

District likely to ask for extension to meet standard

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Jan. 29, 2007

Valley air regulators will likely ask for a delay in meeting a federal air standard today.

That's when the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will release its latest draft plan for cleaning up ozone, the main ingredient in smog. The current deadline for reducing ozone to levels mandated by the federal government is 2013.

"We really have a problem here that no one else in the country has to face," said Brenda Turner, a spokeswoman for the district.

Ozone is created when nitrogen oxides -- emitted from vehicle tailpipes, factories and construction equipment -- react with sunlight. Increased ozone is known to aggravate lung disorders. Ozone tends to become trapped here because of the valley's shape, stagnant air and hot temperatures.

To make the 2013 deadline, the valley must cut emissions by nearly 70 percent. To do that, the last version of the cleanup plan, released by the district in October, estimated it would take 7.5 billion in taxpayer dollars to fund incentive programs.

Even if money weren't an issue, the district doesn't believe the technology is available yet to make the needed reductions by 2013, Turner said. That's why more time seems to be the only alternative.

Potentially, the deadline could be extended out by 10 years to 2023. Doing so would drop the price to fund incentive programs to about \$2 billion or less, air district officials have said. The state Air Resources Board decides whether to grant an extension.

Clean air advocates are expected to oppose any attempt to delay the deadline on grounds that the health impacts of ozone are too grave to postpone cleaner air.

If the San Joaquin Valley fails to meet the air standard, the federal government could withhold about \$2 billion in highway funding.

Program encourages clean burning, offers discounts

Michael Mooney
Modesto Bee, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007

Burn cleaner.

Why?

Because you'll help make breathing a bit easier for all of us who call the Northern San Joaquin Valley home.

And there's a cash consideration.

The folks at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will sweeten the pot with discounts of as much as \$800 to replace and/or upgrade wood-burning fireplaces and old wood-burning stoves.

"There are many old wood stoves in the valley that are emitting a lot of particulate matter," said Jaime Holt, public information administrator for the air district. "We want to assist valley residents in retiring those stoves and improve valley air quality."

"Replacing just 20 old, dirtier devices with new ones can reduce (particulate matter) emissions by one ton per year."

By replacing older, dirtier technology, residents can receive discounts of:

As much as \$800 for a propane fireplace insert

As much as \$500 on a natural gas fireplace insert or stove

As much as \$400 on an EPA-certified wood-burning or pellet-fueled stove or insert

\$25 on a gas-log fireplace set

The air district has joined forces with Operation Clean Air and the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Association on the "Burn Cleaner" program, which kicks off Thursday.

Representatives of the groups will have events in Modesto, Bakersfield and Fresno on Monday and Tuesday to explain the program. Each event will feature a stove-crushing demonstration.

In Modesto, an informational session will take place at 11 a.m. Monday at Modesto Junk Co., 1403-1425 Ninth St.

In Bakersfield, 10:30 a.m. Monday, Golden State Metals, 2000 Brundage Lane.

In Fresno, 10 a.m. Tuesday, Heppner Iron and Metal, 3489 S. Chestnut Ave.

To receive the discount, air district officials said, residents must work with a participating retailer to buy and install their new device.

The old stoves will be hauled away by the retailer and will go to a scrap metal recycler for destruction. None of the devices will go into landfills.

To participate in the Burn Cleaner program, download an application at www.valleyair.org beginning Thursday. Applications will be accepted through March 15 or until funds are depleted, whichever comes first.

Powered by food

Biodiesel is something of a green fad, but it may not cut the Valley's pollution.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee
Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007

Imagine seeing diesel trucks start up without a belch of black smoke. Now think of diesel truck exhaust that smells like egg rolls, doughnuts or french fries.

Those sights and aromas might become familiar if lawmakers bite on new legislation to encourage use of "clean-air" biodiesel - a diesel-engine fuel made from vegetable oils or animal fats and even waste oil from restaurants.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, introduced seven bills this month in hopes of making the fuel common. But before you start looking for a biodiesel pump at the filling station, there's one important question about biodiesel that hasn't been fully answered.

Will it make the air worse in the smoggy San Joaquin Valley?

Biodiesel drastically reduces the cancer-causing specks produced by petroleum diesel, and also sends out far fewer hydrocarbons - an ingredient in ozone, the corrosive gas in smog.

But a 2002 report from the Environmental Protection Agency said biodiesel, compared to petroleum-based diesel, slightly increased smog-making nitrogen oxides, or NOx. One of the Valley's biggest air-quality headaches is an abundance of nitrogen oxides.

"Strictly from an air quality viewpoint," said Don Hunsaker, plan development supervisor at the local air district, "if it increased NOx, it would not be good for us in the Valley. But we have to see what technology will do to address that issue."

There are few bigger air quality issues than nitrogen oxides in the Valley, which had the nation's second-highest total of federal smog violations last year. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District this year will assemble a smog cleanup plan that hinges on a massive reduction of the pollutant.

Florez said he is a believer in biodiesel, which he said he considers a worthy addition to clean-air alternatives - such as compressed natural gas, hybrid-engine technology, ethanol and eventually hydrogen.

His new bills would promote the production, sales and use of biodiesel with tax breaks and mandates. Florez's Senate Bill 70, which would establish California standards for biodiesel as a fuel, mentions a 20%

mix, known as B20. The fuel can be 100% biodiesel, or it can be a mixture of petroleum diesel and biodiesel.

Florez's bills would require school buses and state vehicles powered by diesel engines to use biodiesel fuel.

"We can eliminate the toxic particulates that our children are breathing," Florez said before he introduced the series of bills. "You get huge reductions of soot and particulates."

The nitrogen oxides issue, however, concerns both the EPA and the state Air Resources Board, which supervises California's air quality. Both remain open to the idea of using this fuel as scientists further investigate the issue.

The results of scientific inquiry have begun to come in. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo. - the U.S. Department of Energy's chief research unit - reported tests showing that engines running on biodiesel emitted less nitrogen oxides, compared to conventional diesel.

Emissions may depend on the engine, said Matt Haber, deputy director of EPA's regional air division in San Francisco.

An additive called Soltron reduces nitrogen oxides in biodiesel, said Richard Irwin, technical marketing representative for Silvas Oil Co. in Fresno. He said the additive helps his company market biodiesel in the Valley.

Silvas Oil sells biodiesel to federal agencies, such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Postal Service, which use the fuel in vehicles.

"We buy biodiesel from a company in Houston," he said. "Biodiesel sales are a small percentage of our business - single digits. But we see growth and interest in this fuel."

He and others said the cost of biodiesel is close to the price of diesel. The fuel also is considered a good lubricant for diesel engines. And, using biodiesel means importing fewer gallons of oil.

Commercial biodiesel production has increased - tripling from 2004 to 2005, according to federal figures - as the public becomes aware of the advantages. Biodiesel has become popular in states such as Illinois and Texas.

But biodiesel is produced in only a handful of California plants. The fuel is sold at about 30 retail pumps around the state, and none is in the Valley, according to biodiesel associations.

Meanwhile, in many backyards and garages, there are people making their own biodiesel.

Richard Robinson of Fresno has a twin brother, Robert, who makes biodiesel at his home in Sacramento. Robert also runs his 1980s diesel Chevrolet Suburban on vegetable oil or free waste oil from restaurants.

"He was going to Superb Burger and gets three buckets of waste oil every week," Richard Robinson said. "Probably the best smell was when he had oil used in making shrimp."

Hanford Ethanol Plant Gets Green Light

Valley Voice Newspaper, Jan. 29, 2007

Hanford - Officials from Great Valley Ethanol, LLC have announced their plan to construct a 60-million gallon per year ethanol plant in Hanford.

Great Valley Ethanol has secured a 110-acre site in the Kings Industrial Park south of downtown Hanford. The company is submitting its application this week for a Conditional Use Permit in the park, which is zoned for heavy industry. They will also recommend that the City of Hanford prepare a Full Environmental Impact Report on the plant in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

"We are excited and eager to move forward in Hanford," said Edward Settle, President/CEO of Great Valley Ethanol. "We have received a very warm reception and significant community support for locating the plant in Hanford. Our project will provide a clean-burning, homegrown biofuel for cars in the Central Valley, produce a high-quality feed for local dairy and cattle farmers, and generate substantial economic benefits to the community."

John Lehn, President/CEO of Kings County Economic Development Corporation, said, "We have been very impressed with the thoroughness and efficiency of Great Valley Ethanol and believe this project of state and national importance is a perfect fit for Kings County."

Increasing biofuels consumption to reduce California's dependence on petroleum and address global climate change is at the forefront of Governor Schwarzenegger's initiative. The Governor recognizes that production of biofuels in California is crucial. Further, President Bush announced in his January 23 State of the Union address the goal of replacing 35 billion gallons of gasoline consumption per year with alternative domestic fuels like ethanol.

The company has selected Delta-T Corp. of Williamsburg, Virginia for plant and process design engineering, and has signed a project development agreement with general contractor W.M. Lyles Co. of Fresno, California. "Our analysis determined that Delta-T is providing the most efficient and clean ethanol plant design for the California environment. One of our core values is to meet and exceed expectations for Air District criteria, water consumption and discharge, and other environmental considerations," said Brian Pellens, Vice President of Operations for Great Valley Ethanol. "In addition, with a successful ethanol plant under their belt and a 61-year history of construction leadership in the Central Valley, Lyles is the clear choice for construction."

Plant construction is anticipated to begin later this year and will take approximately 15 months to complete. When completed, the plant will process more than 20 million bushels of corn annually, produce 60 million gallons of fuel, and provide nutrient-rich feed for 200,000 head of cattle. Additionally, the plant will employ approximately 40 highly skilled full-time workers.

Great Valley Ethanol is majority-owned by Californians, predominantly residents in the Central Valley

North part of county set for explosive growth

By Garth Stapley

THE MODESTO BEE, Jan. 29, 2007

EDITOR'S NOTE: First in a two-part series.

A rural swath straddling two counties south of Turlock could be teeming with new homes and tens of thousands of people in the next couple of decades.

If plans materialize, unassuming, unincorporated Stevinson, Delhi and Hilmar, plus a new town proposed between the last two, collectively could produce about 50,000 more people.

That's like squeezing what would be Merced County's second-largest community, in terms of population, into a relatively compact, unincorporated patch of north Merced County.

Just over the county line, Turlock is eyeing a southward growth surge. Added to the others, the overall jump in population -- about 65,000 -- would be equivalent to a new Manteca.

Visionaries see the area producing one of the state's next cities. That would be Delhi, which has more than doubled in size since 1990 and whose leaders figure it to more than double again in 15 years.

Almost next door, developers want a new, unincorporated town to spring up around the Turlock Golf & Country Club. They plan to add nine holes to the 18-hole course, then build a village center ringed by homes on 1,600 acres.

Just down the road in Atwater, plans roll on for an eight-track, \$240 million raceway complex that would draw hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Three environmental groups, however, recently sued to block the project.

The potential for a significant growth wave came up last week in a Washington, D.C., lunch meeting between Rep. Dennis Cardoza and Turlock Mayor John Lazar, who attended a national mayor's conference. They're planning a sit-down with area stakeholders "to see how all this would work," Lazar said Friday on his cell phone, waiting to catch a flight home.

Logic suggests that not all those places would bust out at once, Lazar said, and sometimes plans are floated simply to gauge political acceptance.

"I've got to believe that economic times are not going to lend to rapid build-out," Lazar said.

But the very prospect of that many more cars, homes and people demands close attention, said Merced County Supervisor Deidre Kelsey, who represents most of the area in the potential growth explosion.

"We're going to have to approach growth in a very moderate, phased, well-planned method," Kelsey said, "or we're going to have pandemonium."

Holding back the tide for now is a lack of adequate asphalt.

Road, exit changes needed

California Department of Transportation officials a few days ago approved a preliminary report needed to widen Highway 99 to six lanes from the county line down through Delhi and Livingston. Next will come environmental studies, followed by construction in a few years, if officials can nail down a funding source.

Perhaps more important, Hilmar, Stevinson, southeast Turlock and the country club proposal are waiting for a future interchange, perhaps near the Enoch Christofferson rest stop at the county line. Exits in Turlock and Delhi can't handle all the growth envisioned for those areas.

With developer money and a federal grant, officials in both counties and Turlock are working on studies for the interchange, plus a Highway 165 bypass that would route big trucks around Hilmar. Construction probably won't start in the next eight years, officials say.

After that, watch out.

"Once we know where the interchange is going to be, a lot of things can happen," said Charlie Woods, Turlock's community development director. "The whole key is having a connection to 99."

Until then, Merced County planners will continue shaping a growth plan for Hilmar that would allow it to double in size to more than 10,000 people. Likewise, owners of land around the famed Stevinson Ranch golf course will bide their time, hoping someday to see nearly 19,000 people where now there are 400.

The country club builders would need approval from Merced County leaders to master-plan their new town.

Delhi remains the developers' best hope in the near future, though it, too, has speed bumps.

With 10,700 people, Delhi is by far Merced County's largest unincorporated community. It's bigger than the cities of Dos

Palos and Gustine combined. Delhi's newly approved growth plan would allow it to bulge to 25,000 people in 15 years.

Delhi embraced a new high school in 1998. Townspeople enjoy a modest retail district, though there is no bank, and most drive to Turlock or Merced for serious shopping trips.

Stores mean tax revenue

That would change in a big way with new shopping centers along Highway 99 designed to draw motorists from around the region. Those stores, planners say, could provide a tax base needed for Delhi to become a city.

"We need it," said Debbie Elkins, as she trimmed her front-yard bushes in an established neighborhood. She moved from Livingston to Delhi 23 years ago and tends bar within walking distance of her home.

"We need our own police department," Elkins continued, citing a primary motivator for many towns that have incorporated over the years. The Merced County Sheriff's Department staffs a satellite station in Delhi, but Elkins' impression is that "the response time is not that great."

Anna Adams, who lives in a newer subdivision, would be a happier shopper with nice stores at the Bradbury interchange, an oversized exit at Delhi's largely unbuilt north end. Otherwise, she enjoys Delhi's small-town atmosphere, she said.

"The community really gets involved," Adams said. "There is a good community feel here."

Mara Lara arrived only a couple of weeks ago, having fled Modesto's crime, she said. That's more important than Delhi becoming a city, she said.

The idea is anything but new.

Randy Beard said his uncle years ago sat on a committee investigating incorporation and remembers his disappointment when it didn't happen. Now, Beard is a member of the town's Municipal Advisory Council, a majority of whose members favor Delhi as a city.

"We're getting closer to having some people say, 'Hey, we need to pull the bowstring back, shoot again and see if we can hit the target,'" Beard said.

Any town wishing to incorporate must have majority support of its residents in an official vote. Delhi hasn't tried that.

Neither has Salida, though its advisory council has looked into the idea for several decades and recently produced a well-researched report. With about 14,000 people, Salida is the largest unincorporated town in Stanislaus County and dreams for future regional shopping centers fronting Highway 99 -- similar to Delhi's -- keep alive city talk.

Dennis Cote, a member of Delhi's advisory council, noted that Delhi is "bigger than a lot of incorporated cities. And we really can't expect the county to deliver the kind of personal service people are looking for."

The advisory council studies and debates and recommends, but has no real control over Delhi's destiny. That power rests with the Merced County Board of Supervisors, whose five members have only one -- Kelsey -- representing the town.

A 3-2 majority last month sold out Delhi, Kelsey said, with a vote favoring the Riverside Motorsports Park. Planners went behind her back, she said, to justify a traffic route to the complex from interchanges in and near Delhi.

"I'm fairly well disgusted," Kelsey said. "We just spent five years and more than a million dollars on the Delhi Community Plan. Then the county waltzes in and throws this out without letting me know about it.

"Why do we create these (growth plan) committees, tell them we're going to work with them, then shaft them?" Kelsey continued. "I am not a happy camper. I hate to be a scold, but something has to change. We're going to get San Jose gridlock if we don't think a little smarter."

Sewage expansion

Supervisors supporting the raceway say it presents a golden opportunity to give Merced County a much-needed economic shot in the arm.

Delhi's advisory council members, meanwhile, are preoccupied with a more immediate problem: sewage. Or more correctly, how to get rid of it. They're waiting for the independent Delhi County Water District, which provides the town's water and sewage services, to expand its sewage plant before more homes or stores can be built.

Most eager to get moving is a group of a half-dozen home builders. Delhi's limitations can be overcome, they believe, more quickly than those facing Hilmar, Stevinson and south Turlock.

Trevor Smith helped Matthews Homes build a subdivision in Delhi, then joined another builder, Mill Creek Land Co. of Stockton, to help it get a foothold here.

"That's how much I believe in Delhi," Smith said.

The consortium of builders will help pay for traffic studies and finance reports laying out costs of future streets and utilities "to keep the ball rolling," Smith said. And, they'll build oversized roads and lay water and sewer lines to accommodate future stores, he said.

Retailers will follow homes

Some growing communities require a certain amount of commercial and industrial development as a condition of approving more homes, to keep from becoming too much of a bedroom community, which

Delhi already is. Homes cost the government more in police, park and other services than their property taxes provide.

But Delhi movers and shakers are resigned to first welcoming more houses, whose developers -- they hope -- will provide the infrastructure needed to lure retailers.

"Commercial interests will follow in our footsteps, once they see our rooftops," assured Chris Hawke of Pleasanton-based Mission Valley Properties, one of the consortium members.

Richard Jantz, recently retired deputy chief executive of Stanislaus County, is chairman of Delhi's Municipal Advisory Council. He is convinced that its growth plan shows enough retail potential for incorporation -- if the town can offer utility-ready building sites at the right price.

Jantz envisions a day when Delhi, Hilmar, Stevinson, Turlock and the two counties collaborate on all aspects of future development.

"North county is poised for a tremendous amount of growth," Jantz said. "It can be done in a smart, regional way, or we can compete with one another and produce winners and losers."

Citizens choose among values for the future

By Charles Doud-Editor & Publisher - The Madera Tribune
Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

Maderans punched buttons this week to weigh in about how they think life in the San Joaquin Valley should be in 50 years.

The occasion was a "visioning" meeting at Madera Municipal Golf Course, in which participants were asked to choose from among various lifestyle values, such as "healthy environment" and "vibrant economy."

The meeting was part of the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process, which is meant to create a master plan for traffic and land use through 2050.

The City of Madera went through a similar process last year, focusing on the city through the year 2025. Information from that exercise will be used in updating the master plan and already is being used as a checkpoint for any new ordinance that is passed.

Wednesday night's meeting used devices like television remote controls to allow people to punch buttons and instantly record their opinions on how much importance they placed on various values.

For the more than 30 people at the meeting, two values stood out as the most important - a healthy environment and public safety.

Participants said improving air quality and having enough water for both agriculture and a growing population were values they would put above all others.

Public safety also was important, many said, because if people didn't feel safe in their homes and businesses, and on the street, they would be disinclined to stay in the area.

Other values high on the list were education, improved roads, a vibrant economy and aesthetic quality.

Georgina Vivian, a traffic consultant with VRPA Technologies, which is directing the planning process at this level, said the plan ultimately would encompass San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kings and Kern counties.

She said the values choices made in Madera weren't necessarily the same that would be made in other counties, or even in other cities of Madera County. Planning sessions also were held in Oakhurst and Chowchilla.

But she said planning would be vital, nevertheless.

"Right now, we have about 3.3 million people in the Valley," she said. "By the year 2040, we will have 7 million, and by 2050 at least 8 million and probably more."

She said traffic counts in the southern four counties had increased 577 percent in the past 20 years.

She predicted Madera County would have 410,517 people by 2050 if present growth projections are realized. The county's present population is estimated to be about 155,000.

Information from the visioning meetings will be collected, compiled and eventually turned over to the various counties' councils of government, which in turn would work on the master plan.

Lathrop Super Target put on hold

Residents ask for further environmental studies

By Cheryl Winkelman, STAFF WRITER
Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, Jan. 29, 2007

LATHROP - Plans for a Super Target are on hold indefinitely, after two residents blocked the shopping mecca and questioned its impact on the city.

Changes to the store, which is proposed for an area near the intersection of Interstate 5 and Louise Avenue, were to go before the city's Planning Commission on Jan. 10. Developers wanted to merge a 127,000-square-foot store and 55,000-square-foot grocery store into a 178,000-square-foot super store.

But Lathrop residents Diane Sutton and Catherine Bobeck, through a hand-delivered letter to the Planning Commission, requested that further environmental studies be done to determine the superstore's effects on "traffic and circulation, land use planning and air quality." (Environmental studies and a traffic analysis were done on the initial project.)

In addition, the letter - from San-Francisco based attorney Mark Wolfe - stated, "a recent court decision affirms that Superstore uses carry the unique potential to bring about urban decay ..." The 2004 court case cited numerous closures of conventional supermarkets after the arrival of Wal-Mart Supercenters, which Wolfe related to Target Superstores.

The developers behind the Super Target, Watt McKee LLC, immediately withdrew their site plan changes, and Planning Commission Chairman Bennie Gatto said he wasn't sure what they would chose to do in the future.

"Personally, myself, I don't see athing wrong with (Super Target). We need business in Lathrop," he said. "We need the tax base."

Gatto said Sutton and Bobek were employees of Save Mart Supermarkets. A spokeswoman from the company's Modesto office would not confirm that, and said the company was not behind the women's attempt to block Super Target.

There is a Target in nearby Tracy and Manteca. Lowanda West-Brown and Jeannette Bulman, both Lathrop residents, said they didn't mind the drive and were opposed to a Lathrop Super Target.

West-Brown, 46, said, "I'm personally concerned about the agricultural loss to the state. They're constantly building."

Bulman, 44, said, "I would rather keep what we have. I just think it would hurt the businesses that are here already."

The Super Target is to be part of the 27-acre Lathrop Marketplace, an almost 300,000-square-foot shopping center.

Bobek, Sutton and Watt McKee could not be reached for comment.

Jesse James to pay fine for violating air quality law

The Associated Press

In the San Diego Union Tribune and Washington Post, Saturday, Jan. 27, and Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007

"Monster Garage" reality show host Jesse James has agreed to pay \$271,250 for violating California's air quality laws by selling motorcycles that did not meet the state's strict emissions standards, authorities said Friday.

His Long Beach motorcycle building shop, West Coast Choppers, sold more than 50 new or custom-built motorcycles between 1998 and 2005 that were not certified by the Air Resources Board, the agency said in a statement.

As part of a settlement, the shop is building motorcycles that comply with emission standards, the board said.

In a statement released Saturday, James said he offered to make all of his "non-compliant" motorcycles meet federal standards, but the state agency only was "interested in the cash settlement."

"We hope that paying this money will bring to light that California has a flawed system when it comes to its clean air agencies and the policies and practices they use," James said.

James is married to actress Sandra Bullock. His Discovery Channel series about customized vehicles aired for five seasons.

Monster fine for 'Monster Garage'

Show creator Jesse James is dinged nearly \$300,000 for smog violations.

By Andrew Blankstein, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

With creations like the "Undertaker" and "666 El Diablo," Jesse James and his West Coast Choppers team have become TV stars and automotive icons by turning average motorcycles into pimped-up machines.

But California air regulators announced Friday a \$271,250 fine against James, the co-producer and host of "Monster Garage" and "Motorcycle Mania," saying that 50 of his custom-built choppers ran afoul of California's clean-air rules.

California Air Resources Board officials said their inspectors found that the monster bikes sold between 1998 and 2005 did not have state certified emissions equipment on their exhaust and fuel systems.

As a result, bikes were spewing hydrocarbons at up to 10 times the state limits, said Paul Jacobs, chief of the board's Mobile Sources Enforcement branch.

The market for custom-built motorcycles has taken off in recent years as celebrities, athletes and other gilded age luminaries plunk down \$50,000 - and far more - for signature rides.

James, who is married to actress Sandra Bullock, could not be reached for comment. Nobody who answered the phone at his Long Beach-based West Coast Choppers would discuss the state action.

Regulators said James' celebrity status was not the reason he was targeted. Souping up motorcycles has become a huge industry, and the state has cited, sued or settled air pollution cases with more than 20 motorcycle customizers, Jacobs said.

In addition, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has fined other auto customizers - including the similarly named but unrelated West Coast Customs, which was then affiliated with the MTV show "Pimp My Ride" - for allegedly replacing steering wheel air bags with TV monitors.

Despite James' maverick image, his hamburger joint next to the bike shop is promoted as environmentally friendly, including using solar energy.

Cisco Burgers' website says: "We use biodegradable paper products, natural, no preservative meats, organic dairy and produce."

Budget slows speedy trains

Governor's spending plan guts funding for Valley rail project.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau
Fresno Bee, Monday, Jan. 29, 2007

SACRAMENTO - The state's perpetually delayed high-speed rail project faces yet another funding setback. And this one could be fatal, dashing the dreams of bullet-train enthusiasts, including many in the Valley.

Gov. Schwarzenegger, in his 2007-08 budget, proposes slashing funding for the High Speed Rail Authority from \$14 million to \$1.2 million, leaving the group with enough just to keep its doors open.

"There's really no public purpose for me and my staff to be in office unless you want to move forward with the project," said Mehdi Morshed, the authority's executive director, who wants the governor and lawmakers to approve \$103 million for the project next year. "If you don't want to move forward with the project, then close it down and save yourself some money."

With his focus on road building, the governor also wants the Legislature to indefinitely delay a \$9.95 billion rail bond slated for the 2008 ballot. That would clear the way for \$29 billion in bonds the governor wants to put on the ballot to pay for courthouses, schools and dams - the second phase of his "strategic growth plan" that will spend billions on roads but nothing on high-speed rail.

"In our plan that we put together, it didn't fit in," Schwarzenegger said in an interview last week. "It doesn't mean that it is not going to fit in in the future."

The electric-powered railroad would be similar to the bullet trains prevalent in Europe and other parts of the world. Trains traveling up to 220 mph would speed the length of the state, zooming through the Central Valley with stops in Bakersfield, Fresno, Merced, Modesto, Stockton and Sacramento. An express trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles would take just less than 2 1/2 hours.

Construction costs are estimated to approach \$40 billion. But Morshed said the longer the state waits, the more expensive it will get.

Tracks dedicated to the system for the most part would be built next to existing tracks. More than 1,000 grade crossings - where the railroad goes under or over roads - are needed.

In order to build the crossings, the authority needs to secure rights of way. But that gets harder and more expensive each passing year, especially in high-growth areas like the Valley, where land is getting sucked up for other uses, Morshed said.

Next year, he said, \$40 million is needed to start buying rights of way and \$63 million for planning and engineering.

Though its future is in doubt, the authority is pushing forward. At a scheduled board meeting today, members will consider entering into three contracts for engineering work, including for the Fresno-to-Palmdale and Fresno-to-Sacramento routes.

Established in 1996, the authority has spent about \$30 million so far to plan the route and do environmental reviews, Morshed said. The authority's budget has \$702,000 for salaries and benefits this year. Three full-time employees and one part-timer are on staff, with plans to hire three more full-time staff members in the next month.

All that money would essentially be wasted if the project were halted, Morshed said.

"Basically you get up to speed, [then] they tell you to stop," he said.

To date, the Legislature has shown little zeal for the project.

Rail bond ballot measures have been delayed twice, in 2004 and 2006. Assembly Speaker Fabián Núñez, D-Los Angeles, said he would be hesitant to push for another delay.

"I did say to folks that are very committed to the high-speed rail that I would work with them to see to it that we put it on the 2008 ballot," he told reporters recently. "I think that it's the right thing to do."

But rail is hardly at the top of lawmakers' lists, with prison expansion and the governor's sweeping health care proposal dominating this year's agenda.

High-speed rail lacks the "very powerful old lobby" of developers, carmakers and airlines that have driven the infrastructure debate, said state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, a rail supporter whose mother, Fran Florez, sits on the nine-member rail authority board.

"Because people haven't seen [high-speed rail], touched it or ridden on it, most people, at least in the Legislature, they don't think it can be done," Florez said.

For the Valley - which struggles to lure air service - high-speed rail would mean more transportation options, as well as job-creation opportunities from maintenance facilities.

But Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, who led the charge for rail while in the Legislature, said there is a misconception that the project would only benefit the Valley.

"This is far bigger than simply being a Valley train," he said. "This is a statewide, 700-mile system that would benefit over 80% of the state's population."

Consumer appetite could be growing. Intercity rail ridership, operated by Amtrak, has jumped from 2.3 million in 1994-95 to 4.4 million in 2004-05, according to a report released Friday by the Legislative Analyst's Office.

Californians might not be as car-crazy as they are made out to be. As the report notes, residents here drive fewer miles than the average American.

High-speed rail, Costa said, would get cars off the road, improve air quality and create hundreds of good-paying jobs. Schwarzenegger, who has put forth a bold agenda, is missing an opportunity by not including rail, Costa said.

"This project truly matches the dreams and inspiration that the governor has expressed," he said. "And more importantly, it fits with his concerns on climate warming, it fits with his efforts to provide energy conservation, it fits with his desire to have California as a leader in all of these areas."

The governor, though, has more immediate concerns.

"I feel that our roads are in such horrible shape - the worst in the nation," he said. "We needed to fix the roads, we needed to expand the roads, we need to add lanes to our highways and freeways." High-speed rail, he said, "was not the most important thing at this point."

How the governor's alternative fuels plan could cut carbon

UC Davis expert offers up ideas on how the state could carry out Schwarzenegger greenhouse gas order

David R. Baker, Chronicle Staff Writer
S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

California's attack on global warming focuses directly on your gas tank.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last week signed an executive order to cut the "carbon intensity" of transportation fuel sold in California. Most scientists blame carbon dioxide for the world's rising temperature, and much of that greenhouse gas comes from cars and trucks burning gasoline and diesel fuel. Schwarzenegger's order would reduce the carbon intensity of the state's fuel supply by 10 percent by 2020.

But how do you actually cut carbon? And who has to do the cutting? Oil refineries? The corner gas station?

The governor has offered hints. Gasoline refineries, for example, could blend more biofuels into their gasoline, because biofuels are produced from plants that remove carbon dioxide from the air. The resulting blend would therefore be less "carbon intensive" than regular gas. And fuel providers that couldn't meet the standard would be able to buy credits from other companies that could.

Many of the key details, however, haven't been hammered out.

Enter Daniel Sperling, director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at UC Davis. Sperling co-chairs the committee that will draft ways to implement Schwarzenegger's order.

The committee has until April to deliver its recommendations to the California Air Resources Board, which will then conduct a public review of the proposed rules. The rules will be phased in, starting no later than 2010.

The Chronicle spoke with Sperling about the task ahead. The following has been edited for grammar and clarity.

Q: Who has to comply with this? Gasoline refiners? Gas stations?

A: That's to be determined. The principle is you want to keep it a manageable number. So doing it at fuel stations is way too many. It will probably be applied to refiners, maybe some of the major distributors, too.

Q: Does this rule mean that every gallon of gasoline sold in the state has to, somehow, produce less carbon dioxide than before? Or can it be an average of everything a refiner sells?

A: Every unit of transportation energy sold would have fewer greenhouse gases associated with it.

The gasoline might not have less carbon, although hopefully it would. The refiners could be selling other fuels with less carbon, or buying credits. Internally, they could make their refineries a little more efficient. They could use lower-carbon sources of energy (to run the refinery), like burning biomass material.

They could blend lower-carbon fuels in with their gasoline, like ethanol. There might be other additives they could use. There could be other types of biofuels. They could become major hydrogen suppliers, and they could average that into their fuel mix.

Q: How will this requirement be enforced? How do you make sure the refiners or other companies involved follow these rules?

A: No one's talked about that yet. One would assume they would be expected to provide documentation, and they would be audited.

Q: So what does this mean for drivers? Will we all have to switch to cars that can burn higher concentrations of ethanol? Will we need hydrogen cars?

A: I think there will be a more diverse supply of fuels available. And it may be in some regions there would be more electric vehicles; in others, more hydrogen. In the (Central) Valley we may have more biofuels. It's providing flexibility to industry to figure out how to do it the most efficient way, the least costly way.

Q: One of the reasons California's gasoline prices are higher than the national average is that we have our own, clean-burning blend of gasoline that no one else uses. Could we face a similar situation with these new rules? Will we create another requirement that, in the end, drives up fuel prices?

A: One could say, in the long term, that prices actually should be restrained or even lower, because there will be more fuel choices, more competition. Getting there I don't think will have a big effect, one, because this will be introduced gradually, two, because you'll have a market system -- the trading, the buying and selling of credits.

Q: Do you think this system will be copied elsewhere?

A: Yes. It's a very sound approach because it provides a framework for managing the transition to alternative fuels. It doesn't require government money. Even the oil companies are sympathetic to it because it offers them some kind of structure, some kind of certainty. They're operating in a very wild environment right now. I think they realize they need to do something about greenhouse gases, and this provides them some kind of flexibility.

Lawmakers Mulling Biofuels Legislation

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS, Associated Press Writer

In the N.Y. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Monday, Jan. 29, 2007

Spokane, Wash. (AP) -- Plenty of farmers and others in Washington state love the idea of growing crops to make clean-burning vehicle fuels to cut pollution and the nation's reliance on foreign oil.

The trick is to make producing "biodiesel" profitable. Now, the state Legislature is considering a bill that would provide incentives to increase the production and use of alternative fuel in the state.

"The issue is resonating well with legislators," said Clifford Traisman, a lobbyist for the Washington Environmental Council and other groups pushing the measure.

The incentives would go to farmers to grow crops like canola, and to various government entities to replace or retrofit big polluters like school buses.

Biodiesel is a clean-burning alternative fuel made from oils derived from farm crops, and can be used in any conventional diesel engine. It is used in pure form or blended with regular diesel.

Besides fighting global warming, biofuel could provide an economic boost to farmers if the new crops can be sold for high prices, Traisman said. He said the "clean air, clean fuels" bill has 36 sponsors in the House.

The bill proposes spending \$20 million on a variety of incentives. A key provision is \$5 million for local governments to replace 700 aging diesel school buses with newer models. It also provides money to retrofit other buses so they run more cleanly.

The bill would encourage the creation of biofuels production plants.

A Seattle company called Imperium Renewables Inc. is already building an enormous biodiesel plant between Aberdeen and Hoquiam. Another plant is under consideration in Ellensburg by a company called Central Washington Biodiesel. Seattle Biodiesel already operates the Northwest's first commercial refinery.

The measure would allow the state to contract with fuel producers to purchase their product for the state motor fleet and allow public utilities to produce and distribute biofuels created from Washington state products.

The bill would also require the state to reduce its fossil fuel use by 25 percent below 2006 levels by the year 2020.

Under the measure, the state would use \$500,000 to help create ethanol fueling stations along the Interstate 5 and Interstate 90 corridors. Another \$6.75 million would go to Washington State University's energy program to qualify for federal matching dollars for research.

Major users of biodiesel in Washington could be state ferries, transit buses, school buses and many farm vehicles. A measure being considered in the state Senate would exempt biodiesel fuel used for non-highway farm use from sales and use taxes.

The bills are intended to complement previous state law calling for 2 percent of the motor fuel sold in Washington to be from renewable sources, said Tom Geiger, a spokesman for the environmental council.

There are some concerns, however.

Some farmers worry they will not make any money if they undertake the expense of converting to production of canola. Processing plants have also been slow to break ground.

Glen Squires, vice president of the Washington Wheat Commission, said many of the state's 2.2 million acres of wheat fields are not suitable for canola. Farmers are also wary because they cannot get insurance for growing canola and fear being left holding a crop they cannot sell, he said.

"Wheat they have a market for," Squires said.

Still, the bill received plenty of support from various interest groups at a hearing Wednesday of the state House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee in Olympia.

Fred Fleming, a fourth generation wheat farmer from Reardan, is involved in efforts to boost the production of biodiesel. He said the biofuels industry offers huge potential for farmers to diversify.

"For a change in agriculture, the future is finally starting to look bright," Fleming said.

Another Spare the Air advisory for Sunday evening

Bay City News
S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007

Bay Area residents are being asked to refrain from driving and lighting wood-burning fires again this evening in an effort to reduce particulate pollution in the air, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District reported.

Tonight's Spare the Air advisory is the 26th this season.

The warnings are necessary because cooler weather and low wind speeds cause harmful particulate matter pollution to become trapped down low where people are breathing.

During cold winter evenings, the earth cools the air close to the ground, leaving warmer air up above, which creates an inversion layer. When this phenomenon is combined with low wind speeds, pollution can build up quickly and serious problems for people, especially sensitive populations such as young children, the elderly and people with respiratory or cardiovascular disease.

The recent increase in air pollution advisories is due to a tightening of federal regulations concerning air quality, which have effectively cut the recommended particulate threshold in half.

There is no free transit component to the Spare the Air campaign.

Spare the Air warning for Sunday

By Scott Marshall
Contra Costa Times, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007

Another Spare the Air Tonight advisory has been issued for Sunday night by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, which is asking that residents not burn wood and limit driving.

This is the 26th advisory of the winter season.

Cool weather can cause a building of particulates from wood smoke and vehicle emissions. When the earth cools air close to the ground on winter nights, that creates an inversion layer of warm air above.

With little wind, the particulates are trapped beneath the warmer air layer and particulate levels can become unhealthy. The ultra-fine particle pollution is linked to asthma, bronchitis, and other lung and heart ailments.

No free transit is available during the winter Spare the Air Tonight season.

For information, visit www.sparetheair.org.

Spare the Air set for this evening

Diana Walsh
S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007

Air quality officials are asking Bay Area residents to avoid burning wood and driving their cars tonight because air quality is expected to reach unhealthy levels.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District called a "spare the air" day -- the 26th of the season -- in an effort to reduce the particulate matter in the air.

The season began on November 20 and is expected to end in mid-February. Karen Schkolnick, spokesperson for the agency, said federal air quality standards were tightened this year, but even adjusting for the higher standards, pollution levels appear to be running on the high side.

"It's fair to say we seem to be on the high end of the spectrum," said Karen Schkolnick, spokesperson for the agency.

Schkolnick said the drier than normal winter has caused a build up in particulate matter in the air.

"When it rains you have wind and storms mix up the layers with clean, calm air," she said.

Wood burning accounts for about a third of the air pollution on a typical winter night and has been a concern of air quality officials for years.

Kids living near freeways face health risks

Lung development can be limited, increasing likelihood of ailments later in life, study shows

By Chris Bowman, McClatchy Newspapers
Contra Costa Times, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

SACRAMENTO - Growing up near a freeway stunts a child's breathing capacity for a lifetime, significantly increasing the risk of serious lung and heart diseases later in life, according to researchers who monitored thousands of Southern California children for as many as eight years.

The landmark study, led by a team of University of Southern California scientists and released Thursday, delivers a sobering answer to a long-standing question about the health effects of being raised near a busy roadway where air is chronically polluted.

These children not only are more likely to develop asthma, but their lung development also can be permanently cut short, increasing their odds of having a heart attack or a life-threatening respiratory condition, starting as early as their 50s.

"It's a big risk factor," said James Gauderman, the author and principal investigator of the study by researchers at USC's Keck School of Medicine.

"If you've got less lung capacity and you get hit with the flu or pneumonia, you've got less reserve to fall back on," Gauderman said.

The findings carry profound policy implications nationwide for agencies that monitor and regulate air pollution, for elected officials who determine where to place new roads and housing tracts, and for education officials who buy property for new schools, California air quality regulators said Thursday.

"This is a pretty significant finding. It strengthens the information we need for some of our control programs," said Richard Bode, chief of the health and exposure branch of the state Air Resources Board.

Earlier studies measuring the environmental fallout on neighbors of Southern California freeways prompted the state regulators to go beyond their traditional scope of regional air quality and begin examining local "hot spots."

In the past six years, studies have focused on predominantly low-income neighborhoods near heavy industry, ports, railyards -- including the Union Pacific hub in Roseville -- and at schools on busy roads, such as the Arden Middle School on Watt Avenue in Carmichael.

The USC study draws data from the state-funded Children's Health Study, a long-term investigation of respiratory health that has been tracking thousands of schoolchildren since 1993. The children, now in their 20s, lived in 12 Southern California communities, from the relatively clean towns of Lompoc and Santa Maria in Santa Barbara County to smoggy Long Beach and Riverside.

The project is the largest air pollution health effects study ever undertaken, Gauderman said.

While earlier findings from the children's project were more applicable to urban Southern California, results of the new freeways study should resonate nationwide, Gauderman said.

Even in communities with overall good air quality, Gauderman said, "If children are living near a busy road, then our results suggest that they are at increased risk for these kinds of health effects."

The study, scheduled to be published Feb. 17 in the Lancet medical journal, correlated the data from community air quality samples and annual lung function tests with the locations of the children's homes, relative to freeways and other busy roadways.

More than 3,600 children participated for up to eight years. Investigators examined the link between their exposure to traffic pollution at home and their lung development, measured by how much air the child could forcefully exhale into a device called a spirometer.

The researcher accounted for factors that could skew results such as socioeconomic status, smoking and breathing disorders such as asthma.

They found that the overall lung capacity of children living within 1 mile from a freeway was 3 percent below normal.

The performance of their tiniest airways, where oxygen is delivered to the bloodstream, was about 7 percent below normal.

The reduced breathing capacity is unnoticeable among children because their lungs are still growing. Even after the lungs stop developing, about age 18, the deficit appears to have no effect because their lung capacity, which has lots of reserve, is at its peak.

Lung capacity declines naturally with age, beginning in the 30s and 40s. For those with lungs already compromised by air pollution, the deficit is all the greater.

"These individuals start off living with reduced lung function, so that when they reach middle age, they could be at greater risk for respiratory and cardiovascular disease," Gauderman said. "Most people expect to be active in the 50s."

Earlier research in the children's health project indicated that moving to cleaner environments could improve children's breathing.

"But it is not known at this point whether they completely regain what they lost by their time in a polluted environment," Gauderman said.

The next study will seek to identify which of the many tailpipe pollutants is most responsible for the reduced breathing capacity, he said.

In Brief

Tentative ruling faults city's growth plans

Contra Costa Times, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

Contra Costa County Superior Court issued a tentative ruling on a land conservation group's lawsuit against the city of Oakley last week, but the final decision is still pending.

The tentative ruling states that Oakley followed the law in terms of levees and flooding, but not regarding air quality with its plans to annex more than 2,000 acres of previously unincorporated land into its city limits. That ruling says that the city's environmental plans "failed to adequately analyze potentially significant air quality impacts."

The Greenbelt Alliance filed the lawsuit last April regarding the city's annexation plans. The alliance is suing the city and a handful of developers over plans to build more than 4,000 homes there because of the potential environmental impacts.

The alliance has argued that the residential developments slated for Hotchkiss Tract would harm not only the environment but also jeopardize the health and safety of current and future residents. They say that the city has not done enough in its planning to mitigate air quality effects, resolve the loss of agricultural land and protect residents from flooding.

City officials counter that they have completed a comprehensive environmental planning process that will make the area safer with a new master levee system and improvements to existing levees.

The final ruling is likely to be released within 90 days.

-- Paula King

TVA plans to add reactors to its nuclear power program

Associated Press

Contra Costa Times and Washington Post, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007

SPRING CITY, Tenn. - The Tennessee Valley Authority will submit applications to build two new nuclear reactors under the government's streamlined licensing process and restart its oldest reactor after a 22-year shutdown at Browns Ferry, TVA officials told The Chattanooga Times Free Press.

The utility also plans to decide by August whether to spend up to \$2 billion to complete the unfinished Unit 2 reactor at Watts Bar Nuclear Power Plant, the newspaper reported Sunday.

The total tally could top \$7 billion for design and construction, officials said.

"We need more power and, at this point, nuclear looks to be the best option," TVA Chairman Bill Sansom told the newspaper.

TVA currently operates three nuclear plants: Sequoyah (with two reactors) and Watts Bar (one reactor) in Tennessee, and Browns Ferry (two reactors) in Alabama.

Under its plan, TVA would build two new reactors at the Bellefonte nuclear plant site in Hollywood, Ala. The utility began constructing the Bellefonte plant in the 1970s but never completed it.

A consortium of utilities and contractors known as NuStart Energy LLC will split the projected \$50 million costs with the U.S. Department of Energy for initial design of the two reactors for Bellefonte.

TVA officials said they will benefit from new government rules that provide a more streamlined licensing process and government incentives such as production tax credits and risk insurance for new nuclear plants.

No new nuclear reactors have been ordered in the United States since a 1979 accident at the Three Mile Island plant in Pennsylvania raised public concerns about nuclear power and caused the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to revamp its rules.

But industry officials believe concerns about global warming have changed attitudes about nuclear energy. Nationwide, U.S. utilities are pursuing plans for up to 31 new reactors.

Proponents say nuclear power is an attractive alternative to coal, which is blamed for contributing to global warming and air pollution. Nuclear energy also provides an alternative to natural gas, which has been buffeted by high and volatile prices.

The Bush administration and some Republican lawmakers also are touting the resurgence of nuclear energy, along with a new-to-the-United States reprocessing and recycling technology for highly radioactive spent fuel waste.

"Nuclear power is almost the only answer for clean electricity to meet our growing needs," said Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, who is co-chairman of the TVA Congressional Caucus and a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. "When I look at all of the options, I think nuclear is the leading technology."

The TVA estimates electricity demand will grow 1.9 percent a year. To meet all of that increase with nuclear reactors would require TVA nearly to double its nuclear generation in the next decade.

But critics question the safety and cost of the plan. Nearly 30 years ago, TVA scrapped most of what then was the nation's most costly and ambitious nuclear program.

"Of all the places on Earth that have given nuclear power a shot and failed, the Tennessee Valley has got to be No. 1," said S. David Freeman, a former TVA chairman who has headed four other electric utilities across the country.

The 74-year old utility sank more than \$8 billion in the 1970s and 1980s into 10 nuclear reactors that were canceled before they were finished. TVA spent another \$6 billion to build the first reactor here at Watts Bar, making it the most expensive nuclear plant of its size ever built.

"TVA's electric rates would be a whole lot lower today if they wouldn't have tried to build all those expensive nuclear plants," Freeman said. "It's just baffling to me that TVA would want to get into that business again."

TVA President Tom Kilgore insists the agency now is taking a slower and more cost-effective approach to adding nuclear power than it did before, when it tried to build and operate up to 17 reactors at one time.

"If we do decide to proceed with more nuclear units, we're going to make sure they are well designed in advance and are built one at a time," Kilgore said.

After costly repairs in the 1980s, TVA's five operating reactors are now in the top quartile of U.S. nuclear plants for performance and safety, according to Kilgore.

TVA provides wholesale electricity to 158 distributors serving about 8.6 million consumers in Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia.

ON THE NET

TVA: <<http://www.tva.gov>>

No time like present

By Mike Taugher

Contra Costa Times, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

Global warming has gone mainstream.

President Bush, for the first time, mentioned it during a State of the Union speech Tuesday when he said his energy policies would help confront "the serious challenge of global climate change."

A day earlier, 10 major corporations, including PG&E, Bank of America, Dupont and General Electric, joined with national environmental groups such as the Natural Resources Defense Council and Environmental Defense to call for a nationwide cap on greenhouse gas emissions.

The central debate is no longer whether the earth is warming or whether man has a hand in it.

It is what the impact of climate change will be and what should be done about it.

Now, the debate gets thorny.

Because the extent of future warming is uncertain, it is difficult for policymakers to decide on appropriate responses.

California policymakers have responded aggressively with laws and regulations to curtail tailpipe emissions and commit the state to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The federal government so far has done little by comparison and has opposed California's tailpipe regulations, contending they tread on its authority over vehicle mileage standards.

But some major corporations are urging the federal government to cap emissions because they say it makes sense for the economy and the environment to start cutting emissions soon. The companies include several who face significant financial burdens if greenhouse gases are regulated

"Each year we delay action to control emissions increases the risk of unavoidable consequences that could necessitate even steeper reductions in the future, at potentially greater economic cost and social disruption," the U.S. Climate Action Partnership said this week.

The companies formed the alliance with environmental groups out of a mix of social responsibility and long-range business planning, said PG&E spokesman Shawn Cooper.

"All of the companies in some form or another recognized that global warming is real, that we are part of the cause and that something needed to be done," Cooper said.

They decided it made sense to take the initiative so they could have a hand in solutions.

"It's like your budget. If you have trouble with your budget, it's better to deal with it in January than in November," Cooper said. "By November, it's too late."

The partnership called for a mandatory cap on emissions and a system that would allow companies to buy and sell pollution "credits."

In April, the state Air Resources Board is expected to consider the first set of regulations under a law that commits the state to cutting emissions by 174 million tons. That law requires California to cut emission to 1990 levels by 2020.

The first rules are expected to include limits on the carbon content of gasoline and prohibiting retail sales of car refrigerant. The full plan to bring emissions back to 1990 levels is expected next year.

Meanwhile, state regulations that would cut greenhouse gas emissions from new cars sold in California beginning in 2009 are tied up in court. Those regulations are expected to curtail new cars' carbon dioxide tailpipe emissions by 30 percent by 2016. The fate of that lawsuit is tied to a pending U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a separate case in which states are trying to force the federal government to regulate carbon dioxide emissions.

The state's greenhouse gas regulations are likely to increase the cost of energy and new cars, but state officials say energy efficiency improvements could offset the added costs.

"It's not at all clear that there will be a pocketbook impact," said Chuck Shulock, the air board's program manager for greenhouse gas emissions.

The federal government also appears poised to seriously consider greenhouse gas reductions.

In his State of the Union speech, Bush called for a 20 percent reduction in gasoline consumption, increased use of alternative fuels and reforms in the way mileage standards are set.

The November election that turned control of the Senate to Democrats by the slimmest of margins led to a 180-degree philosophical turnabout on its key environment committee.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla, who called catastrophic global warming a "hoax," had led the Energy and Public Works Committee.

After the election, the chair went to Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who has called warming a serious threat and called for slashing emissions by as much as 80 percent by 2050.

Boxer has scheduled a hearing next week on how to approach climate issues. She plans several more.

"I'm going to take the pulse of the Congress and see what the possibilities are," Boxer said in an interview Friday. "California is certainly a model for me."

"If we get a really good bill out of the Senate, it will make waves," said Boxer, adding that she wants to push the issue into the 2008 presidential campaign.

"People are clearly really concerned," she said.

There are numerous proposals.

For example, California's other senator, Dianne Feinstein, plans five separate bills to address fuel efficiency, power plant emissions and other greenhouse gas sources.

Still, new federal laws to address climate change face significant hurdles. In the Senate, Democrats such as Boxer and Feinstein will have to attract significant Republican support, even if they get the full support of their own party.

In the House, the legislation would probably have to pass the Energy and Commerce Committee, now led by Rep. John Dingell, a Michigan Democrat who might be hesitant to move legislation that harms the auto industry or its workers.

For a variety of reasons, global warming has taken a much higher profile in recent months and years.

Former Vice President Al Gore released an attention-grabbing documentary. Polar bears were proposed for protection because of melting habitat. Scientists became more vocal. Hurricane Katrina, though not directly attributable to global warming, raised awareness of the links between warmer oceans and hurricane intensity.

Even the most skeptical of climate change, by and large, agree it is occurring.

The Competitive Enterprise Institute, a Washington policy group that is among the most vocal critics of climate change responses, said in a recent news release that it "does not deny that the global mean temperature is rising and that human activities may be responsible for some or all of the warming."

Asked if anyone anywhere credibly maintains that the earth is not warming or that humans are not responsible for some of it, the group's director of global warming and energy policy could not name a single source, though he said that there were a few out there.

Myron Ebell contends, however, that models of future climate grossly exaggerate the threat.

"The rate of warming is extremely modest, and the second point is I don't think there is any real scientific reason to think that the rate of modest warming will increase," he said.

Computer models forecast an estimated increase of 2 degrees to 5 degrees in California by mid-century.

As sophisticated as those models are, they are inexact. The climate is big and complicated, and trying to project emission levels of greenhouse gases, how various phenomena will play off each other and then forecast how that will affect a specific place is a massive scientific undertaking.

Still, many climatologists say they now have enough information to act.

"No matter how much predictive capacity we have, until it starts to happen, people aren't going to believe this," said Kelly Redmond, regional climatologist at the Western Regional Climate Center in Reno. "To some extent, if we wait until it happens, it's too late in some aspects of this."

"It's very clear that we're going to see more warming, but is there a worse outcome?" Redmond added. "The time to be thinking about that is about now ... to improve the odds of ending up in the middle range rather than the higher range."

Still, no matter what is done now to curtail emissions, climatologists say further warming is inevitable.

Carbon dioxide, the chief greenhouse gas, is long-lived. The gas would remain in the atmosphere for decades even after immediate, drastic reductions.

And the earth has absorbed energy that has yet to show up in the thermometer.

"Even if we were to stop all fossil fuel emissions today, the earth would still warm, probably by about 1 degree Fahrenheit, because greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have already increased and the earth's radiation budget is still not in balance," said Daniel Cayan, a meteorologist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego.

Cayan, Redmond and other climate scientists say that the sooner emissions are curtailed, the better chances are that the worst forecasts will not come true.

Mike Taugher covers natural resources. Reach him at 925-943-8257 or mtaugher@cctimes.com.

CUTTING CARBON

Ten things you can do to reduce your personal greenhouse gas emissions.

- Replace the most frequently used light bulbs in your home with more efficient, compact fluorescent bulbs. If every household in the United States did this with the five most used bulbs in the home, it would prevent more than 1 trillion pounds of greenhouse gas emissions.

Information on choosing compact fluorescent bulbs:

www.fightglobalwarming.com/page.cfm?tagID=608
<<http://www.fightglobalwarming.com/page.cfm?tagID=608>>

- Heat and cool your home more efficiently. Raising the thermostat just 2 degrees in the summer and lowering it 2 degrees in the winter can save as much as 2,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. Wrapping your water heater in insulation and setting it at 120 degrees Fahrenheit, buying more efficient appliances and replacing air conditioner, furnace and heat pump filters will also help.

Information on saving energy at home:

www.aceee.org/consumerguide/index.htm <<http://www.aceee.org/consumerguide/index.htm>>

- Maintain your car to improve fuel efficiency. Keeping your tires properly inflated by checking the pressure regularly can increase your fuel efficiency by 3 percent. Keeping your vehicle's engine tuned will also improve efficiency. And the way you drive can have a big impact on how much gas you use.

Information on maintaining your car:

www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/maintain.shtml <<http://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/maintain.shtml>>

- Buy a more fuel-efficient car. For people with a long commute to work, driving a more efficient car can make a big difference in personal greenhouse gas emissions and can save money in the long run. For the average person, switching to a car that is just 3 miles per gallon more efficient can cut 3,000 pounds of emissions a year.

Information on fuel economy, including greenhouse-gas emissions ratings for cars:

www.fueleconomy.gov/ <<http://www.fueleconomy.gov/>>

- Recycle and use recycled products. Recycling all of your home's newsprint, glass, metal and cardboard could save 850 pounds of emissions. Recycled paper products require 70 percent to 90 percent less energy to make and save trees.

Information on recycling:

www.epa.gov/msw/recycle.htm <<http://www.epa.gov/msw/recycle.htm>>

www.consrv.ca.gov/dor/ <<http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dor/>>

- Install a solar energy system on your home. This can be expensive, but California has incentives for homeowners to offset the cost. The state goal is to produce 3,000 megawatts of new solar energy by 2017.

Information on home solar energy:

www.gosolarcalifornia.com/ <<http://www.gosolarcalifornia.com/>>

www1.eere.energy.gov/solar/yellow_pages.html <http://www1.eere.energy.gov/solar/yellow_pages.html>

- Buy locally produced foods. The average meal in the United States travels 1,200 miles before arriving at your table. Buying locally can save fuel. Avoiding frozen foods, which require 10 times more energy to produce, can also help.

Information on local farmer's markets:

www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm <<http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm>>

- Use less water, especially hot water. Installing low-flow shower heads can save 350 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. Washing clothes in cold or warm water instead of hot can save 500 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. Using less cold water can save energy used by municipal purification and distribution systems.

Information on saving water:

www.epa.gov/owm/water-efficiency/pubs/simple.htm <<http://www.epa.gov/owm/water-efficiency/pubs/simple.htm>>

- Turn off and unplug unused electronic devices. Turning off the TV, DVD player, computer and other electronic devices can save energy and money. Buying more efficient devices can also help. Unplugging electronics can also save. As much as 40 percent of all the electricity used to run your home electronics is used when they are turned off.

Information on efficient electronics:

www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=find_a_product
<http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=find_a_product>.showProductCategory&pcw_code=H
EF

- Buy green energy. Purchasing renewable energy such as wind, solar or geothermal systems will increase demand for green energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. California has a number of green energy options and incentives, but if those aren't available to you, you can offset your emissions at www.nativeenergy.com <<http://www.nativeenergy.com>>.

Information on buying green power and California's renewable energy incentives:

www.dsireusa.org/library/includes/map2.cfm?CurrentPageID=1&State=CA&RE=1&EE=0
<<http://www.dsireusa.org/library/includes/map2.cfm?CurrentPageID=1&State=CA&RE=1&EE=0>>

www.epa.gov/greenpower/whatis/renewableenergy.htm
<<http://www.epa.gov/greenpower/whatis/renewableenergy.htm>>

Sources: EPA, USDA, climatecrisis.net, Go Solar California, Environmental Defense, American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy

Plan for 3rd power plant riles Oxnard

Two energy stations and two proposed liquefied natural gas terminals are enough, locals say. Edison says the facility would be for peak times.

By Gary Polakovic, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

As debate rages over two proposed liquefied natural gas terminals off the Oxnard coast, Southern California Edison has announced plans to build a third power station in this seaside city to help prevent blackouts during peak summer demand.

The 45-megawatt generator would be in place by August at Mandalay Bay near two bigger power plants, officials said. It would provide enough power for 29,250 households, much of that for use in Ventura County.

It is one of five units to be installed across the Los Angeles region by summer at a total cost of \$250 million. Other sites include Norwalk, Ontario, Stanton and Rancho Cucamonga. Edison officials said scattered sites were selected in part to prevent an earthquake from knocking them all out.

By power plant standards, the new generators are pipsqueaks. In contrast, the existing Reliant Energy power station at Mandalay Bay generates 430 megawatts - a megawatt is enough electricity for about 700 households. Reliant also operates a 1,500-megawatt power plant at nearby Ormond Beach. The new generators are intended to produce just enough energy to satisfy peak demand.

State Public Utilities Commission President Michael Peevey directed Edison in August to produce an additional 250 megawatts of power by summer 2007. Record heat last year resulted in fatalities and power shortages across Southern California. Extreme heat is forecast this summer, and energy companies are scrambling to prepare.

But many Oxnard residents question why the power station must be built in their city. They argue that Oxnard is already home to two big power plants and is being considered for two proposed offshore liquefied natural gas projects.

Australian resources giant BHP Billiton is proposing to build an \$800-million terminal 14 miles off the Ventura County coast, while Houston-based NorthernStar Natural Gas Co. seeks to build a big liquefied natural gas terminal on an oil platform 21 miles offshore. Both facilities would be linked to Oxnard by pipelines.

Liquefied natural gas terminals receive super-chilled natural gas from overseas, heat it to vapor and distribute it to homes and businesses. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and President Bush, as well as many business leaders, support such projects to ensure a reliable energy supply. California air quality regulations favor natural gas, a clean-burning fossil fuel, to fight smog.

Oxnard City Councilman John C. Zaragoza said many of his constituents object to a convergence of energy projects in Oxnard. Many people in the mostly Latino city believe that they are unfairly being exposed to risks and pollution from energy projects without benefits.

"I have a lot of concerns," Zaragoza said. "We have two current power plants, and then we have the old Halaco [toxic waste site] plant and we are host to three landfills, and now they are proposing LNG off the coast. We need those plants, but why Oxnard? Seems like we have our fair share already. There's other parts of the coast we can build this [Edison power] plant."

He said the City Council would probably schedule public hearings on the project this spring. Meanwhile, Edison is sponsoring a public meeting on its new power station from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Courtyard by Marriott near U.S. 101 in Oxnard.

Shirley Godwin, chairwoman of the Saviers Road Design Team, which promotes civic improvements in Oxnard, opposes the new power station. "This is really troubling," she said. "This is contrary to what we are trying to achieve for Oxnard."

Mark Nelson, manager of generation planning and strategy for Edison, said the company examined numerous sites before selecting Oxnard. He said a 16-acre site was chosen because it's near natural gas fuel lines and electrical transmission lines and can be used to help start the adjacent Mandalay Bay generating station. Further, Nelson said Oxnard is a rapidly growing community with increasing energy needs.

Nancy Lindholm, president and chief executive of the Oxnard Chamber of Commerce, said the local business community favors new power sources to ensure reliability.

"For business and industry and our quality of life, it is essential that we have an adequate energy supply," she said.

Nelson said the new power station is a \$50-million turbine similar to ones used on jet engines. It will be powered by natural gas rather than aircraft fuel and contained in a sound-reducing building. In industry parlance, the unit is called a "peaker" because it typically runs during emergencies or when electrical demand is at its peak, such as hot summer afternoons, to supplement the big power plants.

While turbines are generally not as efficient as power generating stations, their advantages are that they can be started and stopped in minutes to respond to energy demand immediately and can be installed much faster than big power plants.

"By meeting all existing regulations, there will not be any significant environmental impacts" from the new power station, Nelson said.

Nelson said that Edison is scheduled to begin building the power station in April and that it will be in operation by August.

Drive to produce ethanol steers energy firm to Peru

By Chris Kraul, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Monday, Jan. 29, 2007

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA - The domain of snakes, scorpions and scrub brush since time immemorial, a stretch of desert in northwest Peru could soon become an unlikely generator of jobs and local well-being, thanks to the booming U.S. market for ethanol.

At a ceremony this month, energy firm Maple Cos. closed a deal to buy 25,000 acres of unused and heretofore unwanted land near the city of Piura. The Dallas company announced plans to invest \$120 million in an ethanol processing plant, a sugar-cane field to provide raw material for the fuel and a mile-long underwater pipeline to the Pacific Ocean to deliver fuel to tankers and onward to U.S. customers.

Maple President Rex W. Canon said the company would be capable of shipping 30 million gallons of ethanol a year by 2010, perhaps growing to 100 million in the following decade. Peruvian President Alan Garcia attended the ceremony and beamed as he heard Maple promise that the project would directly or indirectly create 3,200 jobs.

Gov. Cesar Trelles of the Peruvian region, also called Piura, which includes the site, said in a telephone interview that the project would spark economic development. He predicted that northwest Peru would some day be an ethanol hub, producing 400 million gallons a year. That's an ambitious goal - it would represent 7% of all the ethanol Americans bought last year.

It's easy for entrepreneurs and government officials to wax on about ethanol as they contemplate booming U.S. demand, which last year grew 30% and could have years of expansion ahead. President Bush, in his State of the Union address Tuesday, called for increasing use of alternative fuels such as ethanol - which can be made from sugar, grains and even plant waste - as part of a strategy to reduce U.S. dependence on imported oil.

Maple sees Peru, with its favorable growing conditions and trade preferences with the United States, as the perfect platform from which to fulfill such demand.

"The big driver for us is that Peru is one of the best places in the world to grow sugar cane in terms of how many tons you can produce per acre per year," Canon said.

"That gives us a cost advantage," he said of his privately held group of companies, which has been developing and operating energy projects since 1986, with a focus on Peru since the early 1990s.

Spurring growth in ethanol demand are two factors: the high cost of crude oil and the environmental harm that it and other hydrocarbons are doing to the planet. Global warming and rising pollution have touched off a grass-roots movement in the U.S. and other countries advocating for cleaner-burning automobile engines.

But the market relies on more than consumer preferences. Much of ethanol's market growth is a product of changing laws. Increasing numbers of U.S. states, including California, require refiners to substitute ethanol as an octane-producing gasoline additive in place of MTBE, a chemical that has fouled water sources, is believed to be a carcinogen and is being phased out of most refining.

Growing supplies have already begun to affect prices. Ethanol was trading last week in New York for about \$1.90 a gallon, down about 50% from a record \$3.986 on July 3.

At the same time, the boom in demand has driven the spot price of corn, a primary raw material for ethanol, to about \$4 a bushel on the Chicago Board of Trade. Futures prices, which have surged nearly 90% in the last year, reached a 10-year high of \$4.205 on Jan. 17.

Sugar prices also are up, partly because of inclement weather in Brazil, the world's No. 1 producer, but principally because more of the world's crop goes to feed ethanol factories.

Demand for ethanol is expected to continue to surge as Detroit automakers deliver on promises to manufacture more cars that can run on the fuel. By 2010, the companies say, they will be rolling out at least 4 million so-called flex-fuel vehicles a year capable of running on 85% ethanol. Only 1 million flex-fuel vehicles were produced last year.

Until last year, U.S. ethanol producers kept pace with demand. About 110 ethanol processing plants have opened in recent years, mainly in the Midwest, and more than 70 are under construction across the country, said the Washington-based Renewable Fuels Assn., a trade group. California has four ethanol plants.

Nonetheless, demand has grown so rapidly in the last year that imports of ethanol from Brazil, Costa Rica and Jamaica were needed to fill the gap. Imports ended up supplying 10% of all ethanol sales last year, and that percentage is expected to grow in coming years with more U.S. supplies coming from tropical locales such as Peru.

Ethanol demand will continue to rise, boosters say, as long as oil prices remain relatively high and consumer attitudes stay "green." Ethanol accounted for 3% of all auto fuel sales in the United States last year, compared with about 50% in Brazil, the most advanced country in the use of green fuels.

Significant growth potential in ethanol consumption is expected as well for Japan, China and India, where high fuel prices and pollution are concerns, said Matt Hartwig of the Renewable Fuels Assn., a Washington-based trade group.

With two new ethanol plants opening every month in the United States, competition is tightening and the chance of a glut can't be dismissed.

Canon of Maple says he is not worried. Peru's growing conditions, its low labor costs and the duty-free status of ethanol under terms of the Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act is expected to give Maple an edge over other suppliers, even after accounting for the cost of shipping ethanol by tanker.

Under the trade act, Peru and other Andean countries can export a variety of agricultural products to the United States without paying duties. The program's intent was to give farmers an incentive not to grow coca, marijuana or the poppy from which heroin is made. Ethanol, as a farm-based fuel, is among those duty-free products.

Maple is no stranger to audacious energy projects: In the late 1990s, it built a 175-megawatt electrical power plant in the Peruvian jungle near Pucallpa with two huge generators the company had floated up the Amazon River on barges.

The Piura project will use irrigated water from the nearby Chira River to transform desert acreage into productive farmland.

"This is uncultivated land. We'll build out a sugar-cane plantation, a milling facility and an ethanol distillery," Canon said. "We'll also build a small power plant that will use the *bagazo*, or waste, from the sugar cane as fuel."

Money will go toward building a pipeline and an offshore docking facility to load ethanol onto tankers destined for the U.S. and other markets.

Trelles, the regional governor, says Piura has an expanding portfolio of agricultural exports to the United States. Enormous mango and lemon groves have been planted there in recent years to supply U.S. supermarkets, taking advantage of the duty-free status afforded by the Andean trade act.

To the south of Piura, farmers have planted snow peas and asparagus grown specifically for air shipment to U.S. grocery stores.

But the Maple project will take the area to another level, and Trelles hopes that other ethanol producers will follow with more factories.

"We are at a historic moment in the region," Trelles said. "With this creation of a new industry, we will see wages go up, better conservation of our water and more jobs."

The region is bracing for the effects of a bilateral free trade deal that Peru and the United States have signed; the pact, which Peruvian legislators have approved, may go into effect this year if Congress passes it. The accord would make the trade preferences permanent but would also open Peru to imports of U.S. grains with which rice farmers in the Piura area cannot hope to compete.

Trelles says that as the Maple ethanol plant goes online, he hopes that rice farmers in the area will switch to sugar cane. Such a change would have an added benefit, the governor says, as cane crops need only one-third as much water as rice.

World scientists meet on global warming

By ANGELA CHARLTON, Associated Press Writer
In the Fresno Bee and other papers, Monday, Jan. 29, 2007

PARIS (AP) - Scientists from around the world gathered Monday in Paris to finalize a long-awaited, authoritative report on climate change, expected to give a grim warning of rising temperatures and sea levels worldwide.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is to unveil its latest assessment of the environmental threat posed by global warming on Friday.

As the panel meets, the planet is the warmest it has been in thousands of years - if not more - and international concern over what to do about it is at an all-time high.

"At no time in the past has there been such a global appetite" for reliable information on global warming, the panel's chairman, Rajendra Pachauri of India, told the conference.

Scientists are keeping quiet about the contents of the report, but say it is both more specific and more sweeping than the panel's previous efforts.

Early drafts of the document give a rosier picture than that of the last report, in 2001, foreseeing smaller sea level rises than previously predicted. But many top scientists reject the new figures as not new enough: They do not include the recent melting of big ice sheets in two crucial locations - Greenland and Antarctica.

That debate may be central at this week's meetings at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. After four days of closed-door, word-by-word editing involving more than 500 experts, they will release the first of four major global warming reports by the IPCC expected this year.

"We're hoping that it will convince people that climate change is real and that we have a responsibility for much of it, and that we really do have to make changes in how we live," said Kenneth Denman, one of the report's authors and senior scientist at the Canadian Centre for Climate Modelling and Analysis.

It has been an unusually warm winter in some parts of the world, and awareness of the consequences of climate change is growing.

Last week, President Bush referred to global warming as an established fact, after years of arguing that not enough was known about global warming to do anything about it.

The panel, created by the United Nations in 1988, releases its assessments every five or six years - although scientists have been observing climate change since as far back as the 1960s.

While critics call the panel overly alarmist, it is by nature relatively cautious because it relies on input from hundreds of scientists, including skeptics and industry researchers. And its reports must be unanimous, approved by 154 governments - including the United States and oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia.

Pachauri, director-general of the Tata Energy Research Institute in India who has served as an adviser to India's prime minister, said the report would make "significant advances" over the 2001 report, addressing gaps in that document, reducing uncertainties and adding new knowledge about past changes in climate.

The early versions of the new report predict that by 2100 the sea level would rise between 5 and 23 inches. That is far lower than the 20 to 55 inches forecast by 2100 in a study published in the peer-review journal *Science* this month. Other climate experts, including NASA's James Hansen, predict even bigger sea level rises.

Some critics worry that the IPCC scientists did not take into account shifts in Greenland and Antarctica.

In the past, the panel did not expect a large melt of ice in west Antarctica and Greenland in this century. Their forecasts were based only on how much the sea level would rise because of melting glaciers, which are different from ice sheets, and the physical expansion of water as it warms.

But in 2002, Antarctica's 1,255-square-mile Larsen B ice shelf broke off and disappeared in 35 days. And recent NASA data shows that Greenland is losing 53 cubic miles of ice each year - twice the rate it was losing in 1996.

Scientists are struggling with how to plug this information into their computer models.

Many fear this will mean the world's coastlines are swamped much earlier than most thought. Others believe the ice melt is temporary and won't play such a dramatic role.

In recent years, scientists have documented a dramatic retreat of the Arctic sea and the virtual collapse in mountain glaciers around the globe. They have found plants and animals closer than normal to the poles. They have recorded temperature records in many locations and shifts in atmospheric and oceanic circulation.

Indonesia's environment minister warned Monday that rising sea levels stand to inundate some 2,000 of his country's more than 18,000 islands by 2030.

This week's meetings do not address how to tackle global warming, the subject of a report later this year by the IPCC.

The Basics

The Long Road to Energy Independence

By Matthew L. Wald

N.Y. Times, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007

President Bush never used the phrase "energy independence" in his State of the Union address last week, and it is just as well. His program for cutting gasoline demand is ambitious in scope, but modest in effect, according to experts.

The reason is that the United States has fallen down a very deep well, and it's hard to get out. Last year, the United States imported 60 percent of the oil it consumed. If, as Mr. Bush proposes, we cut gasoline consumption 20 percent by 2017 - about 2.1 million barrels a day - then the share of oil imported will fall only by 4 or 5 percentage points.

In fact, the government expects the share of imported oil to fall anyway, to less than 56 percent, because of a rise in domestic production, mostly from the Gulf Coast.

Domestic production has fallen sharply since the mid-1970s, but the Energy Information Administration, which is part of the Energy Department, expects production to rise to almost six million barrels a day by 2017, up from a little over five million barrels a day now.

Mr. Bush is also proposing an increase in fuel-economy standards and an increase in the production of ethanol and other gasoline substitutes, hoping to keep oil consumption relatively steady. Without such intervention, oil consumption is forecast to rise to just over 23 million barrels a day in 2017, from nearly 21 million barrels a day today.

"It's an enormous challenge," said John Felmy, the chief economist of the American Petroleum Institute, the industry's main trade association.

Production of ethanol from corn has already put pressure on food prices, according to some agriculture experts, but Mr. Bush's plan involves tripling the production of corn ethanol, and making huge amounts of ethanol from cellulose, which is not now done commercially.

Integrating that much ethanol into the fuel supply will involve many more rail-tanker cars or trucks, because ethanol cannot be shipped in conventional pipelines. In addition, the gasoline formula with which it is mixed has to be changed, or the mixture evaporates too easily, causing air pollution.

The actual amount of ethanol produced will depend on what is technically feasible and on the price of oil. But at the rate of change suggested by the Bush plan, energy independence is about a century away.

Mexico City's infamous smog clears, a little

By Frank Jack Daniel

Washington Post, Monday, Jan. 29, 2007

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Heavy trucks belch black smoke and lines of buses battle through a virtually gridlocked sea of cars inching beneath a haze of exhaust fumes.

Welcome to [Mexico <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/countries/mexico.html?nav=el>](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/countries/mexico.html?nav=el) City in 2007. With car ownership more than doubling over the last decade, the megalopolis once dubbed the world's most polluted city should by now be almost uninhabitable, its residents gasping through oxygen masks.

The air doesn't exactly smell sweet. But look up beyond the tops of office buildings these days and the sky is blue.

Over the past decade Mexico City has rid its streets of the most polluting cars and bounced back from the dark days of the 1980s and 1990s, when children painted the sky as black or brown and opaque air sent choking birds plummeting to the ground.

Now, for a couple of days most months, the snow-capped volcanoes that serve as a dramatic backdrop to the city are visible -- after decades of being blanketed by yellow smog.

"Things have changed," said Jose Luis Perez, 70, who has spent 50 years selling newspapers in the ever-more congested city center. "With the new cars and regulations, Mexicans don't pollute like they used to."

Air pollution earned Mexico City a place on a list of the world's 35 worst polluted places last year, but it escaped the top 10.

Nobel prize-winning Mexican chemist Mario Molina points out that the city's ozone levels are still higher than Los Angeles and Houston, the smoggiest U.S. cities.

But gone are the regular smog emergencies of the 1990s when cars were temporarily banned from the streets and children kept inside until the air cleared.

"Pollution is much better than in the 1990s and much better than Los Angeles in the 1960s. There you were choking, your eyes would get watery and you could smell it," said Molina.

NEWER CARS

Tight emissions rules and better fuel have helped, scientists say, but perhaps the biggest change came through a credit boom during the 6-year term of former President Vicente Fox, who left office in December.

With unprecedented access to cheaper cash, Mexico City residents rushed out and bought new cars with fuel injection systems and catalytic converters, which emit up to 20 times less pollutants than older models.

Around 4 million cars are known to circulate in central Mexico City, up from about 1.5 million in 1996, according to industry statistics.

"Even though there are more vehicles circulating, the percentage of old, rundown cars has gradually dropped," said Jose Agustin Garcia, a pollution researcher at Mexico's UNAM university.

But Garcia, who still develops a hacking cough in the months he takes to the streets to do field work, warns that with larger, gas-guzzling models helping clog the city, the positive impact of cleaner motors could be outweighed.

"Our studies say things are going to get worse in the future," he said. "The trend toward 4x4 cars used to take kids to school counteracts the benefit of catalytic converters."

Both Molina and Garcia say more needs to be spent on public transport -- the metro is efficient but does not reach new areas of the sprawling city and the buses are chaotic.

One area worrying the scientists is the level of fine particulate matter in the air -- suspended particles of solids like dirt, soil, dust, pollens, molds, ashes and soot.

Diesel smoke from old trucks, still underregulated in Mexico, is one of the main sources of particulates, which can cause chronic bronchitis and asthma.

Mexico tracks some particulates, but not the finest ones, which World Health Organization studies say can enter the bloodstream and cause heart problems.

A recent Mexican study said unregulated fine particle levels in Mexico frequently exceeded ranges considered acceptable in Los Angeles.

[Fresno Bee column, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007:](#)

Fresno should stay on climate agreement

By Bill McEwen / The Fresno Bee

Last I looked, 376 cities had endorsed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. There are small cities and big cities from red states and blue states. Every state in the union is represented.

Two names not on the list: Fresno and Mayor Alan Autry.

The absences bewildered Fresno resident Franz Weinschenk, who asked that I check into why Autry hadn't joined a grass-roots effort to meet the greenhouse-gas reductions laid out in the Kyoto Protocol, the international climate treaty.

One of the agreement's goals is to reduce global warming pollution levels to 7% below what they were in 1990 by cutting dependence on fossil fuels and accelerating the development of alternative fuels and power technologies.

Puzzling to Weinschenk was that Fresno briefly was on the list, which is kept by Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels' staff. Nickels spearheads the initiative.

"I was so tickled that I went down to the City Council (about my fifth time) to congratulate them - only to find out a week later that Fresno had been removed," Weinschenk wrote in a letter.

"Meanwhile, the polar bears are gonna be on the endangered species list, a hunk of ice the size of Montana broke off northern Canada, hibernating bears in Europe aren't taking their winter snoozes and it ain't cold enough in Moscow this year to freeze the ice on their many rinks so the kids can go skating."

I understand Weinschenk's confusion and frustration.

Under Autry, the city has embraced the use of alternative fuels in its vehicles and worked to improve air quality.

What's more, Autry's political soul mate, Gov. Schwarzenegger, is on the leading edge of the global-warming fight.

Last week, the leaders of 10 huge companies - including Duke Energy, General Electric and DuPont - asked Congress and President Bush to set caps on carbon dioxide emissions. And the president spoke about "the serious challenge of global climate change" in his State of the Union address.

When I called Autry, he sounded confused, too.

"I thought it was going to move forward [to Seattle]," he said of the City Council's resolution.

What happened?

Condensing a tortured story: The council endorsed the agreement in August and again in November, passing resolutions introduced by Brian Calhoun.

Autry neither signed nor vetoed the resolutions, saying that while he supported efforts to curtail global warming, he believed the mayors' agreement was a politically motivated swipe at Bush. Autry also said he needed more details about the agreement because he wanted to be involved in something substantive, not symbolic.

Under city rules, the council's wishes take effect when the mayor doesn't use his veto. But there was a legal rub this time.

Responding to an inquiry from City Manager Andy Souza, the city attorney's office offered an opinion that "the mayor's express powers of providing leadership on a community issue would be impaired if [the] council were permitted to direct the mayor to endorse the agreement."

Adding to the confusion, the city attorney also threw the council a bone, saying that "the resolutions that were adopted by the council may be sent to the city of Seattle ... to be kept on file."

My guess as to why the city went off and on the list is that Nickels' office received the resolution, added Fresno and then removed it after someone in Autry's administration complained.

I told Autry that he was occupying both sides of the debate - against both global warming and an attempt to do something about it.

Why not veto the council's resolution if he thought the agreement was flawed?

"I guess I am trying to have it both ways," he said. "I thought we were going to be on the list of supporters. Now that we're not, I'm willing to revisit it."

Will Autry become the 377th mayor to add his name?

Souza said Friday night that he had talked to the mayor and Fresno was now "good to go" on the list. Let's hope we stay on it this time.

[Fresno Bee commentaries, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007:](#)

H. STERLING BURNETT: Polar bear counts are increasing, not declining

WASHINGTON - Cable TV satirist Stephen Colbert coined a term truthiness, which online encyclopedia Wikipedia explains is "to claim to 'know' something ... 'from the gut' without regard to evidence, logic ... or actual facts."

Truthiness, thus, is an emotional appeal meant to short-circuit intellectual examination of the claims being made. A prime example of the effectiveness of truthiness came in late December when environmental lobbyists persuaded the Bush administration to recommend that the polar bear be listed as threatened due to global warming.

In lieu of evidence, environmentalists offered mostly anecdotes that polar bears are at risk: isolated reports of a few polar bears drowning in Arctic waters normally containing sea ice as well as a few instances of cannibalism among polar bears.

Then they took a long leap of logic to posit that human-caused global warming will melt most of the ice at the North Pole within 50 years, and that without the ice, polar bears will be unable to hunt seals, their preferred prey.

Fortunately, both for policy and the polar bears, the plight of this one population does not reflect the population trend as a whole.

Indeed, since the 1970s, while the world was warming, polar bear numbers increased dramatically from around 5,000 to as many as 25,000 today - higher than at anytime in the 20th century.

And historically, polar bears have thrived in temperatures even warmer than at present - during the medieval warm period 1,000 years ago and during the Holocene Climate Optimum between 5,000 and 9,000 years ago.

Polar bears have thrived during warmer climates because they are omnivores just like their cousins the brown and black bears. Though polar bears currently eat seals more than anything else, they also will feast on fish, kelp, caribou, ducks, sea birds, the occasional beluga whale, musk ox and scavenged whale and walrus carcasses.

In addition, Dr. Mitchell Taylor, a biologist with Nunavut Territorial government in Canada, pointed out in testimony to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that modest warming may be beneficial to bears since it creates better habitat for seals and would dramatically increase blueberry production, on which bears gorge themselves when available.

Alaska's polar bear population is stable, and Taylor's research shows that the Canadian polar bear population has increased 25% from 12,000 to 15,000 during the past decade with 11 of Canada's 13 polar bear populations stable or increasing in number.

Where polar bear weight and numbers are declining, Taylor thinks too many bears competing for food, rather than Arctic warming, is the cause.

That's right, the problem confronting polar bears may be overpopulation, not extinction! The World Wildlife Fund, while arguing that polar bears are at risk from global warming, presented data that undermine their fear.

According to the WWF there are 22,000 polar bears in about 20 distinct populations worldwide. Only two bear populations - accounting for 16.4% of the total number of bears - are decreasing, and they are in areas where air temperatures have actually fallen, such as the Baffin Bay region.

By contrast, another two populations - 13.6% of the total number - are growing, and they live in areas where air temperatures have risen, near the Bering Strait and the Chukchi Sea.

As for the rest, 10 populations - comprising 45.4% of the total number of bears - are stable, and the status of the remaining six populations is unknown.

For now, the government will be taking public comments on the proposal. Let's hope some science - facts and accuracy - make an appearance before this goes too far. The rush to place polar bears on the endangered species list smacks of truthiness rather than truthfulness.

Many Americans may view this polar bear gambit as just another backdoor attempt by dedicated greens to restrict energy use in the United States. They might well be right.

Senior fellow and energy expert at the National Center for Policy Analysis

WAYNE MADSEN: Global warming deniers stand by as Arctic ice recedes, bears dwindle

WASHINGTON - Global warming has reduced the summer Arctic ice cap by 40% since the 1960s, yet some skeptics still contend that this vast melting has nothing to do with the threatened extinction of one of nature's most magnificent creatures - the polar bear. One can only wonder if the Flat Earth Society is making a comeback and whether the Bush administration will grant it a federal charter!

Although a number of endangered lesser-known species can be viewed as "canaries in the cage" as the earth's atmosphere and oceans speed into the red zone, none has captured public attention as much as the polar bear.

Long before Coca-Cola had polar bears guzzling its carbonated sugar water in TV ads, native people revered the polar bear for its industry and uncompromising ferocity. Polar bears continued to be revered even today, serving as a popular figure of strength and tenacity on the flags and the coats-of-arms of the nation of Greenland, the Norwegian city of Hammerfest and Canada's Northwest Territories.

Unfortunately, all the credible scientific data suggest the polar bears' days already are numbered. Arctic ice now breaks up three weeks earlier than in the 1960s, and that makes it tough for polar bears to hunt.

As ice packs recede, they are forced to swim greater distances in search of food. Many have drowned and others are suffering from malnutrition. Indeed, National Center for Atmospheric Research studies show that if global warming is left unchecked, the Arctic's summer ice may well disappear altogether by 2040 - dooming the polar bear to a boring existence as a bred-in-captivity zoo animal.

Even the Bush administration, which only a few months ago pooh-pooed any suggestion that manmade greenhouse gases were contributing to the pressures on the polar bear, now concedes that polar bears are in big trouble. The White House produced not even a grumble of dissent when its U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently proposed polar bears be listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

It's not necessarily a case of better late than never for President Bush, since his tardiness in recognizing the worldwide global warming phenomenon may make it impossible to prevent the looming disaster.

The human locusts who believe that unnatural consumption of natural resources is good and that conservation is evil, shamefully, have dedicated themselves to fighting a rear-guard action against sound science. The Wall Street Journal recently declared what is tantamount to a war on the polar bear - and others on the far right, including Fox News and the Competitive Enterprise Institute - quickly enlisted.

Disregarding that long litany of facts marshaled by the National Center for Atmospheric Research in its endangered species proposal, they had the unmitigated gall to suggest that the world's polar bear populations - far from diminishing - actually are increasing.

Since the Bush administration has shied from forcefully addressing the vital global warming issues for six years, the new Democratic Congress must confront the problem head-on and rectify the damage already done by the global warming deniers.

Congress needs to pass stiff new carbon taxes on all industries and products that emit carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases in any significant quantities. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., should push for a much stiffer version of the Kyoto

Protocol, the carbon-reducing treaty that President Bush scrapped after virtually all of the world's advanced nations had ratified it.

And they should ramrod through enabling legislation that allows local cities and counties to impose stiff penalties on individuals who despoil the environment. It's high time to put polar bears - and all other living things, for that matter - above corporate profits. Acting together, Americans once again can muster the leadership that inspired the world by example. We must do it today; tomorrow may never come.

Wayne Madsen is a contributing writer for the liberal Online Journal.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007:](#)

Revving up air district

Regulators must become more aggressive in struggle for clean air.

The people in charge of the Valley's air district like to brag about how fast their vehicle is moving, even as they struggle to get the thing out of second gear. It's time to pick up the pace of clean air efforts.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has presided over some improvements in air quality since its inception in the early 1990s, but most of its achievements have been driven by outside influences, usually lawsuits by environmentalists or legislation from Sacramento.

Take, for example, new regulations governing pollution from Valley agriculture. A number of them have been put in place, against strong opposition from the ag community. But it wasn't the air district that pushed for those changes, it was state Sen. Dean Florez, who managed to get a package of legislation out of Sacramento that has done a great deal to reduce pollution from ag sources.

Part of the air district's problem is structural. The makeup of the district's governing board is dominated by politicians who are largely beholden to special interests, many of whom are more interested in protecting a profitable status quo than they are in cleaner air.

There have been efforts to alter the makeup of the board by adding scientists and environmental voices to the panel, as well as permanent seats for representatives of the largest cities in the eight-county district. Those efforts have been fought tooth-and-nail by the county supervisors who dominate the governing board.

Sorting out motives is always a difficult task, but it has seemed for some time that most of the members of the governing board are more concerned with the appearance of progress than they are with bold measures to clean up our air.

The district's leaders have noted that they have no control over so-called "mobile sources," emissions from vehicles that cause the large majority of our smog and particulate pollution problems. That's true. Federal and state agencies are charged with regulating those emissions, and they haven't been go-getters themselves - especially the feds under the Bush administration.

But the air district has been noticeably reticent when it comes to agitating for changes that might actually help reduce vehicular pollution. The district has a pulpit - why isn't it being used to bully recalcitrant federal and state officials into action?

The clock is ticking for hundreds of thousands of Valley residents - many of them children exposed to a higher risk of asthma and other respiratory problems than their counterparts elsewhere. Air pollution causes 1,000 premature deaths annually in the Valley. Millions are lost in health care costs, crop damages and reduced productivity due to illnesses caused by our dirty air. Many people are fleeing, and others are not moving here because of the filthy air.

The status quo is killing people. It's time for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to shift to a higher gear. If it can't, perhaps we need to trade it in on a newer, more aggressively air-friendly model.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007:](#)

VALLEY'S TOP 10: 'American Idol' contestants

10. "Dreamgirls" performed by Elizabeth Egan and Margaret Mims

9. "I Wish It Would Rain" by the Fresno County Farm Bureau
8. "Fly Like An Eagle" by the Lemoore Naval Air Station Top Guns
7. "Takin' It To The Streets" by Police Chief Jerry Dyer
6. "Jump!" by Fresno State Basketball Coach Steve Cleveland
5. "Why Can't We Be Friends?" by Fresno County Supervisors Susan Anderson and Henry Perea
4. "On Broadway" by the senior class of Roosevelt School of the Arts
3. "Suspicious Minds" by The Bee's Editorial Board
2. "The Air That I Breathe" by Dean Florez
1. "Do I Make You Proud?" by Kevin Federline

[Editorial in the Contra Costa Times, Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007:](#)

Global warming not only reason for new energy policy

JUST HOW QUICKLY global climate is warming, how much human activity has contributed to higher temperatures and how damaging its effects will be have resulted in considerable political debate.

Even though the majority of climatologists agree that global temperatures are rising and will continue to do so at a faster pace, there are many people, political leaders and even some scientists who believe that climate change is not nearly the threat that many forecasters have warned about.

The most heated disagreements, at least in the political area, focus on what measure should be taken to combat global warming. There is a consensus among those who have studied climate change that the increase in so-called greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, is the prime cause of warming.

A lopsided majority of scientists say the best way to prevent possible cataclysmic global warming is to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide and methane that humans are putting in the atmosphere. To accomplish that goal, people are going to have to use less fossil fuel, which means burning less oil, coal and natural gas.

Those who argue against taking preventive measures say that it would be an economic disaster to cut way back on petroleum use and that the threat has been greatly exaggerated.

Some studies, often funded by oil companies, downplay global warming and its threats. On the other hand, there are some studies that rely on government grants that may be overestimating the rate and impact of rising temperatures.

Regardless of what one believes about the extent and threat posed by global warming, much of what scientists say we should do to prevent a climate change disaster should be done even if there were no global warming.

Essentially, that means using oil, natural gas and coal in a more efficient and responsible manner.

There are at least three reasons other than climate change why the United States, the world's largest user of fossil fuels, and the rest of the world should substantially reduce their consumption of petroleum products, which are the greatest source of greenhouse gasses.

ECONOMIC: Oil and natural gas are in limited supply. It makes no sense from an economic view to waste such valuable resources. We can make automobiles that get 40 or 50 miles per gallon, and should do so as quickly as possible. Such efficiency would lower prices, saving consumers money.

More efficient appliances and machinery along with better insulated homes and offices would save money as well as reduce fossil fuel use.

Also, developing more efficient motor vehicles and alternative energy sources would spur new industries and create jobs.

The challenge of using fossil fuels more efficiently and developing new energy technology should be seen as a boon to the economy, not a threat.

ENVIRONMENTAL: Using less oil, natural gas and coal will result in cleaner air and water. Greater use of current technology, such as nuclear power and hydropower, would result in far less pollution.

The development of new sources of energy, including biodiesel, solar, tidal power and hydrogen produced by non-fossil fuels would greatly reduce air pollution. There also should be far more effort in developing fusion power, the holy grail of clean energy.

POLITICAL: Much of the petroleum we rely on comes from the Mideast, one of the most politically volatile regions of the world.

Our dependence on foreign sources for more than 60 percent of our oil puts us in a vulnerable position and poses a threat more immediate than global warming.

Reducing the world's dependence on Mideast oil would go a long way toward preventing and defusing political conflicts that already have cost tens of thousands of lives.

If it takes the threat of a global warming catastrophe to motivate nations to use fossil fuels more efficiently and develop nonpolluting sources of energy so be it. But there are plenty of other reasons why we need to change the way we produce and use energy.

[Guest Commentary *Staley*The Washington Post, Jan. 28, 2007:](#)

5 Myths About Suburbia and Our Car-Happy Culture

By Ted Balaker and Sam

They don't rate up there with cancer and al-Qaeda -- at least not yet -- but suburban sprawl and automobiles are rapidly acquiring a reputation as scourges of modern American society. Sprawl, goes the typical indictment, devours open space, exacerbates global warming and causes pollution, social alienation and even obesity. And cars are the evil co-conspirator -- the driving force, so to speak, behind sprawl.

Yet the anti-suburbs culture has also fostered many myths about sprawl and driving, a few of which deserve to be reconsidered:

1. Americans are addicted to driving.

Actually, Americans aren't addicted to their cars any more than office workers are addicted to their computers. Both items are merely tools that allow people to accomplish tasks faster and more conveniently. The New York metropolitan area is home to the nation's most extensive transit system, yet even there it takes transit riders about twice as long as drivers to get to work.

In 1930, the interstate highway system and the rise of suburbia were still decades away, and yet car ownership was already widespread, with three in four households having an automobile. Look at any U.S. city and the car is the dominant mode of travel.

Some claim that Europeans have developed an enlightened alternative. Americans return from London and Paris and tell their friends that everyone gets around by transit. But tourists tend to confine themselves to the central cities. Europeans may enjoy top-notch transit and endure gasoline that costs \$5 per gallon, but in fact they don't drive much less than we do. In the United States, automobiles account for about 88 percent of travel. In Europe, the figure is about 78 percent. And Europeans are gaining on us.

The key factor that affects driving habits isn't population density, public transit availability, gasoline taxes or even different attitudes. It's wealth. Europe and the United States are relatively wealthy, but American incomes are 15 to 40 percent higher than those in Western Europe. And as nations such as China and India become wealthier, the portion of their populations that drive cars will grow.

2. Public transit can reduce traffic congestion.

Transit has been on the slide for well more than half a century. Even though spending on public transportation has ballooned to more than seven times its 1960s levels, the percentage of people who use it to get to work fell 63 percent from 1960 to 2000 and now stands at just under 5 percent nationwide. Transit is also decreasing in Europe, down to 16 percent in 2000.

Like auto use, suburbanization is driven by wealth. Workers once left the fields to find better lives in the cities. Today more and more have decided that they can do so in the suburbs. Indeed, commuters are now increasingly likely to travel from one suburb to another or embark upon "reverse" commutes (from

the city to the suburbs). Also, most American commuters (52 percent) do not go directly to and from work but stop along the way to pick up kids, drop off dry cleaning, buy a latte or complete some other errand.

We have to be realistic about what transit can accomplish. Suppose we could not only reverse transit's long slide but also triple the size of the nation's transit system and fill it with riders. Transportation guru Anthony Downs of the Brookings Institution notes that this enormous feat would be "extremely costly" and, even if it could be done, would not "notably reduce" rush-hour congestion, primarily because transit would continue to account for only a small percentage of commuting trips.

But public transit still has an important role. Millions of Americans rely on it as a primary means of transportation. Transit agencies should focus on serving those who need transit the most: the poor and the handicapped. They should also seek out the niches where they can be most useful, such as express bus service for commuters and high-volume local routes.

Many officials say we should reconfigure the landscape -- pack people in more tightly -- to make it fit better with a transit-oriented lifestyle. But that would mean increasing density in existing developments by bulldozing the low-density neighborhoods that countless families call home. Single-family houses, malls and shops would have to make way for a stacked-up style of living that most don't want. And even then the best-case scenario would be replicating New York, where only one in four commuters uses mass transit.

3. We can cut air pollution only if we stop driving.

Polls often show that Americans think that air quality is deteriorating. Yet air is getting much cleaner. We miss it because, while we see more people and more cars, we easily overlook the success of air-quality legislation and new technologies. In April 2004, the Environmental Protection Agency reported that 474 counties in 31 states violated the Clean Air Act. But that doesn't mean that the air is dirtier. The widely publicized failing air-quality grades were a result of the EPA's adoption of tougher standards.

Air quality has been improving for a long time. More stringent regulations and better technology have allowed us to achieve what was previously unthinkable: driving more and getting cleaner. Since 1970, driving -- total vehicle miles traveled -- has increased 155 percent, and yet the EPA reports a dramatic decrease in every major pollutant it measures. Although driving is increasing by 1 to 3 percent each year, average vehicle emissions are dropping about 10 percent annually. Pollution will wane even more as motorists continue to replace older, dirtier cars with newer, cleaner models.

4. We're paving over America.

How much of the United States is developed? Twenty-five percent? Fifty? Seventy-five? How about 5.4 percent? That's the Census Bureau's figure. And even much of that is not exactly crowded: The bureau says that an area is "developed" when it has 30 or more people per square mile.

But most people do live in developed areas, so it's easy to get the impression that humans have trampled nature. One need only take a cross-country flight and look down, however, to realize that our nation is mostly open space. And there are signs that Mother Nature is gaining ground. After furious tree chopping during America's early years, forests have made a comeback. The U.S. Forest Service notes that the "total area of forests has been fairly stable since about 1920." Agricultural innovations have a lot to do with this. Farmers can raise more on less land.

Yes, American houses are getting bigger. From 1970 to 2000, the average size ballooned from 1,500 square feet to 2,260. But this hardly means we're gobbling up ever more land. U.S. homeowners are using land more efficiently. Between 1970 and 2000, the average lot size shrank from 14,000 square feet to 10,000.

In truth, housing in this country takes up less space than most people realize. If the nation were divided into four-person households and each household had an acre, everyone would fit in an area half the size of Texas. The United States is not coming anywhere close to becoming an "Asphalt Nation," to use the title of a book by Jane Holtz Kay.

5. We can't deal with global warming unless we stop driving.

What should be done about global warming? The Kyoto Protocol seeks to get the world to agree to burn less fossil fuel and emit less carbon dioxide, and much of that involves driving less. But even disregarding the treaty's economic costs, Kyoto's environmental impact would be slight. Tom M.L. Wigley, chief scientist at the U.S. Center for Atmospheric Research, calculates that even if every nation met its obligation to reduce greenhouse gas, the Earth would be only .07 degrees centigrade cooler by 2050.

Wigley favors a much more stringent plan than Kyoto, but such restrictions would severely restrict economic growth, particularly in the developing world. Nations such as China and India were excluded from the Kyoto Protocol; yet if we're serious about reversing global warming by driving less, the developing world will have to be included.

The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes that during the 20th century the Earth's temperature rose by 0.6 degrees centigrade and -- depending on which of the many climate models turn out to be closest to reality -- it expects the temperature to rise 1.4 to 5.8 degrees by 2100.

What does the IPCC think the effects of global warming may be? Flooding may increase. Infectious diseases may spread. Heat-related illness and death may increase. Yet as the IPCC notes repeatedly, the severity of such outcomes is enormously uncertain.

On the other hand, there's great certainty regarding who would be hurt the most: poor people in developing nations, especially those who lack clean, piped water and are thus vulnerable to waterborne disease. The IPCC points out that the quality of housing in those countries is important because simple measures such as adding screens to windows can help prevent diseases (including malaria, dengue and yellow fever) from entering homes. Fragile transportation systems can also frustrate disaster recovery efforts, as medical personnel are often unable to reach people trapped in flooded areas.

Two ways of dealing with global warming emerge. A more stringent version of Kyoto could be crafted to chase the unprecedented goal of trying to cool the atmosphere of the entire planet. Yet if such efforts resulted in lower economic growth, low-income populations in the United States and developing countries would be less able to protect themselves from the ill effects of extreme heat or other kinds of severe weather.

Alternatively, the focus could be on preventing the negative effects -- the disease and death -- that global warming might bring. Each year malaria kills 1 million to 3 million people, and one-third of the world's population is infected with water- or soil-borne parasitic diseases. It may well be that dealing with global warming by building resilience against its possible effects is more productive -- and more realistic -- than trying to solve the problem by driving our automobiles less.

Ted Balaker and Sam Staley are coauthors of "The Road More Traveled: Why the Congestion Crisis Matters More Than You Think, and What We Can Do About It" (Rowman & Littlefield).

Note: [The following clip in Spanish discusses the first statewide ban on toxic dry-cleaning chemical by the California Air Resources Board.](#)

Golpe al bolsillo de las tintorerías

Prohíben en California el uso de sustancia química tóxica que usan para limpiar la ropa; estos negocios se verán obligados a comprar nueva y costosa maquinaria

Samantha Young, AP

La Opinión, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

SACRAMENTO.- Cuando una prueba del suelo indicó que una posible sustancia química cancerígena había penetrado el terreno debajo de su tintorería, la limpieza le costó 200 mil dólares a Thomas De Pippo.

Después de eso, De Pippo comenzó a usar un sistema de "limpieza húmeda", que protege el medio ambiente en vez de usar el solvente tóxico percloroetileno.

El jueves, el mercado de este tipo de tecnología "ambientalista" recibió un impulso cuando California promulgó la primera prohibición a nivel estatal al uso del percloroetileno para el año 2023.

"Me costó los ahorros de toda una vida, mi matrimonio", afirma De Pippo sobre la limpieza de su tintorería, Julie's Cleaners, en el condado de Orange".

De Pippo es uno de los casos entre las miles de tintorerías del país que están cambiando a opciones en favor del medio ambiente.

La regulación de la Junta de Recursos del Aire de California comenzará a suprimir paulatinamente el uso de percloroetileno el año próximo, prohibiendo a las tintorerías comprar máquinas que dependan del solvente que las autoridades estatales han señalado causa varios tipos de cáncer.

Las 3,400 tintorerías del estado que lo usan actualmente deben deshacerse de las máquinas que tengan más de 15 años de antigüedad para julio de 2010.

"Ésa es la tendencia del futuro, no elementos tóxicos que contaminen", dijo Annette Kondo, portavoz de la Coalición de Aire Limpio, un grupo ambientalista de California.

"Creemos que esto tendrá un efecto en los demás estados del país".

Los defensores del medio ambiente y de la salud recibieron con agrado la nueva reglamentación, aunque habían urgido a la junta a que acelerara la prohibición del químico debido a considerarlo un posible cancerígeno. El solvente ha contaminado uno de cada 10 pozos de agua en California.

Pero los propietarios de las tintorerías dicen que la prohibición amenaza con terminar con sus negocios, dado que los métodos alternativos no están probados y son más costosos. Se calcula que el 70% de las tintorerías del estado usa el solvente.

"Podría provocar el cierre de algunas empresas familiares, las tintorerías pequeñas que no pueden costear los gastos", dijo Bob Blackburn, presidente de la Asociación de Tintorerías de California.

El costo de la conversión podría ser considerable para las tintorerías, de las cuales el 85% tiene un pequeño margen de rentabilidad. Sustituir una máquina que usa percloroetileno puede costar entre 41,500 y 175 mil dólares.

La junta calcula que el gasto adicional en nuevos equipos se verá reflejado en un aumento de 1.20 a 1.60 dólares en una factura de 15 dólares del cliente.

Todavía se discute cuál sería la alternativa a permitirse en California. Las tintorerías que cambiaron a otros sistemas intentaron convencer a la junta para que se inclinara por su preferencia.

Si bien la junta no apoyó ningún sustituto, la regulación daría a las tintorerías un incentivo de 10 mil dólares para comprar una máquina con un sistema de limpieza húmeda, que usa dióxido de carbono.

Los ambientalistas urgieron a la junta a prohibir la alternativa más común que usa hidrocarburos. Los críticos dijeron que eso sólo aumentaría la contaminación del ozono.

La votación de la junta continúa reflejando medidas similares a la tomada hace cinco años por la Oficina de Control de la Calidad del Aire (AQMD) de la Costa Sur en el Sur de California. Este organismo se convirtió en el primer ente regulador del país en prohibir el percloroetileno, forzando a más de dos mil tintorerías a suprimir el uso del químico para el año 2020.

El año pasado, la Oficina del Medio Ambiente (EPA) de EU prohibió el uso del químico en las tintorerías ubicadas en edificios residenciales de todo el país para el año 2020. Pero esas empresas representan una pequeña fracción de las tintorerías del país, dijo Jon Meijer, vicepresidente del International Fabricare Institute, una asociación de la industria con sede en Maryland.

California declaró al percloroetileno como sustancia química tóxica en 1991. Las autoridades estatales de la salud informaron a la junta el jueves que puede causar cáncer de esófago, linfoma, cáncer en el cuello del útero y cáncer de vejiga. El solvente, que tiene un olor fuerte y dulce, también puede afectar el sistema nervioso. Muchos propietarios de tintorerías cuestionan estas afirmaciones.