

Time, money needed for air

Valley pollution agency says it will take an extra 11 years, \$3b to meet cleanup goal.

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

The Valley's air pollution agency on Monday said it will miss a federal deadline to clean up the air by 2012 and needs another 11 years - plus \$3 billion - to meet the goal.

The need for a lengthy deadline extension was revealed as the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District released its newest cleanup plan, following months of preparation and public workshops.

An extension would allow the Valley to avoid sanctions, which include freezing more than \$2 billion of federal road-building money for the Valley, local air officials said.

They added that they also would need about \$3 billion over the next 16 years to help pay for new, cleaner-running cars, trucks and other types of engines. Vehicles produce 80% of smog-causing pollutants targeted in the plan.

The 700-page document includes many new rules, such as a requirement for larger businesses to set up employee carpools or allow more workers to do their jobs from home.

The district estimates it would need to remove 75% of the Valley's smog-making pollution to attain the goal.

"Even if money were no object - if we bought everyone a new car, a new truck, a new engine - it is still physically impossible to get the pollution reductions we need by 2012," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "What we're proposing is the fastest possible way to do it."

The public will have opportunities to comment on the document, beginning with a workshop at 9 a.m. Feb. 8 at the district's headquarters, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. in Fresno.

The plan also must be approved by the district board and the state Air Resources Board before going to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by June 15.

Air-quality activists are disappointed in the new plan, saying they would support additional government funding if the cleanup met an earlier deadline than 2023.

"I'm very worried about people living with asthma," said Liza Bolaños, coordinator of the Fresno-based Central Valley Air Quality Coalition. "People will have to suffer longer."

To extend the cleanup deadline to 2023, the district board must ask to be placed in the worst-offender category for smog. Only one other place in the country qualifies for the category - the Los Angeles-area South Coast Air Basin. The Valley air district was granted the worst-offender category several years ago for a different smog standard that's no longer in use.

If the deadline is not extended, the Valley risks sanctions for an inadequate plan to clean the air by 2012, officials said.

In addition to withholding the \$2 billion of road-building money, federal authorities could levy higher costs on new and expanding businesses in the area. Federal authorities also could take over the Valley's air cleanup plan.

Such sanctions have been rarely invoked around the country. However, new and expanding Valley businesses have briefly been affected by additional fees in the past.

A deadline extension would not slow down the cleanup, said Sadredin, who added that he would avoid asking for the delay if he possibly could. He said 50% of the Valley should be breathing healthy air by 2015, and 90% by 2020.

The remaining 10% is in Arvin, downwind of the smoggy Bakersfield metropolitan area, and in northwest Fresno, which gets a big dose of afternoon pollution carried from local freeways on swirling wind, officials said.

A large part of the pollution reduction hinges on stricter fuel standards and cleaner-running engines. But the public needs help in buying the new vehicles, air officials said.

The plan calls for using \$188 million in public funds each year to help businesses, local agencies and others to pay for cleaner-running vehicles. Officials hope to get \$100 million a year from the federal government and make up the rest from developer fees, vehicle registration surcharges and a state engine-replacement program.

Air agency to miss deadline

By MARK GROSSI - THE FRESNO BEE and MICHAEL G. MOONEY - BEE STAFF WRITER

In the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

FRESNO — The valley's air pollution agency on Monday said it will miss a federal deadline to clean up the air by 2012 and needs 11 more years — plus \$3 billion — to meet the goal.

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"Even if money were no object — if we bought everyone a new car, a new truck, a new engine — it is still physically impossible to get the pollution reductions we need by 2012," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "What we're proposing is the fastest possible way to do it."

District officials said the plan was designed to reduce the emissions that create ozone, the main ingredient of smog.

Those same officials say the draft ozone plan, combined with air-quality improvements expected from next year's plan to reduce fine particulates, will result in 460 fewer premature deaths throughout the valley.

Other health benefits, according to the district, include 260 fewer hospital admissions, 3,000 fewer lost workdays, 23,300 fewer asthma attacks and 3,230 fewer cases of acute bronchitis in children.

Manual Cunha, president of the Nisei Farmers League, said Monday that while he supports the plan's goal, it likely will be very costly to achieve.

"My industry wants to move forward," Cunha said, to continue to feed the country. I support the plan, but with a caveat: We will need funding help."

Cunha said it is very expensive for farmers to go out and buy new equipment, such as tractors and other necessary machinery. He also noted that low-emission diesel tractor motors still are being developed and won't be available until 2015.

In a statement released Monday, district officials said they are seeking \$100 million per year in federal funding and \$60 million per year in state funding until attainment is reached.

The plan contains an expenditure plan that includes funding for clean irrigation pumps, retirement of gross polluting vehicles, public and private fleet turnover, school bus replacement, agricultural equipment, and alternative transportation.

The plan unveiled Monday was developed in response to the federal Environmental Protection Agency's new standard limiting ozone concentrations averaged over eight-hour periods. Under the old federal standard, ozone concentrations were averaged over a one-hour period.

Steve Madison, executive officer of the Building Industry Association of Central California, said he wasn't expecting any surprises in the new plan.

Madison's group already is challenging the air district's indirect source rule in court, contending that the building industry is being asked to pay a disproportionate share for pollution caused by motor vehicles, among other things.

In the valley, ozone largely is a summertime problem, but it's not emitted directly from vehicle tailpipes or smokestacks.

Instead, ozone results from a chemical reaction that takes place in the atmosphere — a reaction fed by nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, sunlight and high temperatures.

Nitrogen oxides are a byproduct of combustion.

Volatile organic compounds include gasoline, as well as alcohols and solvents.

The problem is exacerbated by the valley's geography — mountains to the east, south and west.

When combined with seasonal temperature inversions (which act like a lid and hold pollutants in the air rather than letting them escape) and an exploding population, the result is one of the most severe ozone problems in the nation.

While Los Angeles registers higher peak ozone levels, the valley experiences more days with unhealthy levels.

The public will have opportunities to comment on the document, beginning with a workshop at 9 a.m. Feb. 8 at the district's headquarters, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. in Fresno.

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Air-quality activists are disappointed in the new plan, saying they would support additional government funding if the cleanup met an earlier deadline than 2023.

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If the deadline is not extended, the valley risks sanctions for an inadequate plan to clean the air by 2012, officials said.

On the Net: Copies of the draft "2007 Ozone Plan" are available online at www.valleyair.org.

New pollution plan "will not be cheap," air district says

From The Modesto Bee Newsroom - BEE STAFF REPORTS

Modesto Bee, Monday, Jan. 29, 2007, 9:25 AM

Air district officials are about to release a plan to cut smog in the valley, and they estimate the cost at \$188 million a year in "incentive funding" alone.

Officials acknowledge that the plan carries "a considerable expense to valley businesses."

"This plan is designed to clean the valley's air as expeditiously as possible," district executive director Seyed Sadredin said in a news release. "It will not happen overnight and it will not be cheap."

The draft "2007 Ozone Plan" aims to reduce emissions that create ozone, the main ingredient of smog, which is mostly a summertime problem in the valley. The draft will be released this afternoon, after months of extensive public workshops and comments.

This is the first plan developed under new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards that limits ozone concentrations averaged over eight-hour periods.

Previous regulations looked at pollution over shorter periods of time.

Recommendations in the draft include:

- New state and federal standards for emissions from cars, trucks and locomotives.
- Requiring employers of a certain size to establish carpool and alternative transportation programs.
- Further regulations on industrial, commercial and agricultural operations.
- Public funding to help the private sector pay for replacing and retrofitting high-polluting engines.

Watch The Bee and modbee.com for continuing coverage.

Air regulators call for 2023 deadline

Valley officials seek 10-year extension on cuts in emissions to meet federal ozone standards

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

All the money in the world couldn't solve the valley's smog problem and to even get close will require dramatic efforts and a lot more time, air regulators said Monday.

Ten more years to be precise.

Regulators have released a new draft plan that calls for extending the 2013 deadline to meet a federal air standard to 2023. The plan also calls for \$188 million a year in funding and a slew of changes that could affect everything from the way we get to work to the amount we pay for municipal services.

"It won't be cheap and it won't happen overnight," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

A public hearing on the new draft will be held at 9 a.m. on Feb. 8 at the district's Bakersfield office. The district's governing board is set to adopt the plan in April. The plan then gets forwarded on for state and federal approval. The plan must be submitted to the federal government in June or the valley could face a moratorium on new businesses and potentially lose \$2 billion in highway funding.

To meet the federal standard, the valley must reduce ozone-causing emissions by 75 percent. Ozone is the main ingredient in smog and is known to aggravate lung disorders. A prominent study suggests that the health impacts of poor air quality in the valley costs \$3 billion each year and causes 460 premature deaths and 3,000 days of lost work.

While the health impacts are costly, the technology to make emission reductions sooner than 2023 simply isn't available yet, Sadredin said.

"Even if money were no object, the technology today and in the next few years is not enough to get us where we need to be," he said. "It's physically impossible to get the reductions we need by (2013)."

Even taking all the passenger cars in the valley off the road wouldn't reduce emissions enough to meet the federal standard, according to the district's research.

To meet the goal by 2023, the plan calls for an 85 percent reduction in emissions through stricter regulations. The other 15 percent would come through technological advancements and incentive funding to upgrade pollution control equipment and encourage fleet turnover.

Since the main stationary sources in the valley have been regulated nearly to the extent possible, Sadredin said, additional controls must reach into new areas.

"I guess the basic message here is that we need to go beyond the traditional strategies we've pursued in the past," he said. "Given the enormity of the problem we face, we need to expand into all other areas with new and innovative concepts."

Some of the ideas in the plan include:

- Lowering thresholds so that more businesses fall under existing regulations. For example, the size of dairies that come under regulation might be dropped from 1,000 cows or more to 500.
- Increasing required emissions reductions. The plan mentions the possibility of strengthening the already controversial indirect source rule, which requires developers to reduce by a certain percent the pollution caused by new development or pay a mitigation fee. The amount they must reduce may increase.
- Requiring companies with 50 to 100 or more employees to institute measures that encourage alternate means of transportation, like telecommuting, carpooling or mass transit.
- Broadening the Spare the Air program to include businesses and possibly making some voluntary actions compulsory. (Spare the Air discourages unnecessary use of gas and electricity by the public when air quality is bad.)
- Encouraging cities and towns in the valley to adopt a green contracting ordinance, under which they would give preferential treatment to contractors, like garbage haulers, that use cleaner vehicles. This move would likely drive up the cost of those services.

When it comes to tackling the biggest source of polluting emissions -- trucks and cars -- financial incentives will be key, Sadredin said. That's where the \$188 million a year in additional state and federal funding will play a crucial role.

The money would be used primarily to encourage trucking companies and consumers to buy newer, cleaner vehicles. The district might offer programs that would pay one-third to half the cost of replacing a diesel truck with something newer and cleaner. Another program may offer owners of the most polluting passenger cars \$3,000 to \$5,000 toward a newer vehicle.

With this level of incentive funding, 90 percent of the valley is estimated to reach attainment by 2020. Without this funding, only 65 percent would reach attainment by then, according to air district models.

Finding that money will be tough, but the district has already begun soliciting federal officials, Sadredin said.

The district also plans to ask the state for 25 percent of the \$1 billion in transportation funding expected to come from the recently-passed Proposition 1B, which aims to upgrade the transportation system and reduce air pollution.

According to Sadredin, 28 percent of the total vehicle miles travelled by trucks in the state are in the San Joaquin Valley. Of that, 12 percent just travel through and contribute nothing to the local economy.

"The state really owes the valley some mitigation," Sadredin said.

Highlights of the plan

San Joaquin Valley air district released a new version of a plan Monday to reduce ozone in the valley and comply with federal air standards. Here's several important details from the 700-page document:

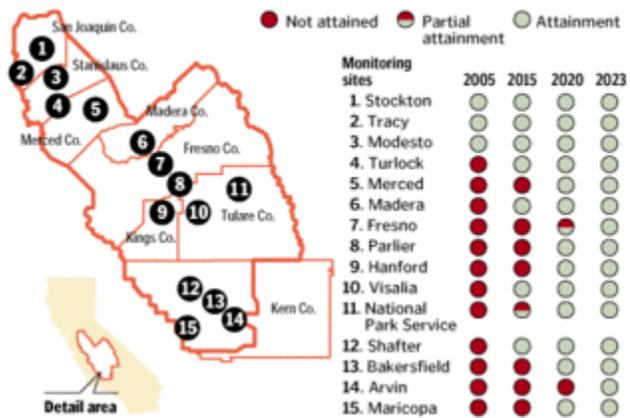
- The valley will need 10 additional years, 19 new or amended air regulations and \$188 million a year to meet federal standards for ozone, the main ingredient in smog. The current deadline set by the federal government is 2013. The plan released Monday calls for extending that deadline to 2023.
- Under the plan, 50 percent of the valley could meet the federal standard by 2015 and 90 percent would reach it by 2020. Only areas in northwest Fresno and east of Arvin would not to reach compliance until 2023.

- Without the \$188 million in incentive funding, only 35 percent of the valley would reach attainment by 2015 and 65 percent by 2020. The money would be used to encourage the purchase of newer, cleaner vehicles. Mobile sources make up nearly 80 percent of ozone-causing emissions.
- A moratorium on businesses like dairies and manufacturing could take affect if the region fails to submit the plan to the federal government. Not doing so could also lead to the loss of \$2 billion in highway funds.

A copy of the plan is available at www.valleyair.org.

San Joaquin Valley's ozone attainment plan

A plan released by the local air district Monday calls for the entire valley to reach attainment for a federal ozone standard by 2023. Under that plan, 50 percent of the valley would meet the standard by 2015 and 90 percent would meet it by 2020.



Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

THE CALIFORNIAN

Plan may reduce smog

Officials hope incentives aimed at motorists will help meet federal standards by 2015

By Ian Holmes, For The Times-Delta

Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

FRESNO — San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials hope to dangle \$188 million worth of incentives in front of polluters as part of a revised smog reduction plan presented Monday. The incentives are particularly aimed at reducing pollution from mobile polluters—cars, trucks and motorcycles.

Air district executive director Seyed Sadredin said the goal is to accelerate ozone reduction. If the incentives work, 50 percent of the Valley's population will live in areas that meet the Environmental Protection Agency's eight-hour ozone health standard by 2015 and 90 percent of the Valley's population will join them by 2020.

Ozone, the main ingredient of smog in the summer, is a major way of measuring air pollution. The gas is created by the combination of oxides of nitrogen, volatile organic compounds and sunlight.

Mobile sources including cars, motorcycles and trucks accounted for 80 percent of nitrogen oxide emissions in 2005, Sadredin said.

"All Valley residents regardless of where they live will see measurable improvements in air quality quickly and steadily over time," Sadredin said.

The incentives are just part of a \$7.5 billion plan to clean up the Valley's air.

"Some call it an ambitious level of funding, some call it unrealistic, but we think the Valley can make a good case for getting its fair share," Sadredin said.

Sadredin said Proposition 1B, passed by California voters in November, includes \$1 billion dollars for air quality. Air district officials believe the Valley deserves 25 percent of that money.

"Our justification is that 28 percent of the vehicle miles traveled by trucks in the state happen in the San Joaquin Valley and of that 28 percent, 12 percent of it is just passed through traffic—trucks that just go from one end of the Valley to the other end without any economic contribution to the Valley," Sadredin said.

Sadredin said the Valley has access to \$40 million from local and state funding sources, including mitigation fees charged to developers, a \$7 per vehicle Department of Motor Vehicles registration fee surcharge, and \$10 million from the Carl Moyer program. Sadredin added that meetings with Senators Diane Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and the Valley's congressional delegation resulted in commitments of federal money.

"We are optimistic that they are with us, to go to battle for us — for the Valley — to get us about \$100 million per year from federal funding," Sadredin said. "We are looking for the rest to come from the state."

The revised ozone reduction plan has two parts, Sadredin said, a regulatory component and an incentive component. The regulatory measures, new rules and regulations on businesses and mobile sources in the Valley, will provide 85 percent of the necessary reductions. But regulations alone are not sufficient to reduce the Valley's air pollution to required standards, Sadredin said. The incentive money called for in the plan would be used for such improvements as clean farm-irrigation pumps and agricultural equipment and public and private fleet turnover.

"We are hoping to expend in excess of \$2 million a year, for instance, to replace vehicles, the gross polluting vehicles that people in the Valley with low economic means have to drive now," Sadredin said, "replace them with newer vehicles that reduce emissions."

Controlling emissions from mobile and stationary sources with incentive money and regulations is part of the plan's major goal, improving the health of the Valley's residents, Sadredin said.

"If this plan is implemented as we are proposing there will be major reductions in air pollution-related environmental impacts that the Valley residents suffer," Sadredin said.

The health benefits will include 460 fewer premature deaths, 23,300 fewer asthma attacks, 188,000 fewer lost school days and 3,000 fewer lost work days, according to the air district's 2007 Ozone Plan.

"And if you want to look at it from a purely economic perspective," Sadredin said, "if we are able to reduce the pollution as we have proposed here, the cost of health care that goes with these adverse health impacts is about \$3 billion per year."

Turning over old stove, fireplace worth up to \$800

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

Need a good reason to upgrade your wood stove or fireplace? How about free money?

Homeowners who want to replace their older stove or fireplace with a new, less-polluting unit can get vouchers and rebates of up to \$800 starting Feb. 1.

The cost of a new unit generally runs from about \$1,500 to \$4,500, according to retailers and manufacturers.

"This is a significant savings for local residents seeking to change out their older devices," said Brenda Turner, spokeswoman for San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The program is part of the district's ongoing effort to improve air quality. Wood smoke contributes to particulate matter pollution, a wintertime problem in the San Joaquin Valley. Particulates are microscopic specs about one-tenth the width of a human hair. They can lodge deep in the lungs and contribute to heart and lung damage and premature death.

Old models of wood stoves and fireplaces create as much as 60 to 90 grams of particulates per hour, whereas newer models create 7 grams or less, according to Steve McCarty, a technical specialist with Fireplace Products International, a stove and insert manufacturer.

Pellet and biomass stoves -- which burn anything from wood to rye grass and corn -- are even cleaner, putting out less than 1 gram of particulates per hour.

Natural gas inserts create no particulate pollution.

As part of the program, old stoves will be recycled at Golden State Metals on East Brundage Lane. At the facility, the units will be fed through a shredder and the resulting hand-size scraps will eventually be melted and used in new products like rebar, car parts and even washers and dryers.

Applications for vouchers are available on the air district's Web site, www.valleyair.org, or at its office, 2700 M St., suite 275, Bakersfield.

Here's what's being offered:

- \$25 voucher for gas logs
- \$250 voucher for new wood or pellet stoves or \$350 voucher for natural gas or propane insert. In addition, select local retailers are offering \$75 discounts on new units. Some manufacturers are also offering discounts ranging from \$75 to \$300.

Air district to pay for your new fireplace

Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, Jan. 26, 2007

A new program is offering an incentive for Valley residents to replace their old wood-burning stoves and fireplace inserts for cleaner, more efficient models.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's Burn Cleaner Fireplace and Wood Stove Change-out program starts Feb. 1. Qualifying people can get money if they agree to replace their wood-burning stoves and inserts.

Applications for the program will be available Feb. 1 on the Valley Air District's Web site, www.valleyair.org, and at their three Valley locations:

- 4800 Enterprise Way, Modesto
- 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno
- 2700 M Street, Suite 275, Bakersfield.

Use of fireplaces discouraged today

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

People in Stanislaus County are asked to refrain from using fireplaces and older wood stoves today because of concerns about air quality. Forecasters say the air will be unhealthy for sensitive people — children, older adults and those with chronic breathing problems. The "burning discouraged" advisory comes from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. On the Net: www.valleyair.org.

Ag chief visits valley Thursday

By Michael Doyle — Bee Washington Bureau
Modesto Bee, Tuesday, January 30, 2007

WASHINGTON — The farm bill debate will escalate in the San Joaquin Valley this week, with the Modesto appearance of Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns.

Johanns is bringing the Bush administration's farm bill campaign to the Stanislaus County Agricultural Center. The hourlong event starts at 8a.m. Thursday, but the ensuing conversation could last much longer.

"I certainly believe it will be a tremendous opportunity for farmers in the Central Valley, since he's not from here," said Wayne Zipser, executive manager of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau.

A former Nebraska governor, Johanns lacks the valley touch of his predecessor, Modesto native Ann Veneman. His 2005 Senate confirmation hearing paid scant attention to the specialty crops — fruits and vegetables — for which the Central Valley is known.

That could change, as Johanns will be in the valley one day after unveiling the administration's farm bill proposal.

"I can't imagine he's going to come to Modesto to speak ill of specialty crops; that would be suicide," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced. "I can only imagine he's going to make a positive announcement."

The Bush administration's proposal, being released Wednesday, follows Agriculture Department hearings in 48 states. Johanns has hinted that fruits and vegetables will reap more dollars than in years' past.

"I believe the next farm bill can do a better job of more evenly distributing support," Johanns acknowledged earlier this month in a speech before the American Farm Bureau Federation. "For instance, we can better assist nonsubsidized producers through research, conservation, rural development and market development."

Until now, specialty crops have harvested federal money primarily from ventures such as the Market Access Program. This year, \$100 million will help groups such as the California Kiwifruit Commission, the California Table Grape Commission and the California Walnut Commission. The money will pay for ads and overseas promotions.

Bill wants more for specialties

By contrast, California growers of cotton, rice, wheat and corn received \$321 million in federal payments in 2004, according to data compiled by the Environmental Working Group. Nationwide, subsidies for the four commodities exceeded \$14 billion last year.

Cardoza, chairman of the House subcommittee handling fruits and vegetables, expects to reintroduce after Presidents Day an ambitious farm bill proposal that includes far greater specialty crop spending.

"The big question is how we're going to do our new initiatives while still maintaining existing programs," Cardoza said, adding that budget-balancing rules will further complicate the challenge.

A key Cardoza staffer and Turlock resident, attorney Dee Dee Moosekian, began working more than a year ago on crafting the House's specialty crop alternatives with groups including Environmental Defense, Western Growers Association and American Farmland Trust.

Their plan includes goals such as quadrupling to \$100 million the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. This pays farmers for conservation measures that can accomplish goals such as cutting air pollution.

In another bid to aid specialty crop growers, the coalition wants to double to 5 million acres the amount of land conserved through the Wetlands Reserve Program. Currently, 6,264 acres in California are conserved through the program.

"We sat down with a handful of ag representatives and environmental representatives and we came to a consensus," said Kathryn Phillips, a Sacramento-based Environmental Defense activist who began the meetings with Moosekian.

The Bush administration's farm bill proposal likewise arose after a series of meetings that incited some 4,000 public comments.

A closely held secret that caught even local congressional offices by surprise Monday, Johanns' Modesto visit is part of several visits he will make across the nation, including in Iowa, Tennessee and Mississippi.

Farmers in those states rely more heavily on traditional crop subsidies, and they could resist the push for specialty crop assistance if they fear it would cut into their payments. Iowa farmers, for instance, raked in more than \$2.2 billion in subsidies last year.

Leaders still press for high speed rail Visalia mayor weighs in on governor's advice

By Jake Henshaw, Sacramento Bureau
Visalia Times-Delta, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

SACRAMENTO — Despite an occasional frustrated outburst, the state High Speed Rail Authority outlined a determined but non-confrontational strategy Monday to press for survival of a state bullet train.

The agency is trying to counter recommendations by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to give it only a fraction of its proposed budget next year and to drop permanently a \$10 billion bond for the train from the ballot.

"That's not good news for high speed rail," Visalia Mayor Jesus Gamboa said of the governor's proposals after testifying in favor of the train that would run through the San Joaquin Valley.

HSRA board member Rod Diridon had a stronger reaction about the plan to jettison the bond to fund the first phase of the train linking Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area.

"That is obnoxious," he said.

Bond still on ballot

HSRA chairman Quentin Kopp, however, stressed that the bond is on the November 2008 ballot and that it would take a two-thirds vote of the Assembly and the Senate to remove it.

"I have not talked to any legislator who wants it otherwise [than on the ballot]," Kopp said. "I proceed on the premise that the bond issue will be presented to voters in 2008."

Gamboa agreed that it will be politically difficult to take the bond off the ballot: "That's going to be a hard sell."

But Kopp agreed that the board faces a critical year to keep momentum — including six contracts already signed — going to get construction on the first 420-mile leg of the train underway in 2009.

The bullet train is projected to carry passengers at speeds of more than 200 mph in what supporters have argued is an alternative way to reduce highway congestion and air pollution.

But the governor already is proposing another \$40 billion bond package for other purposes over the next couple of elections, and his budget director, Mike Genest, has said a bullet train is not ready to go now and is "not the highest priority."

"High speed rail is not going to solve our congestion problems today," Genest said in early January. "It may be a key in the future and if so, we need to plan for that."

The board approved a motion directing its staff to seek the full \$103 million budget it wants, including \$52 million for some design and environmental work that Kopp said is essential to keep the project on schedule.

The board also directed staff to develop what Kopp called an "action plan" for building support, but the chairman deflected a proposal to formally declare it's support for the 2008 ballot vote.

Instead the board agreed that staff would only inform anyone who asks that the board opposes taking the bond off the ballot again — it's already been bumped off two previous ballot.

Kopp said in an interview it is "mystifying and perplexing" to him that the governor only proposed \$1.2 million for the HSRA next year after approving \$14.3 million this year to develop a financial plan, identify right-of-way and begin detailed project design and environmental work.

The board Monday selected design teams for some work to be funded out of this year's budget, including the Fresno to Palmdale segment, but with the warning that continued spending — including about \$30 million to date — would all be a waste if the project is scuttled.

"We have so much going on but without that money it's all for naught," board member Fran Florez said of the budget funds.

Gamboa said Visalia will continue supporting the high-speed rail project while trying to persuade the HSRA to route it near Visalia. He said the city would do what it could in the way of providing staff or financial support for the project.

"We have worked very hard to get on the radar screen" of the train project, he said, noting city representatives regularly attend board meetings and visit members individually.

Right now, the early plans call for the train to travel closer to Hanford and make no stops between Fresno and Bakersfield.

"We're going to support a stop somewhere in our area," Gamboa said.

"The region needs a stop, not just a train zooming by our area."

Plastic pipe dream realized

Samantha Young/Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald and Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

SACRAMENTO — California homebuilders Monday won the right to use less-expensive plastic water piping instead of copper, ending a two-decade-long battle against groups that warned of plastic's potential health hazards.

Developers called the decision by the California Building Standards Commission a victory for consumers because it will reduce plumbing costs in new homes and when doing retrofits.

"Forty nine other states use the product. We now have a 25-year history of this product in use," said Dennis Beddard, general counsel of the California Department of Housing and Community Development, which drafted the regulation. "It clearly demonstrates this product can be used safely."

Chlorinated PolyVinyl Chloride, otherwise known as CPVC piping, is a sturdy material that — unlike most plastics — holds up even when filled with hot water. That makes it an ideal substitute for the metal pipes traditionally used in homes. It also costs several thousands dollars less in a typical home than copper piping.

But environmental concerns and fire hazards prompted state regulators to ban its use in drinking-water lines throughout the state.

The building industry has lobbied the commission since 1982 to change that. Homebuilders won a partial victory in 2000 when California regulators allowed limited use of plastic piping. They gave builders the right to install it in areas where soil or water conditions might prematurely corrode copper.

Environmental and consumer groups have argued that chemicals in the type of plastic piping preferred by the industry are dangerous, leaching into the soil and contaminating water that eventually runs out the faucet.

Labor groups had sought to protect workers from the fumes given off by the glue used to fit the pipes together, while fire officials warned of the toxic fumes CPVC emits when it burns.

"From leaching toxic chemicals to rupturing prematurely to fire hazards, CPVC is associated with impacts that are hazardous," said Richard Holober, executive director of the Consumer Federation of California.

Arkansas restricts the use of CPVC pipes, while the cities of New York, Chicago and Nacogdoches, Texas, ban it, according to the Safe Building Materials Coalition, a California group that represents environmental, consumer, labor and firefighting groups that oppose the material's widespread use.

The regulations adopted unanimously Monday by the 11-member commission are expected to be made final early next year as part of an update to the state building code. They will give builders the option to install the cheaper plastic pipes anywhere in the state.

"If something works well under harsh conditions, it makes no sense if it's not allowed under average, normal conditions," said Bob Raymerr, technical director of the California Building Association.

Before the vote, environmental and consumer groups urged the panel to direct the housing department to perform another environmental assessment. They said state officials had failed to take into account scientific evidence that the plastic releases hazardous dioxins during installation and during house fires.

"It's one of the most dangerous chemicals known to man," said Rene Guerrero, a project manager at the Planning and Conservation League, a statewide environmental group based in Sacramento.

The state housing department's review said installing the pipes properly would diminish any health concerns.

Pipes should be flushed with water to clean them of the chemicals that can leach into the ground or drinking water, and workers should be required to wear safety gloves and masks, the review said.

State officials acknowledged that the cement used to connect the pipes releases a gas that contributes to poor air quality. Beddard, of the state housing department, said the emissions are small and would be outweighed by the benefits to consumers.

Tom Enslow, an attorney with Safe Building Materials Coalition, said his members may consider filing a lawsuit to stop the widespread use of the pipe. The coalition includes the Sierra Club, Consumer Federation of California, Communities for a Better Environment and the California State Pipe Trades Council, which represents laborers.

Community Briefing

ROUNDBABOUTS IN RIVERBANK:

Modesto Bee, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

Folks in Riverbank soon will be going round and round. The city is installing three roundabouts at the corners of Squire Wells Way and Crawford Road, Prospectors Parkway and Glow Road, and Prospectors Parkway and Crawford Road. The roundabouts will replace four-way stops, which were installed after officials realized drivers had to pull into traffic to see oncoming vehicles. Roundabouts will help alleviate air pollution due to stops, said Public Works Director Laurie Barton. She is negotiating to bring down the preferred contractor's \$85,600 bid.

Dry cleaning pollutant to be phased out

Toxin blamed for tainted groundwater in Stockton, Lodi

By Staff and wire reports

Stockton Record, Saturday, Jan. 27, 2007

A chemical loved by dry cleaners for its ability to remove stains but a cause of groundwater pollution throughout Central Valley cities is being phased out of the dry cleaning industry by state regulators.

Beginning in 2023, dry cleaners will no longer be able to use perchloroethylene, the toxic solvent beneath much of central Lodi and also being removed at Stockton's Lincoln Center shopping center. And starting next year, dry cleaners in the state will not be allowed to buy machines that rely on PCE.

"You can't be in business for free, and if the regulations dictate a certain type of equipment to be in business, that's what you have," said Jack Alquist, owner of a Lodi dry cleaning company that switched from perchloroethylene to a silicon-based cleaner in December 1999. "Now that we see we have alternatives to use, we should be using them. You use the better mousetrap."

The regulation by the California Air Resources Board will force the state's 3,400 dry cleaners who now use PCE to get rid of machines that are 15 years or older by July 2010 and switch to other cleaning methods.

The rule was approved unanimously by the seven-member board and was embraced by environmental and health advocates. They urged the board to accelerate the ban because of the chemical's effects on health. The solvent has contaminated one in 10 wells in California, with the Central Valley especially hard hit.

In Lodi, cleanup has begun at two of five toxic plumes of perchloroethylene contaminating the soil and groundwater. The pollution has cost Lodi an estimated \$30 million so far for legal, technical and cleanup expenses and was the focus of a federal lawsuit filed six years ago. That ongoing case spawned other lawsuits among the city and insurance companies, a Wall Street investment banking firm and Lodi's former attorney, who conceived the since-discredited theory that insurance companies would be held responsible for the entire cleanup.

Perchloroethylene cleanups also are under way at Lincoln Center and at several sites in Modesto, which also waged an expensive legal battle against chemical manufacturers and companies that built cleaning machines. The cleanups are expected to take decades before groundwater is no longer threatened by the suspected carcinogen.

"Dry cleaners have known this is a problem for quite some time," Air Resources Board member Dorene D'Adamo said. "There is a cost to society, and, believe me, taxpayers are paying for it."

For consumers, the board estimates that the additional expense of the new equipment will turn what is now a \$15 billion cleaning bill to \$16.20 to \$16.60.

Cleaners said eliminating the most common dry cleaning solvent could drive them out of business because alternative methods are unproven and more costly.

"It could shut down some mom-and-pop operations - the little guys that can't afford it," said Bob Blackburn, president of the California Cleaners Association.

The cost of converting could be significant for dry cleaners, 85 percent of which are small business with slim profit margins. Replacing a machine that uses perchloroethylene can cost from \$41,500 to \$175,000.

Alquist, owner of Lodi's Guild Cleaners and Village Cleaners at Lincoln Center, said all industries change over time to meet new standards, such as automakers and farm product producers. His store, identified by state regulators in 1990 as a probable source of perchloroethylene pollution in Lodi - a claim he denies - uses a silicon-based cleaner and a new system that uses water with biodegradable additives.

"You need to be able to change to be in the business," Alquist said.

What alternative should be allowed in California is still under debate. Dry cleaners who switched to other systems sought to sway the board in favor of their preference.

Although the air board did not endorse a substitute, the regulation would give cleaners a \$10,000 incentive to buy a machine that uses carbon dioxide or what is known as a "wet cleaning" system.

Environmentalists urged the board to ban the most common alternative, which uses hydrocarbons. Critics said it could lead to increased ozone pollution.

"It seems to me there needs to be some clarity," air board member Ron Rogers said. "I think some of the primary options are really questionable at best."

The board's vote follows similar action five years ago by the South Coast Air Quality Management District in Southern California. That agency became the first regulatory body in the country to ban perchloroethylene, forcing more than 2,000 dry cleaners to stop using the chemical by 2020.

Last year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned the chemical for dry cleaners in residential buildings by 2020. But those operations are a small fraction of the nation's cleaners, said Jon Meijer, vice president of the International Fabricare Institute, an industry association based in Maryland.

In California, for example, only 50 of 5,210 dry cleaners operate out of residential buildings.

California declared perchloroethylene a toxic chemical in 1991. State health officials told the air board Thursday that it can cause lymphoma and esophageal, cervical and bladder cancer. The solvent, which has a strong, sweet odor, also can affect the central nervous system.

Business owners disputed those claims.

"We believe perc has served the industry well for many years with no related health problems," said John Horst, owner of Margaret's Cleaners in La Jolla, which has operated for more than 50 years.

About 70 percent of the state's dry cleaners use the chemical and will be affected by the regulation.

Cleaners operating in residential buildings must remove their perchloroethylene machines by July 2010. Health advocates want the earlier timeline applied to cleaners operating near schools, retirement homes, day-care centers and medical buildings.

Perchloroethylene will be allowed for use in other industries, the air board decided. But the chemical is primarily used by the dry cleaning industry.

Highway Exhaust Stunts Lung Growth, Study Finds

By NICHOLAS BAKALAR

N.Y. Times, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

A new study suggests that children who grow up within a third of a mile of a freeway may be sustaining permanent respiratory problems.

Researchers studied developing lung function in 1,445 children living in 12 Southern California communities for eight years, from age 10 to 18. They found that the closer the children lived to a freeway, the more likely they were to experience reduced growth in lung function as measured by the standard tests.

“That living near freeways is a health issue is something we’ve known about for a long time,” said Gennet Paauwe, a spokeswoman for the California Air Resources Board, which financed part of the research. “All of this points to the fact that California’s air pollution control program needs to continue with its aggressive reduction in air pollutants. But I think this would translate to any other part of the U.S. where people are living near heavily trafficked roadways.”

The findings were published online Friday by the British journal Lancet.

“Our finding of a larger impact on small lung airways is consistent with what is known about the types of pollutants that are emitted from the tailpipe,” said W. James Gauderman, the lead author and an associate professor of preventive medicine at the [University of Southern California](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/u/university_of_southern_california/index.html?inline=nyt-org) [ex.html?inline=nyt-org](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/u/university_of_southern_california/index.html?inline=nyt-org). These pollutants, he continued, “can be inhaled deeply into the lung and may have the largest impact on the smallest lung airways.”

The study was not restricted to the notoriously smoggy Los Angeles basin. “Our findings were observed in all of these children, including those living in areas of lower pollution,” Dr. Gauderman said, “so it suggests that in any urban area where children are living near busy roads, they are likely to have adverse respiratory effects. It’s not just L. A.”

The development of lung function was also lower in nonasthmatic and nonsmoking teenagers living near freeways, suggesting that the highways had an adverse effect on otherwise healthy children. Growth of lung strength and capacity, the researchers write, is largely complete by age 18, and this means that a child with a deficit at that age will probably suffer lifelong diminished lung function.

“The study is significant in the finding that it isn’t just regional air pollution, which policy makers have focused on,” said Frederica Perera, director of the Columbia Center for Children’s Environmental Health at the Mailman School of Public Health in New York. “These results indicate that it’s also important to consider local variations in air pollution.”

The researchers started with a group of 3,600 children, using questionnaires to gather information on parental income, history of [asthma](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/health/diseasesconditionsandhealthtopics/asthma/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) [ex.html?inline=nyt-classifier](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/health/diseasesconditionsandhealthtopics/asthma/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier), prenatal exposure to maternal [smoking](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/health/diseasesconditionsandhealthtopics/smoking/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) [ex.html?inline=nyt-classifier](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/health/diseasesconditionsandhealthtopics/smoking/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) and household exposure to smoking and pets. Then, using yearly questionnaires, they tracked asthma status, personal smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke. They also recorded the distance of each child’s home from the nearest limited-access highway and from other major nonfreeway roads.

To determine lung function, the scientists used standard tests that measure how much air a child can exhale during a forced expiration and how forcefully he can do so. Normally, these numbers gradually increase as children grow. The children were tested an average of six times over the eight years of the study.

About 11 percent of subjects per year dropped out of the study for various reasons.

Although the authors controlled the study for socioeconomic status, an editorial with the paper points out that social factors are difficult to define and may affect lung capacity no matter where a child lives.

Other studies, for example, have shown that poor children in the Los Angeles area are more likely to attend schools near freeways than those who are more affluent. Also, the study did not examine exposures at ages younger than 10.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

It may be time to hit the brakes

Putting homes, schools and parks by freeways was seen as a final frontier in L.A., but a USC study on pollution could force a rethinking.

By Christopher Hawthorne, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007

A new study from researchers at USC about the effects of local highway pollution on children's health would be alarming under any circumstances, especially for parents. But it happens to arrive just as Los Angeles is building or planning scores of projects - including housing, parks and schools - right on the edge of major freeways.

Seen in that light, the study carries significant implications not just for antipollution efforts but also for the future shape of the city. It should make us think not just about cleaning the air but about how and where we build.

In the last few years, we've come to view land near freeways as a last frontier in a Los Angeles that grows more crowded by the year. When developers and public agencies such as the Los Angeles Unified School District are searching for large, empty parcels of land, they often find that the only ones that they can afford are freeway-adjacent, in the unlovely jargon of the real estate business.

And when planners, architects or academics get together to talk about and sketch designs for the Los Angeles of the future, their proposals inevitably call for new buildings swarming like kudzu along and across freeways.

In the same way that the futuristic city plans of the last century looked to the air, calling for buildings on stilts or stacked like pancakes or connected by floating zeppelins, architects these days tend to see L.A.'s ribbon of highways as the unlikely foundation for a new kind of post-sprawl urbanism.

Last month, Eric Owen Moss won a competition sponsored by the History Channel that asked architects to imagine and help design the Los Angeles of 2106.

"We intend to build over, under, around and through the freeways" of the city, he declared in his winning entry.

Of course, it's hardly surprising to learn that pollution levels are higher near freeways than in other parts of the city. But the data from USC are compelling enough to suggest that when it comes to zoning, we should give up the idea of that land as a means for reshaping L.A. and increasing density and see it instead as territory to be avoided - at least when it comes to placing facilities where kids spend a good portion of the day.

Proposals such as Moss' may anticipate the day when we'll no longer use cars, at least in their current form, and the freeways that once carried them will be empty and ready for reinvention. But even in the most optimistic scenarios, we still face several decades of highway pollution.

The USC study, which tracked 3,600 children for 13 years, found that those living within 500 yards of a highway faced risk of permanent health damage, including stunted lung growth and respiratory problems.

"Someone suffering a pollution-related deficit in lung function as a child will probably have less than healthy lungs all of his or her life," the study's lead author, USC epidemiologist W. James Gauderman, told The Times last week.

Even within that fairly tight 500-yard radius, we are building a number of high-profile projects, quite a few of which are designed for children or would be used heavily by them.

Housing continues to sprout along the edges of the region's highways - including stucco boxes and high-end, themed apartment complexes such as the Medici, which practically leans out over the 110 as it cuts through downtown.

And the LAUSD's massive construction campaign includes a number of new schools next to some of our busiest roadways. Nearing completion is a new high school designed by Perkins + Will at the so-called Metromedia site. Commuters on the 101 have watched the school rise on North Wilton Place, no more than 100 feet from the freeway. The architectural flagship of the construction effort is a new high school for the arts, designed by the Austrian firm Coop Himmelblau. It will be built facing another stretch of the 101, across the freeway from the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels downtown.

As architectural solutions to tricky, overlooked sites, the schools are impressive. But through the lens of public health, they look altogether different.

In Hollywood, meanwhile, planners are working to gain approval for a new park that would be built directly atop a curving portion of the 101, between Bronson Avenue and Wilton Place. Preliminary designs for the park have been greeted as an ingenious solution to the open-space crunch in Los Angeles - and, in many ways, a sign of things to come. Councilman Eric Garcetti, who represents the neighborhood, said as much three weeks ago, after the City Council voted to spend \$100,000 studying the feasibility of a park in that site.

"We've come to a place in Los Angeles [where], for better or for worse, it's actually cheaper to look at putting a cap over the Hollywood Freeway to build a park than buying land in the middle of Hollywood," he told a broadcast reporter.

It's a good thing the park is still being studied. Maybe the act of capping the freeway will reduce pollution levels inside the park enough to reduce the risk to the children who play there to an acceptable level. But if it won't, "buying land in the middle of Hollywood," no matter how expensive, will be a more responsible option, environmentally, morally and probably legally.

At the very least, local governments will have to dig deep into the results of the USC study and similar reports as they begin to decide how big a health risk is presented by putting kids in schools, apartments or parks adjacent to freeways. They will have to look not just at proximity to freeways but also at wind patterns and other factors that affect the quality of neighborhood air. And as they do that they will have to be ready to reassess their planning strategies, perhaps in dramatic ways.

But the mechanism for doing so is not as powerful or as centralized as it needs to be, according to Roger Sherman, an architect in Santa Monica and co-director, with Dana Cuff, of City Lab, a new urban planning think tank at UCLA. Cuff and Sherman teamed up in the History Channel competition.

"Caltrans has one approach to thinking about these pieces of land, LAUSD has another and various cities have still others," Sherman said. "There's really a need for a regional coordinating authority. Without one, I think we're going to see neighborhood councils take more active measures to deal with these issues."

The councils, whose clout has been growing in recent years, could push for exclusionary zoning, for example, to make development near freeways impossible or more difficult. But that approach raises its own risks.

"You may see a kind of Balkanization," Sherman said. "Some communities along the freeway will decide to deal with the problem by putting up barriers along the freeway or planting to affect their microclimates, and others won't."

Most controversial of all, the USC study may open a discussion on the possibility of local governments using eminent domain to carve out new space for housing or parks a safe distance from local freeways. To a limited degree, the LAUSD has already relied on eminent domain simply to find school parcels it considers appropriate to its needs.

Determining the fate of buildings already planned or under construction near freeways will be no less tricky. Given the statistics gathered in the USC study, it's hard to imagine the LAUSD cutting the ribbon on the Perkins + Will high school overlooking the 101 with much enthusiasm about its location. Still, it's equally hard to imagine the district shutting down the school altogether over traffic pollution fears.

Perhaps the district will be able to plausibly argue that it didn't understand the full range of risks that come with building so close to freeways. But it's getting more and more difficult for any of us in this city to make that claim.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007:](#)

Weather versus climate

The author of a Jan. 23 letter said he is "cold and confused," and asks, "What happened to global warming?" In a recent editorial cartoon, a man was standing in waist-deep snow at his mailbox while reading an invitation to a conference on global warming. What do the letter and the cartoon have in common? They confuse weather with climate.

Weather is what happens on a day-to-day basis, while climate concerns a much longer time scale -- a decade, a century, a millennium. I'm not a scientist, but I can read and learn. The earth's climate is warming (no one can seriously deny that), and human activities are accelerating, if not entirely causing, this trend.

Climatologists tell us that as the climate warms, it will have varied effects on local weather patterns. Some areas will be warmer, some will be colder, some will have more precipitation, some less.

Can anything be done about climate change? Of course. Climatologists say that while it is late in the game, positive steps can and must be taken to ameliorate the effects of global warming.

Conrad Gaunt, Chowchilla

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2007:](#)

Two types of legal pollution

Regarding the editorial "Smog check cheaters hurt the whole valley" (Jan. 22, Page B-4): If you take all the fast-food restaurants, banks, pharmacies, etc., and count how many thousands of hours vehicles sit in line emitting smog, wasting gas, how much would this practice help the air? For months during the harvest season, I see every piece of imaginable junk driving down the freeway. How much smog do all these unregulated vehicles emit?

While these two examples are legal, they still contribute to unhealthy air. It really comes down to having clean air or not, depending on how much and who it costs. If some get away with illegal smog checks, why shouldn't the shop make a few extra bucks, just like the banks, fast-food restaurants, pharmacies, etc.?

MARK JOHNSON, Turlock