Dreamliners, a plane made from light composite materials that Boeing is touting for its fuel efficiency.

The biofuel experiment and big Dreamliner purchase are part of Virgin Atlantic's efforts to reduce contributions to global warming, according to Branson. Branson also owns 25 percent of Virgin America, a separate, startup carrier based in Burlingame that hopes to begin flying this summer.

In addition to buying Dreamliners, which Boeing says will burn 27 percent less fuel than other comparably sized twin-engine jets, and working to develop a biofuel alternative to jet fuel, Virgin Atlantic has conducted other experiments to reduce carbon emissions. The London airline recently tried having its planes towed to and from the runways at three large international airports.

One of the airports where the tests were held was San Francisco International Airport, where a Virgin Atlantic plane was taken around the taxiway in late March by what Virgin Atlantic Chief Executive Officer Steve Ridgeway described as a single-engine diesel tug. Ridgeway said in a telephone interview that Boeing and Virgin Atlantic engineers are studying the results of the tests at SFO and London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports to gauge the effect on aircraft and airports when the planes are towed rather than running on their own power.

"If you have this tug or tractor, rather than a plane using two, three or even four engines, you can reduce noise dramatically on the ground, and reduce emissions at and near the airport," Ridgeway said. "If it can be made to work, the whole industry can adopt it."

The desire to reduce emissions was behind the decision to order Dreamliners, Ridgeway and Branson said. Boeing will begin delivering the new plane next year. Virgin Atlantic has ordered the longer version, the Boeing 787-9, and expects to take possession of the first of its 15 Dreamliners in 2011, Ridgeway said.

Virgin Atlantic also took options on eight 787s and purchase rights for an additional 20 aircraft. Virgin's total package has a list price of \$8 billion, though big customers usually negotiate for lower prices. Virgin Atlantic's order is the largest by a European carrier, but Air Canada said Tuesday that it will buy 37 Dreamliners.

Boeing says the 787 will use less fuel, largely because it is made with composite plastics and metals and weighs less than standard aluminium-frame airplanes.

Also on Tuesday, Virgin Atlantic said it plans to burn a yet-undetermined formulation of biofuel in a jumbo Boeing 747-400 sometime in 2008 in a joint project with sister company Virgin Fuels and engine manufacturer GE Aviation.

"It will be a very long time before this type of fuel can replace commercial jet fuel," Ridgeway said, "but we have been trying to push the envelope a bit, to see if it could be possible. We are looking actively at a number of fuels. Perhaps we will use fuel on a blended basis. There is a whole load of work to do."

Standard jet fuel is essentially kerosene. Some scientists say emissions of carbon gases from jet fuel burned at the high altitudes used on long-haul flights are more harmful than they are at lower elevations.

"Virgin Atlantic is totally focused on delivering a cleaner airline in the air and on the ground, and our order today will significantly cut carbon emissions," said Branson, Virgin Atlantic's founder and chairman of its British parent company, Virgin Group. "The 787 Dreamliner symbolizes the environmentally kinder aircraft of the future -- cleaner, quieter, lighter."

The long-range midsize 787 has become a key weapon in Boeing's battle with Europe's Airbus, which plans to produce a long-range midsize aircraft called the A350. Airbus has banked much of its future on its superjumbo A380, which will be the largest commercial jetliner ever built when it goes into service next year. Introduction of the A380 has been delayed by costly and complex production elements, especially its electrical wiring.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., April 25, 2007:](#)

'Simply unacceptable'

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board is up to its old tricks again. On April 30, the board will meet to consider a proposal that would delay attaining clean air by 11 years.

Experts tell us that each year the Valley is in non-attainment costs the Valley \$1,000 a person (\$3.2 billion), 1,200 lives, asthma rates in children approaching 20%, some of the nation's highest death rates for asthma (Fresno County ranks third in the nation), and difficulty in encouraging new talent and industry to locate here.

Four of the nation's five most smog-polluted cities are in California, nearly all in the Valley. The cost to our economy and health care system appears enormous. I hope the public will demand that the board end these unacceptable costs. The public must insist that the board update its inventory of polluters, base policy on modeling that uses current information, prepare an appropriate environmental impact report for any changes in existing attainment goals, place clean-up responsibility on polluters and work diligently to clean our air as quickly as possible.

Under the new proposal, it is simply unacceptable that a child born today will not breathe clean air until high school graduation.

Brian and Rita Cohen, Fresno

[Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, April 25, 2007:](#)

Dairies are a treasure, not a nuisance

Your editorial on April 11 regarding the licensing of taco trucks makes some valid points. I am not taking issue with your arguments.

I do, however, regard your characterization of dairies as a nuisance as one of complete stupidity. Why not put one of the manufacturing plants, or one of the trucking companies, or even one of the restaurants in the county in the same category?

Any one of them could be called a nuisance because of potential pollution.

As a single entity, dairies produce and distribute more income than any other business in this state. The dollars they generate flow through our economy and are deposited in more areas than any other entity.

Please, don't call dairies a nuisance; call them a treasure to this county.

PAUL ATLAS, Tulare

[Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Wednesday, April 25, 2007](#)

Changes should bring relief on I-580 commute

ALAMEDA COUNTY'S drivers and residents can look forward to congestion relief along the Valley segment of the Interstate 580 corridor, with shovels in the ground for new lanes starting early next year.

Federal, state and local governments have committed more than \$450 million to three landmark projects for I-580 — new high-occupancy vehicle lanes eastbound and westbound, and a new interchange at Highway 84. All three projects received final funding, thanks to the passage of voter-approved Proposition 1B last fall. All qualified for the Corridor Mobility Improvement

Account of the bond, which funds highway improvements that address traffic congestion. All projects must be under construction by 2012.

I-580 is the major interregional gateway connecting the San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Valley to the rest of the state for goods movement. The I-580 corridor also connects affordable housing to well-paying jobs.

Traffic, primarily during ever-expanding morning and evening commute periods, exceeds the capacity of I-580 as currently designed. With the exception of the I-80 Bay Bridge approach, this segment of I-580 consistently rates as the most congested corridor in the entire nine-county region. There is no doubt in the minds of those who travel through this corridor regularly, or anyone who lives in the Valley, that the chronic highway congestion impacts traffic flow and safety on our city and county roads, as well as our air quality.

In its Transportation

2030 Plan, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission projects that traffic coming over the Altamont Pass will increase 90 percent by 2030. The Port of Oakland estimates that the number of containers it handles will increase three-fold during the same period. The Alameda County Congestion Management Agency estimates that approximately 40 percent of the traffic on I-580 in the Valley has neither an origin nor a destination in Alameda County. Regardless of where this traffic originates, and as troublesome as the congestion is today, it is only expected to worsen.

Later this month the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency will approve a comprehensive plan called the I-580 Tri-Valley Corridor Improvement Delivery Strategy. The plan sets a phased timetable for corridor upgrades, including the three projects covered by the California Transportation Commission's recent allocation of Proposition 1B funds. The plan also sets priorities for expanding the right of way for BART or other transit in the I-580 median and utilizes "smart transportation" technology to help cars and buses flow smoothly.

The comprehensive plan includes a number of elements, such as construction of auxiliary lanes, truck climbing lanes and rebuilding existing interchange structures including major improvements needed to improve traffic flow and safety at the I-580/I-680 interchange. Some of the later elements will be built as funding opportunities become available.

In terms of transit improvements, to prepare for any future opportunity for a BART extension to Livermore, the CMA has outlined in the strategy its plan to begin environmental clearance in the I-580 corridor to accommodate "transit" in the median. About \$100 million has been earmarked for this important element. It is hoped this will provide some incentive to BART leadership to refocus its attention on this extension. In response to concerns raised about the use of the median for the new HOV lanes, making it more difficult for future BART — if BART approved the extension today and the necessary funding was secured — the existing median width does not meet BART's specifications, and a new right of way on the outside lanes would be needed. While the new HOV lanes will infringe on a portion of existing median, it also provides utility of existing space for a much-needed additional lane of traffic in the near-term.

Given all of the various factors to consider in addressing congestion in the I-580 corridor, the CMA has outlined a prudent course of action for the future. We will continue to seek funding toward improving the crucial I-580/I-680 interchange as well as the other, unfunded elements outlined in the I-580 strategy. I am pleased that progress will be made to bring relief to I-580, and by extension, to the entire Tri-Valley.

Scott Haggerty is chairman of the Alameda County Congestion Management Board and represents the county on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. He also represents District 1 on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.