

Valley must change its ways or be smoggier version of L.A.

By Bill McEwen / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2007

Keith Bergthold had the floor last week at the Fresno County Board of Supervisors meeting, and he was on a roll.

The No. 2 guy in the city of Fresno's planning and development department was talking about seismic changes in the global economy and our place in it, cleaning the air, housing densities and creating a multicounty transportation loop to move people quickly and efficiently.

"Now is the time," Bergthold said. "We're the folks. If we don't use this opportunity, we'll lose it. Nobody else is going to help us.

"Everything about the future is going to be different than the past."

Bergthold gets it. If Fresno and neighboring counties in the San Joaquin Valley don't get their act together soon, our region will metastasize into a poorer, smoggier version of Los Angeles.

Others get it, too, and some of them are involved in the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint, which is attempting to plan land use and transportation in eight counties through 2050. Organizers made a presentation to Fresno County supervisors last week.

Among them: Fresno builder Kevin Castanos, who is co-chairman of the Metro Rural Loop committee with retired businessman James Hallowell. Said Castanos of the Valley Blueprint and the proposed loop, "This is the most important and most noble work of our careers."

The question is, whether elected officials will take the blueprint to heart, or keep approving projects willy-nilly, relying on campaign donations and the mantra of job creation as their guide.

Based on the reaction of the supervisors last week, it appears that some of them get it.

"When it comes to land use, the status quo is not an option," said Susan Anderson, adding that permanent protections for agricultural land must be enacted.

Henry Perea advocated for farmland preservation, too, and Judy Case -- who is also a member of the California Air Resources Board -- talked about slowing growth and getting serious about air-pollution cleanup: "We're starting to choke on our exhaust."

But Bob Waterston and Phil Larson sounded wedded to the past. Waterston, once again, raised the possibility of the county using retail development such as an outlet center along Interstate 5 to add sales tax revenue to its general fund. Larson talked more about fixing roads than about finding better ways of moving and housing people, preserving open space and reducing asthma rates.

The supervisors' attitudes reflect reality in the Valley. Some people haven't figured out that planning ahead saves money, makes life easier and supports economic success. Or that part of the reason the roads are bad and the potholes aren't filled is we let people build whatever they want wherever they want, thus strapping taxpayer resources.

Other people simply are frightened by change and believe that mass transit such as light rail will bankrupt us and that building up instead of out will destroy the Valley as we know it.

Then there are those who realize how much gas will cost in 20 years, how important agriculture is to the Valley's economy and how nice it would be to preserve green space while we grow.

If the ambitious Valley Blueprint is to become a working document, its promoters must use a two-pronged approach to win people over.

One picture should be of futuristic (and sensible) transportation corridors mixing rail, light-rail, freeways and bike paths connecting people to high-paying jobs, shopping and recreation from nearby population centers.

Other pictures should be of people stuck endlessly in traffic on pothole-riddled roads and freeways trying to get somewhere from rural ranchettes that may -- or may not -- have sufficient water. And of cities bumping into one another, subdivisions gobbling up what used to be prime farmland and people working for minimum wage.

While only a relative handful of people might recognize the value of good planning and modern transportation technologies, everyone hates a long, bumpy commute to a job that barely pays the rent.

Burning allowed again with close of fire season But CalFire requests residents play it safe by following the rules

By Bee Staff Reports

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, December 11, 2007

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection closed fire season in the Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit as of 8 a.m. Saturday. There were 1,920 acres burned in 647 fires involving vegetation, vehicles, structures and personal property that amounted to about \$7.156 million in damage.

The unit includes Calaveras and Tuolumne counties and eastern portions of San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties.

With the end of fire season, burning is permitted 24 hours a day, but only on Permissive Burn Days established by the Air Pollution Control District in each county. Before burning, check the burn day status in your area:

Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties, 877-429-2876

Calaveras County, 754-6600

Tuolumne County, 533-5598.

CalFire burn permits will not be required until May 1, but people who own five acres or more may need a permit from their local air pollution control district.

The department offers the following tips:

Never burn during high wind.

Limit burn piles to 4 feet in diameter.

Remove flammable material from within 10 feet of the outer edge of the pile.

A responsible person must be nearby with a shovel and water until the fire is out.

Burn only clean, dry vegetative material.

Do not burn household or commercial trash, tires, plastic or other garbage.

Avoid burning piles of pine needles, which smolder and often spread dense smoke over neighborhoods.

Keep a 30-foot defensible space and an additional 70-foot reduced fuel zone around all structures or to the property line, whichever is nearest. Dry leaves and pine needles do not have to be removed from the reduced fuel zone, but trees and brush must be thinned and pruned.

Detailed information about the new requirements can be obtained from CalFire stations or by searching online for "general guidelines for creating defensible space."

On the Net: www.fire.ca.gov <<http://www.fire.ca.gov>>.

Planners approve eateries for north Visalia

By Gerald Carroll

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2007

McDonald's and Starbucks will stake their respective claims on some north Visalia land after both restaurant sites were approved Monday night by the Visalia Planning Commission.

Commission member Vincent Salinas has one request, however.

People waiting to catch a bus 30 feet away from the proposed McDonald's should not have to breathe in all those fumes from customers waiting for their burgers in the fast-food restaurant's drive-through lane.

"I'm opposed to bus stops being located that close to drive-through windows," Salinas said. "People waiting for the bus have no choice but to breathe in the fumes."

That's why Salinas cast the dissenting vote in a 4-1 commission approval of the McDonald's plan. The Starbucks, part of a larger retail building in the same shopping center, was approved unanimously.

"Our [Starbucks] location is 200 feet from the nearest bus stop," said Michael Leberman of Costa Mesa-based Donahue Schriber, lead developer for both sites. "Hopefully, that will be safe."

Both businesses are slated to be built at the Orchard Walk community center anchored by a new Target department store on the northeast corner of North Dinuba Boulevard and Riggan Avenue.

Paul Scheibel, director of planning for the city, said no studies exist that show any correlation between people's health and their distance from vehicle fumes.

Planning commission member Terese Lane asked if bus stops could be moved to keep them farther away from drive-through pollution. "These bus stops are locked in by [the California Department of Transportation] and others," Scheibel said. "It would be easier to relocate the drive-through window."

In other actions, the planning commission:

- Voted unanimously to allow two office buildings totaling 6,088 square feet to be built on a pair of lots on the north side of Mineral King Avenue, about 360 feet from Chinowth Street.
- Voted unanimously to allow radio station KDUV to build a 9,300-square-foot office building on the east side of Fairway Street, about 150 feet south of Dorothea Avenue.

Gas fees may be coming to area

MTC, air board want motorists to pay at the pump to fight warming

By Erik N. Nelson, Staff Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, December 10, 2007

Surveys show Bay Area residents want to fight global warming. The question dogging transportation and air quality officials is, will they put their gas money where their mouths are?

Area transportation and air regulation officials are gingerly attempting to find out. This week the Bay Area Air Quality Management District board voted to investigate a fee of as much as 10 cents per gallon of gasoline purchased within nine Bay Area counties. Later this month, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission is scheduled to consider the same sort of fee.

"All that's happened is our board approved staff exploring the feasibility of a proposal that would go before the voters," said air district spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick. "We're a ways off, because all the work still needs to be done."

That Wednesday approval is the latest baby step in a process that began in the 1990s, when the state legislature gave the MTC the authority to place a gas tax on the ballot to support transportation projects.

The latest effort seeks to create a gasoline charge that would both support a cash-starved road maintenance program and transportation projects that would cut carbon dioxide emissions known to cause global warming.

But voter approval for such a tax has been unlikely, and the MTC has never exercised that authority, said commission spokesman Randy Rentschler.

The commission's polling shows that a majority of voters would support levying a charge on gasoline to improve public transit and implement other measures to fight global warming. However, a more general "tax," as defined by state law, would require a two-thirds vote to pass. Polls show support falling short of that threshold.

So what the two agencies are exploring is not a "tax," but a "fee," which state law defines as revenue earmarked for a particular type of expense.

And that makes sense, Rentschler argues, because the state's gasoline tax is really more of a fee.

"It's probably much closer to a bridge toll than it is to a general tax," he said, because gas tax revenue is limited, for the most part, to covering transportation costs.

But new taxes and fees are rarely crowd-pleasers, so officials will be hard-pressed to push either one through, said Larry Gerston, a San Jose State University political science professor.

Even if the state Legislature were to give the MTC the authority to put the fee on the ballot, voters might not support it if its purpose isn't well-focused, he said.

"On the one hand, you're fighting global warming," Gerston said, while on the other, "you're fixing roads to allow more cars to travel and further pollute."

Santa Clara County failed to persuade voters last year to pass a sales tax that would have supported public transit, principally the BART extension to San Jose, but also support health and human services programs.

"One looks like sugar coating to make the other thing easier to swallow," Gerston said, "and I think voters see through things like this pretty quickly."

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, Dec. 10, 2007:](#)

Bush shouldn't veto energy bill

The new standards would save 1.1 billion barrels of oil per day by 2020.

What looked like a historic breakthrough on fuel economy standards last week has become a desperate struggle by polluting industries and the Bush administration to stop California and other states from regulating greenhouse gas emissions.

In a statement issued late last week, the White House made it clear the president was unlikely to sign the energy bill with its tougher fuel economy rules. Among other objections, Bush administration officials complained that the House energy bill "leaves ambiguous the role of the Environmental Protection Agency in regulating fuel economy."

Ambiguity over EPA's role is probably not what bothers the White House.

The bill lacks a provision that would overturn a U.S. Supreme Court decision announced earlier this year affirming EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gases emitted from tailpipes. That decision freed 17 states, including California, to regulate auto pollution that contributes to global warming.

The White House was hoping the new energy bill would give car makers what they haven't been able to achieve in court: the ability to stop California and other states from regulating automobile greenhouse gas pollution.

A joint letter to the U.S. Senate issued Friday from some of the country's leading producers of greenhouse gases, including the American Gas Association, National Association of Manufacturers, National Mining Association, National Petrochemical and Refiners Association and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, is quite clear about the goal. It states that "the energy

legislation must contain explicit language clarifying that nothing in this bill can be construed as triggering the regulation of carbon dioxide or any other greenhouse gas under the Clean Air Act."

To stop states from regulating greenhouse gases, the White House and its allies in industry are willing to kill the energy bill and its fuel-efficiency improvements.

With gas at the pump going for well over \$3 a gallon, House leaders agreed to raise the average fuel-efficiency standards from 25 miles per gallon today to 35 mpg by 2020, the biggest boost in 32 years.

The new standard would save the country 1.1 billion barrels of oil per day by 2020. That's equivalent to half of the oil the United States imports from the Persian Gulf.

More fuel-efficient automobiles would save consumers an estimated \$22 billion by 2020. The legislation would prevent the release of more than 190 million metric tons of global warming pollution, the equivalent of taking 28 million cars and trucks off the road this year.

The White House and its industry allies would jettison these significant benefits. Congress must not let them.

While improved fuel economy is important for this nation, the need to slow global warming damaging the planet is vital as well. The White House has stubbornly refused to lead on this issue, so the states, with California at the forefront, have moved forward on their own.

Congress must not let the president stand in their way.

[N.Y. Times editorial, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2007:](#)

Mr. Johnson's Unused Authority

When President Bush plucked him from civil service obscurity in 2005 to run the Environmental Protection Agency, Stephen Johnson probably never imagined that he would someday find himself at the center of the policy struggle over global warming. But that is where he is now, courtesy of the Supreme Court's ruling in March that greenhouse gases could be regulated under the Clean Air Act, a law administered by the E.P.A. Unfortunately, Mr. Johnson and the agency have not done anything meaningful since.

Mr. Johnson is now being challenged again. Last week, five states, New York City and four environmental groups petitioned the E.P.A. to force the nation's airlines to reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. In early October, the same groups petitioned the agency to regulate emissions from large, ocean-going ships.

Aircraft account for 3 percent of total United States emissions of carbon dioxide and 12 percent of emissions from transportation sources, but they are growing rapidly. According to a recent report from a British royal commission, airplanes also generate ozone-forming pollutants and water vapor that together could triple the effect of aircraft-emitted carbon dioxide. The report's authors suggested various ways to curb emissions, including the use of lighter and more efficient aircraft and operational measures to cut distances and flying times.

This is Mr. Johnson's responsibility. The Supreme Court's ruling that the E.P.A. could regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases - a position that had been opposed by the White House - applied specifically to automobile emissions. But it clearly inferred that the agency had the power to regulate greenhouse gases from other sources, including power plants, ships and jets.

California and 13 other states are also pressing the E.P.A. to give them the authority they have been seeking since 2005 to impose their own restrictions on greenhouse gases from automobiles.

Mr. Johnson may see all of this as a burden. We would prefer that he see it as an opportunity to address the problem of climate change in a meaningful way. We urge him to move rapidly on all of these fronts.

Tri-Valley Herald Commentary, Tuesday, December 11, 2007:

Home-energy price hikes reveal crude truth

Offsets are often the equivalent of buying medieval indulgences to cleanse you of your environmental sins.

These eco-penances may allay your guilt somewhat if you have an energy-gluttonous lifestyle, yet do little in directly addressing the main problem: how to live a less resource-intensive life.

Although you may have no way to directly monitor this guilt intermediation, with green tags you can buy a third-party promise to purchase renewable energy and offset your carbon-dioxide emissions.

Say you fly or drive a lot. Then you go on the Internet and find a service that will sell you an offset. There are more than a dozen marketers of what the U.S. Energy Department calls "retail renewable energy certificates." You will pay from \$1 to \$20 per ton of carbon-dioxide emissions saved.

One appealing program called Native Energy, based in Charlotte, Vermont, allows you to directly contribute to renewable-power projects built on American Indian lands.

Offset costs

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe, for example, is getting help from Native Energy to build its 30-megawatt Owl Feather War Bonnet Wind Farm in St. Francis, S.D.

What's wrong with that? It looks like a noble project, but you may be avoiding the real issue: Most Americans generate 20 tons of carbon dioxide per year, compared with about 4.5 tons for the average resident of the planet.

While I have no problem endorsing clean energy, some of the best economic solutions to an ecological crisis should start in the home and are direct actions.

When Maren Engelmohr, a St. Louis architect, designed a new home, energy consumption was on her mind. She worked with Kirkwood, Miss-based green builder Matt Belcher to construct a 2,650-square-foot (246-square-meter) home that will not only provide a healthier indoor environment, it will cut utility bills for her family of four.

By installing a 94 percent efficient furnace and highly rated air conditioning, they expect to save 60 percent on energy compared with a conventional home. They also reduced building waste by constructing walls with structurally insulated panels instead of traditional stick building with frames.

Green savings

"We didn't pay much for the green features," Engelmohr says. "But we had a goal of doing green before we even picked the site."

You don't need to be building a new home to reap energy savings. Remodelers and renters can certainly lower their utility bills. Some of the changes can be simple.

- If you drive frequently, trade in your gas guzzler for a more fuel-efficient model. Don't pay a premium, though. You may get a better deal on a high-mileage car that's not a gas-electric hybrid.

- Local utilities and states are offering a raft of breaks for alternative and energy-efficient appliances. New Jersey, for example, gives rebates on photovoltaic technology, wind and fuel cells; Massachusetts reimburses homeowners for various energy-saving devices; Washington state has more than 50 utility rebate programs. For a complete list of incentives by state, see <http://www.dsireusa.org>.

- To see how much you can reduce your energy bill, it pays to do a carbon footprint of your lifestyle. Although there are several such calculators available, I recommend Nature Conservancy's.
- Pressed for time? Do a "Ten-Minute Energy Audit" at <http://www.americanhomeowners.org>.
- Leaky windows can account for as much as 25 percent of energy usage. If you are building new or remodeling, replace them with Energy Star-rated windows.
- Your home's biggest power or water users are spa tubs, refrigerators and washing machines. Buy Energy Star-rated appliances and look at their yellow tags to see how much money you can save. European countries have similar rating systems.
- Whether you rent or own, replace all incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents, which use almost 75 percent less electricity. Lighting alone accounts for a quarter of all household-energy use.

No matter how you do it, cutting resource consumption on a personal level will help you in the future. You won't be able to do anything about energy prices, but if you cut your utility bills, you will at least be able to weather the economic storm with more cash in your pocket.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the meeting in California between two mayors from the most polluted cities on the North American continent. Los Angeles and Mexico City mayors plan to hold a series of conferences about plans on how to regulate the pollution in the air. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Se reúnen hoy en California alcaldes de dos ciudades con mayor contaminación

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, December 10, 2007

Esta mañana se reúnen en California los alcaldes de dos de las ciudades con mayor contaminación del aire en el continente. Antonio Villaraigosa de Los Ángeles y Marcelo Ebrad, de la capital mexicana, el Distrito Federal.

El alcalde capitalino mexicano podría asistir a un acto en el que Villaraigosa inste en reunirse con unos tres mil 500 estudiantes para formar una próxima generación de dirigentes ambientalistas.

La visita de Ebrad se enmarca en una serie de conferencias de esta semana en Los Ángeles que incluyen a jóvenes ambientalistas, industriales que diseñen equipos anticontaminantes y planes de regulación de contaminación en la zona con el aire mas deteriorado en el país.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the meeting between Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles and Marcelo Ebrad of Mexico City; this after Southern California received a "D" for not doing enough to improve air quality for their residents. For more information, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

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By Carlos Quintanilla, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, December 10, 2007

El reporte anual de la Oficina de Gobiernos Asociados del Sur de California (SCAG, por sus siglas en ingles), le otorga a Los Ángeles y ciudades vecinas, una "D" de calificación por lo poco que hacen para mejorar la calidad de vida de sus residentes. Según el referido informe, en el Sur de California, es muy poco lo que se está haciendo en las áreas de vivienda asequible y calidad del aire. Secuela el estudio que el tráfico vehicular y la mala calidad del aire, siguen siendo un serio problemas para los residentes del Sur del estado. El citado reporte también indica que la deserción escolar aumenta, sin que haya alternativas de solución.