

[Visalia Times-Delta, Commentary, Friday, May 18, 2007:](#)

Valley air cleaner, with more help on the way

Air quality in the San Joaquin Valley is better than it has ever been in recorded history. With tough regulations, innovative measures and investment by businesses and residents, air pollution has been reduced significantly throughout the Valley.

Despite this tremendous progress, the Valley's pollution-retaining geography and meteorology make meeting new, federal ozone and particulate standards a challenge that is unmatched by any other region in the nation.

Having already reduced Valley smog by 80 percent since the 1980s, virtually eliminating the remainder will not be cheap and cannot happen overnight.

On April 30, the air district's governing board adopted the first eight-hour ozone plan in California. This overarching and comprehensive plan is designed to help the Valley attain cleaner air, as measured by the federal smog standard, as expeditiously as practicable. The regulatory cost to businesses will be about \$20 billion. The board members should be commended for their courage, resoluteness and commitment to clean air.

In fact, an objective assessment of the board's work on air quality gives Valley residents a great deal to be proud of. A child born today in the Valley breathes air that is 80 percent cleaner than it was 25 years ago and that now meets the federal standard for particles 10 microns and smaller. The Valley is the only "serious" noncompliant area in the state to meet the standard for airborne particles of this size, and we did it five years ahead of the federal deadline.

The Valley also is on track to meet the one-hour ozone standard by 2010, making it the only "extreme non-attainment" area in the state on track to do so. Meeting this health-based standard will further diminish the proven respiratory and health-related ailments associated with strong ozone concentrations.

The district's recently adopted plan to meet the new federal health-based ozone standard is the first of its kind in the nation. Under the plan, 50 percent of the Valley's population will live in "attainment" areas — that is, areas without any recorded violations of the air-pollution standard — by 2015; that number will increase to 90 percent by 2020. By law, the Valley cannot claim attainment because in a couple of areas, air pollution still will violate the standard at least a few days each year until 2023.

Undisputed analysis by experts shows that even if money were no object and we ignored all logistical constraints, the technology available today and in the foreseeable future could not reduce smog-forming emissions enough for these areas to attain the clean-air standard any sooner than 2023.

In this situation, the only option provided under federal law is to seek an "extreme" designation and incorporate future technology when it becomes available — thus, the proposed deadline of 2023. All local measures that can be adopted by the air district will be in place by 2010. As a result, every area in the Valley will see significant, steady reductions in ozone concentrations and the number of days above the standard.

The measures contained in the ozone plan also will help the Valley meet the federal standard for fine particles by 2015. (Fine particles are 2.5 microns and smaller.) This makes the Valley the only noncompliant area in the state on track to meet this standard by the deadline. Doing so will eliminate more than \$3 billion per year of the estimated \$3.1 billion annual health-related costs attributed to airborne particles in the Valley.

With public health as the foremost priority, the air district's governing board also acted to seek other innovative and creative strategies to clean the air. These measures, which focus on alternative modes of goods- and people-movement, as well as alternative fuels and energy, will require broad support from the general public, as well as business and government.

About 80 percent of our smog-causing pollutants come from mobile sources, over which the air district has no jurisdiction. More than ever, we will need the state and federal government to do their fair share for the Valley by providing funding and regulatory assistance to reduce emissions from cars, trucks and locomotives.

By any objective measure, the plan adopted by the air district is a comprehensive effort that leaves no stone unturned to bring the Valley into attainment with federal air-quality standards as quickly as possible.

Those who champion clean air are invited to join us on this challenging but fulfilling journey to cleaner air in the Valley.

Seyed Sadredin is Executive Director and Air Pollution Control Officer of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Air board OK of rule exemptions angers Florez

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, May 18, 2007

The same day the state Senate passed legislation to restructure the San Joaquin Valley air board, State Sen. Dean Florez railed against the board's members for approving a series of exemptions in a new air rule aimed at agriculture.

The rule, adopted Thursday, prohibits burning the trees removed from orchards and requires farmers to compost the trees or send them to a biomass facility. Exemptions until 2010 were made for:

- Orchards less than 20 acres in size because of the cost of alternative disposal.
- Citrus, apple, pear, quince and fig trees, along with rice, because the crops either contain blight that can spread if transported or because no alternative disposal method exists.

Florez, D-Shafter, said the exemptions were an attempt to undermine his series of air quality bills approved in 2003 that enforced air restrictions on agriculture, an industry largely excluded from such regulation until that point.

"This is the worst kind of burning. It's not even filtered, it's just going straight into the air," Florez said.

The district's executive director, Seyed Sadredin, said he and his staff recommended the exemptions because no other alternative to burning was available in those cases.

Wording in Florez's bills say burning can only be restricted if a cost-effective alternative exists, Sadredin said.

For example, mulching trees on less than 20 acres can cost farmers from 18 to 252 percent of their net profit per acre.

"From our estimation, that's not cost-effective," Sadredin said.

The exempted crops make up 10 percent of the total emissions from open agricultural burning, Sadredin said.

The exemptions were approved by the governing board, made up of county supervisors and city council members from throughout the valley. The lone "no" vote came from Arvin Councilwoman Raji Brar, who was recently appointed to the board.

Florez said the district negotiated to have the "cost-effectiveness" clause put in the bill and he worried at the time it would be used as an excuse to weaken the restrictions.

"This just screams out that this board needs to have more diverse members other than these guys who are tied to industry and do whatever industry wants them to do," Florez said.

A bill that would require more diversity on the board, including permanent seats for major cities and two health experts appointed by the governor cleared the state Senate Thursday. It will now go on the Assembly.

Governing board members could not be reached for comment.

Florez said the district should have taken a tougher stance and required farmers to prove economic hardship on a case-by-case basis instead of creating blanket exemptions.

Now, farmers who could afford to use alternative means won't, Florez said.

"Farmers are in a tough market," he said. "If they see their competition is not doing it, they say 'Why should I?'"

Senate OKs bill to add to air board

Proposal would add city and public health voices to Valley district panel.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau

Fresno Bee, Friday, May 18, 2007

The state Senate on Thursday passed a bill to add more city and public health representation to the Valley air pollution board, increasing membership from 11 to 15.

"This will allow the board to build broad coalitions," said Sen. Mike Machado, D-Linden, author of Senate Bill 719. "I think this is a step forward to improving the air quality in the Valley."

But Dave Cogdill, R-Modesto, who voted against the bill, said the current board is doing "laudatory work," and that the change was not needed.

Valley Sens. Roy Ashburn, R-Bakersfield, and Jeff Denham, R-Atwater, also voted no.

At present, membership on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board includes eight county appointees and three city appointees who rotate between regions and must include a small, medium and large city.

SB 719 adds two city appointees and requires the governor to appoint two medical experts: a physician who has a focus on the health impacts of air pollution, and another public member with medical or scientific expertise in air pollution. Both members would have to live in the district.

The bill is supported by health and environmental advocates, but opposed by farm groups and county governments.

The Tulare County Farm Bureau says the bill creates a "more bureaucratic board," and would "allow Sacramento lawmakers to decide the Valley's future."

But supporters say a greater urban voice is needed.

"The reality is ... this board needs significant reform," said Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter.

Florez is a longtime board critic who most recently has bashed the board's decision to delay a smog cleanup plan deadline to 2024, more than a decade beyond the current date. The proposal is expected to be accepted by the state air board in June and forwarded to the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

SB 719 now heads to the Assembly, where a similar proposal failed last year.

The bill is linked to a Florez bill, SB 240, that would allow the board to increase fees on stationary pollution sources and raise vehicle license fees, with the goal of collecting \$100 million a year for anti-pollution programs.

Florez is using a carrot and stick approach, only giving the board the new authority if it changes its membership. In other words, SB 719 can pass without SB 240 passing. But SB 240 can only take effect if SB 719 passes.

SB 240 is still being heard by Senate committees.

State to float pesticide rules

Farm representatives fear agriculture could be hurt.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Friday, May 18, 2007

The state is expected today to propose far-reaching rules aimed at slashing almost 40% of smog-making gases from pesticides in the San Joaquin Valley, but critics already are voicing doubts.

Farm representatives worry the new regulations could cost agriculture more than \$40 million annually statewide. Environmentalists don't want chemical companies involved in tracking usage of pesticides, as the new rules propose.

"We're very concerned about enforcement," said lawyer Brent Newell of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, a nonprofit legal watchdog that sued the state to force the new rules.

A lively public comment period is expected in the next two months at the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, which is proposing the rules. The proposal would affect many thousands of farm chemical applications, making it one of the most expensive rules the agency ever has suggested.

A research symposium is scheduled Tuesday and Wednesday in Sacramento, and public hearings will be conducted in July in Parlier and Ontario.

"This is comprehensive and complex rule-making," said Paul Gosselin, chief deputy director for the pesticide regulation department. "We are expecting to make amendments, because there are lots of issues on details."

Outside of the Valley, the rules are projected to reduce more than half of the smog-making gases, called volatile organic compounds or VOCs, from pesticides in Ventura and the southeast desert, which includes the Antelope Valley, Coachella Valley and the Mojave Desert.

Pesticides are among the top-10 sources of VOCs in the San Joaquin Valley, contributing about 6% of the smog problem, state figures show. The Valley has one of the worst smog problems in the nation.

"It's definitely a source that needs to be controlled," said Scott Nester, director of planning for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "This will help."

More than half of the Valley's pesticide VOCs come from fumigants -- gaseous poisons that wipe out insect pests in the soil so crops have a better chance to grow.

Gosselin said the new rules specify several accepted ways to apply or inject fumigants into the soil without allowing much pollution to escape.

Chemical companies would be allotted a limit on the amount of fumigants they could sell for use in the Valley, Ventura or the southeast desert. The companies would have to report the amount of fumigants that are used.

State officials said fumigant use also is tracked by county agricultural commissioners. In addition, chemical companies' records would be audited, and fines could range up to \$10,000 a day for violations of the limits.

Consultant Jim Wells, whose Sacramento-based Environmental Solutions Group works for farmers and chemical companies, said the rules may need tweaks.

"How are all the chemical companies supposed to coordinate this and stay within the caps?" he asked. "We'll know more when we see the proposal."

The Fresno County Farm Bureau also is waiting for details, said Executive Director Ryan Jacobsen. He said the county's \$4.7 billion farm economy could suffer from the rules.

"Fumigants are important to clean up the soil so that pests don't have free range on the roots of your plants," he said. "These rules could affect farms that plant carrots, tomatoes, cotton and many other crops.

They could affect people who are changing out orchards. We will definitely comment to the state."

Environmental report ready

By The Record

Stockton Record, Friday, May 18, 2007

TRACY - A five-year review of the environmental cleanup of one of eight buildings that released contaminants at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's high-explosives test range southwest of Tracy is complete and available for public viewing.

The Building 834 facilities at the Site 300 test range have been used since the 1950s for experiments with the thermal cycling of weapons.

Site 300, a Superfund cleanup site, is owned by the U.S. Department of Energy and operated by the laboratory.

The report summarizes the federal government's progress in cleaning up the area. Officials say human health and the environment are adequately protected .

The review is available at the Tracy Public Library, 20 E. Eaton Ave., Tracy.

For more information, contact Claire Holtzapple, U.S. Department of Energy remedial project manager, at claire.holtzapple@oak.doe.gov.

Farm air pollution targeted

The state plans strict, costly rules on the use of fumigants in soil.

By Marla Cone, Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times and the Tri-Valley Herald, Friday, May 18, 2007

California plans to enact the most costly pesticide regulation in state history as it cracks down on use of fumigants in farm fields to comply with a court-ordered deadline to combat smog.

Under the proposed regulation, to be unveiled today, California will be the first place in the nation to target the widely used chemicals, imposing statewide restrictions on how fumigants are applied as well as limits on use in three farming regions.

State officials warned that the cost will be extremely high - estimated at \$10 million to \$40 million a year - and that growers of strawberries, carrots, tomatoes and peppers will bear the brunt of it. The biggest burden will fall on Ventura County's strawberry growers, who will face strict caps on emissions and may have to resort to pulling thousands of acres out of production to meet the smog targets.

"We are very concerned about the cost of the regulation," said Rick Tomlinson, director of public policy for the California Strawberry Commission, which represents the state's strawberry growers, who produce almost 90% of the nation's crop.

"Using old, obsolete data, they are imposing a regulation that could drive a third of the acreage out of production in Ventura [County]. If the draft that is proposed is implemented, it will definitely drive growers out of business," he said.

Mary Ann Warmerdam, director of the state Department of Pesticide Regulation, said her agency "will do everything we can to keep California farms producing while we take these necessary steps to clean up our air."

Fumigants are poisonous gases that are injected into fields before planting to sterilize the soil, killing insects, weeds and diseases. When they evaporate from the soil, smog-causing gases waft into the air.

The proposed rules, expected to go into effect by the end of the year, will "fundamentally change the way agriculture uses this class of materials," Warmerdam said. No legislation is necessary; the agency has authority to set regulations.

"This gives us a fighting chance to meet our obligations under a federal court order. At the end of the day, that's what we're looking for, to meet our obligation to improve air quality in California," she said.

California's crackdown on the pesticides comes more than 10 years after the state first promised to force farmers to do their part to clean the air.

Last year, the U.S. District Court in Sacramento ordered the state pesticide agency to reduce pesticide emissions by 20% from 1991 levels in areas that violated national health standards for smog. That reduction was supposed to begin in 1997 under the state's 1994 smog plan. A lawsuit was filed against the state by California environmental groups, led by El Comite Para el Bienestar de Earlimart, an advocacy group in the farm town of Earlimart, north of Bakersfield.

"The agricultural industry had a free ride for over 10 years. These regulations should have been adopted in 1997," said Brent Newell, an attorney for the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment who represents the plaintiffs. "Emissions have increased, and the public has borne that cost by breathing polluted air in three air basins."

In Ventura County and the San Joaquin Valley, pesticides rank among the top 10 sources of smog-causing gases called volatile organic compounds.

Nearly 36 million pounds of seven fumigants were used on California farms in 2005. Under the proposal, volumes will decline an estimated 30% to 40%.

Although the requirements would raise the cost of growing many crops, the impact on consumer prices is unknown.

Under the proposal, all California growers who use fumigants must hire special commercial applicators and must incorporate low-emission techniques, such as injecting the gases deeper into soil that is moist and covering fields with heavier tarps.

"We're going to be specifying and limiting methods for all the fumigants statewide," said Paul Gosselin, the pesticide agency's chief deputy director. "Any shallow, un-tarped methods are generally not going to be allowed."

Additionally, specific caps on emissions will be set in Ventura County, the San Joaquin Valley and the southeastern desert region, which includes the Antelope and Coachella valleys. If those caps are exceeded, pesticide companies will be penalized and fumigant sales could be suspended.

In the San Joaquin Valley and desert region, low-emission techniques are expected to achieve the smog targets. But in Ventura County, they will fall short, so growers will need to find other solutions, Gosselin said.

Up to 10,000 acres - one-third of Ventura County's fumigated acres - might have to be removed from production or left untreated to meet the court-ordered limit, pesticide department officials said. About 25% of the nation's strawberries are grown in the county.

Warmerdam said crop acreage and pesticide emissions have surged in the Ventura area since 1991, the baseline year for smog emissions. Consequently, its target "will be more difficult to achieve. They will be forced to look at the most conservative application techniques."

To stay in business, Ventura County growers may have to switch to more expensive organic methods or exchange profitable strawberries for lower-value crops that don't use fumigants.

But many growers say fumigants are the most efficient way of killing a broad spectrum of pests. Land values are so high in the Ventura area that if they don't grow strawberries, farmers may have to sell their land to developers - which could worsen the region's smog.

Tomlinson said growers dispute how big a role pesticides play in forming smog. He said that Ventura-area growers have already implemented low-emission fumigation techniques and that despite a growth in fumigated acreage, the county has complied with national smog standards for the last few years.

"It's frustrating, because as an industry we were working on emission reduction well before this lawsuit," he said. "Any time a government entity issues a scientifically flawed regulation from a 13-year-old [smog plan], we're very concerned."

State pesticide officials said that although the court ordered them to implement the reductions outlined in the 1994 smog plan, new, extensive studies of field emissions and application techniques were used to develop the regulation.

"We are going to comply with the court order with the best information we have at hand," said agency spokesman Glenn Brank.

Environmental groups, including those that sued the state to force the regulation, said their biggest concern is enforcement. They want individual growers, not just pesticide manufacturers, to face potential penalties for exceeding emissions limits.

The pesticide department will hold two public hearings on its proposal in July. The regulation must be adopted by Jan. 1 under the court deadline.

Restrictions will be more severe in Ventura County than in Los Angeles County, where smog is far worse. That is because the Los Angeles Basin has already achieved the court-ordered 20% reduction in pesticide emissions. Much of that decline came from ending structural use of methyl bromide, which was sprayed in buildings to kill termites until most uses of the chemical were banned under a United Nations treaty to protect the ozone layer.

Only Ventura County, the San Joaquin Valley and the southeast desert remain far out of compliance. In Ventura County, fumigant emissions totaled 4.8 tons a day in 2004, nearly twice its court-ordered limit of 2.6 tons daily. In the San Joaquin Valley, fumigants emitted 17.9 tons per day, 2.4 daily tons more than allowed under the order.

For decades, oil refineries, automakers, paint manufacturers and other industries have had to cope with stringent and costly limits on volatile organic compounds. But until now, pesticide companies and users have not faced smog rules.

After the international phaseout of methyl bromide began, many growers turned to metam-sodium - now the No. 1 fumigant in California, used largely for carrots - and 1,3-dichloropropene, used largely for strawberries and grapes.

Fumigants are considered some of the most dangerous agricultural compounds. Some are carcinogenic and can cause acute respiratory and other health problems. The state recently announced other fumigant restrictions, including extended buffer zones and advance notification of schools, homes and hospitals, to reduce exposure to drift of toxic fumes.

Agricultural smog

California will become the first place in the nation to regulate air pollution from fumigants. The proposed rules would govern how they are used and impose limits on emissions in three regions of the state.

Smog emissions from pesticides, tons per day

Area	2004*	2008 limit
San Joaquin Valley	17.9	15.5
Ventura County	4.8	2.6
Southeast desert**	1.0	0.6

*Most recent data available

** Includes the Mojave Desert, Antelope Valley and Coachella Valley

Five most-used fumigants in California and major crops, 2005

(millions of pounds)

Metam sodium 13.0

Carrots: 5.9

Tomatoes: 1.8

Peppers: 0.5

Lettuce: 0.5

1,3-Dichloropropene 9.3

Strawberries: 1.6

Grapes: 1.3

Almonds: 1.0

Carrots: 0.9

Methyl bromide 6.4

Strawberries: 2.9

Walnuts: 0.3

Citrus: 0.1

Chloropicrin 4.9
Strawberries: 3.2
Raspberries: 0.1

Metam-potassium 1.9
Broccoli: 0.3
Peppers: 0.2

Source: California Department of Pesticide Regulation

Who needs a car? Visalians take advantage of Bike to Work Day

By Gerald Carroll, Staff writer
Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, May 18, 2007

Mark James claims bicycling has saved his life, and he's not afraid to talk about it.

"Two years ago I weighed 400 pounds," James said. "I bicycle to work every day now and don't even own a car."

James was one of some 40 bicyclists who participated in the Bike to Work Day on Thursday. James, 50, makes the 15-mile bike ride from his Visalia home to Farmersville, where he works for Extreme Health, and back again every day.

"You have to be careful," James said. "I start out on Noble Avenue and go west, taking Road 168 into Farmersville." He has to watch out for fast-moving vehicular traffic, and he always wears a helmet.

And helmets were Topic A on Thursday as the Jeff Barnes Brain Injury Foundation was a co-sponsor along with Visalia City Coach and other organizations.

"We gave out at least 22 helmets that I know of today," said Lindsay Bailey, representing the Bicycling, Pedestrian and Waterway Trails Citizens' Committee that advised the city of Visalia on cycling issues. "Safety is key with bicycling and all other endeavors."

Tree-stump remover John Fiore rode to work Thursday, too — only his office is mostly all of Visalia.

"I use the bike to travel from street to street, house to house and locate clients," Fiore said. "It's the only way to go."

Jacob Maldonado, 65, is retired but participated Thursday anyway since he uses his bicycle all the time — in combination with Visalia City Coach.

"I'm all over the place," said Maldonado, who takes advantage of the transit buses' front bike racks that can hold as many as three bicycles at once.

"When I go to Tulare, I just get my bike on the rack and I take the bus over there, ride my bike all over Tulare if I want and take the bus back here," Maldonado said. "I don't even have a car."

All that is music to the ears of Visalia City Coach manager Monty Cox, who has helped make Bike to Work Day an annual event in Visalia.

"It's amazing what the combination of bicycling and transit buses can produce," Cox said. "It's a great way to save on gas, car expenses and it keeps the air more clear."

Reducing pollution is also the goal of Angela Carasco, 28, who used Bike to Work Day in a special way.

"I'm unemployed," Carasco said. "Instead of going to work on my bike, I went to every business I could, collecting and filling out job applications."

Can America's masses get charged on electric cars?

By Mary Milliken, Reuters
Washington Post and the New York Times, Friday, May 18, 2007; 7:11 AM

SANTA ROSA, California (Reuters) - The ZAP Xebra is a three-wheeler running on basic batteries, silent and easy to maneuver. It is more than a golf cart and less than a compact car and costs just under \$10,000.

"They are cute in their own ugly way. They are the VW of the electric cars. They are the car of the people," said ZAP CEO Steve Schneider said, pointing to a Xebra fleet painted in Kiwi Green, Lipstick Red or Zebra Flash (with stripes).

While others hammer away at battery technology to make all-electric cars go further and cost less, ZAP (as in zero air pollution) believes it has the formula in its tiny Xebra cars made in China: Plug it in at home and go up to 40 miles per hour for up to 25 miles.

"The key is to keep the car simple," said Schneider, noting that a single-wheel front end is a crucial part of containing costs.

ZAP last month anchored a \$79 million order from Chicago-based The Electric Vehicle Company, which aims to sell 10,000 ZAP electric cars and trucks to local governments, universities and companies like Domino's Pizza, which is testing the Xebra for deliveries.

That may be the largest order for electric vehicles in history. But even with increased awareness about global warming produced by carbon emissions and the high price of gasoline, America's masses may not be ready to jump on the electric vehicle.

"Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money for a limited function vehicle," said Ron Cogan, editor of Green Car Journal.

While all-electric vehicles emit no pollution when they are driven, they are still responsible for emissions at the power plants that generate the electricity to charge their batteries.

"If you are going to be living in a retirement community or if you are doing all your travel in a downtown area where the speed limits are appropriate, neighborhood electric vehicles or low-speed ones are great," Cogan added.

VOLT GIVES VOLTAGE

Indeed, America's urban areas have just sprawled too much to make a low-speed electric vehicle a viable option for many. While it could work wonderfully in Santa Rosa or even San Francisco, hardly anyone in freeway-mad Los Angeles could get by with one.

That is why electric car enthusiasts are placing their mass-market bets on General Motors Corp.'s Chevrolet Volt, a plug-in electric car with a small combustion "range extender" engine.

Now still a concept car, GM will begin production as soon as battery costs fall below \$3,000 per car. Its experience with the EV1, its defunct electric car featured in the film "Who Killed the Electric Car?," has been instrumental in developing the Volt and its battery.

"We hope the battery can catch up to us and it is not too far out in the future," said Tony Posawatz, vehicle line director for the Volt. "It is probably sooner than most people think."

GM plans to price the Volt at a premium over the standard compact price of \$20,000 and make it "accessible to a larger volume of potential customers," Posawatz said.

The Volt will have a 40-mile range between charges, which covers most commutes in the United States, according to Sherry Boschert, author of the book "Plug-in Hybrids: The Cars That Will Recharge America."

But she said the idea to give it an engine as a back-up to those who fear getting stranded is a wise one.

"I love all-electric cars and I actually think they are much better in a lot of ways," said Boschert. "But I think most Americans who are unfamiliar with driving on electricity will be more comfortable starting out with a plug-in hybrid."

CARS FOR ALL CLASSES

Cogan calls the Volt "an intelligent short-term answer and an important pathway for future products."

As battery technology develops, Cogan believes manufacturers will sell different versions, including lower priced ones with a shorter range.

No carmaker seems content to stay focused on just one segment of the electric car market.

Maverick Tesla Motors is starting at the high end, selling its sultry Roadster sports car at over \$90,000 and boasting a waiting list of 400. It is also moving down market to a sports sedan to cost between \$50,000 and \$65,000.

"I think they have a good chance of following through to something everyone can buy," said Boschert.

And ZAP, although it has yet to see its main market take off, is developing the ZAP X with Lotus Engineering, a \$60,000 vehicle with a range of up to 350 miles and a range extender.

But Schneider remains attached to the potential of his ugly-cute, three-wheeler and hopes a celebrity or two adopt the Xebra, like Leonardo DiCaprio adopted Toyota Motor Co.'s Prius hybrid.

"We have a challenge of adding the cool factor to the economic factor," said Schneider.

Growth Control Measures Advance

Montgomery Panel Backs Higher Fees

By Miranda S. Spivack, Washington Post Staff Writer
Washington Post, Friday, May 18, 2007; B01

The Montgomery County Planning Board unanimously approved a series of measures last night to regulate growth by sharply increasing builders' fees and raising taxes on home sales to help pay for more schools, roads and public transit.

The board, which discussed the proposals during several meetings in recent weeks, spent much of its time yesterday debating the amount of the fee increases and how quickly they should be put in place.

The plans approved last night would more than double school fees for a new single-family home to \$22,729 and increase transportation fees from \$5,819 to \$8,380 in many areas.

In addition, the board recommended that the council impose another tax in neighborhoods when schools become too crowded.

The recordation tax, often split at closing between buyers and sellers, would almost double to about \$11 per \$1,000 of value.

The board recommended that the County Council phase in most of the tax increases over 12 months after final approval.

Board Chairman Royce Hanson said the proposed tax increases are large and could be politically perilous. "The board needs to feel comfortable with this," he said. But he said he was confident that the extra fees are necessary.

The proposals will go to the council, which asked the board this year to speed up a reevaluation of the county's growth policy after rejecting a proposal from Council President Marilyn Praisner (D-Eastern County) for a temporary moratorium on new construction.

The terms of the growth policy, last revised in 2003, could prove critical to the county in the next 25 years. Officials predict that the county's population will soon top 1 million and that the number of households, now more than 250,000, will grow by one-third.

The expected arrival of thousands of jobs, coupled with federal plans to transfer the Walter Reed Army Medical Center's patients and medical personnel to Bethesda, are expected to further strain county services.

Building industry officials have argued that the proposed fee increases could price many builders and homeowners out of the county.

And neighborhood activists have criticized a provision that they said would make it easier for developers to build in congested areas. Under current policies, county planners determine whether a neighborhood is

crowded in part by counting the number of cars on the roads. The new plan would allow them to consider whether public transit is available to offset traffic.

"It doesn't matter if you have great transit but the police and firetrucks can't get to you," said Jim Humphrey, who heads the Montgomery County Civic Federation's land use committee.

Raquel Montenegro, a lobbyist for the Maryland-National Capital Building Industry Association, said she was dismayed by the board's debate. She thinks the county is behind in providing schools, roads and transit, but she said the lag cannot be attributed to new construction. "The impact that new development has is marginal. The county has been behind on its infrastructure for years," she said. "The infrastructure needs we have now haven't been addressed. I believe it is an academic exercise we are all going through."

If the new policy is adopted, it will encourage the construction of taller buildings and the creation of denser neighborhoods near public transit.

In the nearly built-out county, that process has begun along Rockville Pike and in downtown Bethesda, and redevelopment plans for Wheaton include many multifamily buildings. The county is increasingly looking at redeveloping older communities.

The planning staff has estimated that nearly three-quarters of all new residential development in the next 25 years will be multifamily buildings, such as apartments, attached homes and townhouses. Although the school system's enrollment has dropped, the number of students is expected to increase in the next several years and become more economically and ethnically diverse.

Coupled with federal demands from the No Child Left Behind act, which has led to smaller classes for some students, and the school system's revival of all-day kindergarten, pressures will increase for more classrooms and an end to temporary trailers, which are widely used.

Political leaders have expressed interest in using government policies to encourage expanded use of public transportation to help take commuters off the road and improve [air quality](#).

Governor to detail plans to curb fuel emissions

Supporters say policy will transform global debate over clean-energy sources

Robert Collier, Chronicle Staff Writer <mailto:rcollier@sfchronicle.com>

S.F. Chronicle, Friday, May 18, 2007

Four months after announcing a program to reduce the global-warming emissions from transportation fuels, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will unveil today details of the plan that supporters say could transform the international debate over green sources of energy.

The implementation report -- which will be released by Schwarzenegger and the two University of California professors who were picked to write it -- will create a complex, path-breaking method to calculate the greenhouse gas emissions of all fuels sold in the state from the moment of production through final consumption.

"So many people around the globe have been waiting for someone to figure out how to measure the emissions from all the different fuels," said Schwarzenegger in a Chronicle interview.

"That's what we'll talk about. There's no difference if you want to lose weight. You have to know what your body weight is now and then you figure what you have to do to take it off."

Today's report marks a major step in enacting the state's low-carbon fuel standard, which Schwarzenegger announced in January. The standard orders a reduction in the carbon intensity -- the total greenhouse gas emissions -- of California's vehicle fuels by at least 10 percent by 2020. Oil companies that cannot meet the standard will need to buy credits from producers who have exceeded their targets for reducing emissions.

The plan is expected to displace one-fifth of California's gasoline consumption with lower-carbon fuels and put more than 7 million alternative fuel or hybrid vehicles on the roads.

Today's report was co-authored by Alexander Farrell, a professor in UC Berkeley's Energy and Resources Group, and Daniel Sperling, director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at UC Davis, and they are

following it with another report later this month. The state's Air Resources Board is expected to incorporate both reports into a new emissions plan for the state, to be announced next month. The new fuel standard is likely to be copied worldwide as governments adopt similar measures.

Scientists say the fuel standard cracks a difficult nut in the fight against global warming. In Congress, several competing bills have been introduced with varying versions of California's plan. Among the bills' sponsors are California Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, both Democrats, as well as presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill.

"Twenty years from now, without the low-carbon fuel standard, when you pull up to the pump you would be filling up with liquid coal, or oil shale, or oil from the (Canada) tar sands," said Farrell, referring to fuels whose production processes spew out high levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

A coalition of nine Northeast states is also considering adopting the California standard, as is Illinois. The European Parliament is moving forward with a plan modeled on California's.

The state formula is often viewed as a direct challenge to the Bush administration's new push for alternative energy sources, which has brought worldwide criticism. Bush's "20-10" proposal, which would reduce America's use of gasoline by 20 percent over the next decade, is centered on two fuels that environmentalists love to hate -- corn-based ethanol and liquefied coal. Roland Hwang, vehicles policy director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, noted that Bush's plan calls for doubling the amount of ethanol and other renewable fuels blended into gasoline to 7.5 billion gallons by 2012, with an ultimate target of 35 billion gallons by 2017.

"The danger is that we're going to be going backward -- by increasing emissions rather than decreasing them," Hwang said. "The low-carbon fuel standard is the way to reverse that trend and to instead use lower-carbon fuels."

Internationally, Cuba's Fidel Castro and his ally, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, have gained new fame as environmental oracles because of their hard-line opposition to ethanol.

Castro and Chavez have framed the debate as one between food security for poor nations and energy security for the world's richest.

"What will happen when hundreds of millions of tons of corn are redirected toward the production of biofuel?" Castro asked in a May 1 article in Granma, Cuba's state-owned newspaper. "And I would rather not mention the volumes of wheat, millet, oats, barley, sorghum and other cereals that industrialized countries will use as a source of fuel for their engines."

Castro predicted 3 billion people would die from hunger as a result.

U.S. advocates of low-carbon fuels squirm at the appearance of siding with Castro, but they say the drawbacks of corn-based ethanol are real.

With about 95 percent of U.S. ethanol made with corn, the rapid diversion of America's corn crop toward the ethanol industry has raised corn prices and reduced the nation's corn exports, which comprise 40 percent of the world's total trade in corn.

"I was just down in Mexico, and they're very interested in biofuels," said Drew Kodjak, executive director of the International Council on Clean Transportation, a Washington think tank. "But they are very concerned about high corn prices, what to do about the effect on the poor echelons of Mexican society as the price of tortillas starts soaring."

At a South American energy summit in Venezuela in March, Chavez promised to "overthrow" a biofuels pact that Bush had made with Brazil, and later announced his own plan to supply Latin America and Caribbean countries with half-price oil.

In the United States, the oil industry has backed off somewhat from its previously strong opposition to California's new standard.

"This is the most dramatic change in gas formulation that anyone has ever attempted, and the state can't afford to get it wrong," said Cathy Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer of the Western States Petroleum Association. "We're very constructively engaged, and we're not opposed to meeting the governor's goals."

Nearly every major oil company is spending heavily on alternative sources for ethanol such as switchgrass and elephant grass, and they are casting themselves as environmental pioneers.

BP is giving \$500 million to create a new research institute at UC Berkeley, the Energy Biosciences Institute, and San Ramon-based Chevron says it will spend \$2.5 billion in research in the next three years on environment-friendly biofuels.

Some UC scientists say the new research must pay keen attention to its international impact.

"The low-carbon fuel standard shouldn't be thought of as an endpoint," said Daniel Kammen, a UC professor and a member of the Energy Biosciences Institute's five-person executive board.

"I know the word 'sustainable' is seen as mushy and Berkeley- esque, but we need to follow this with something like 'fair trade' coffee, a sustainability fuel standard. There are huge issues at stake for developing nations."

Kammen cited the example of China, where environmental degradation linked to global warming has caused dramatic declines in crop yields and public health. "So if China can get sustainable, low-carbon biofuels, it would have much quicker returns than here, on a much bigger scale."

Edison wants ratepayers to fund study

The utility seeks to pass on the \$52-million cost of exploring a 'clean' coal-fired plant.

By Janet Wilson and Elizabeth Douglass, Times Staff Writers

L.A. Times, Friday, May 18, 2007

Southern California Edison wants to study how and where it could build the nation's first advanced-technology "clean" coal power plant and Thursday asked the California Public Utilities Commission to require the utility's customers to foot the \$52-million bill.

The 600-megawatt power plant, which would serve customers here but could be sited anywhere in the West, would take plentiful but highly polluting coal, separate out and bury greenhouse gases and other toxic contaminants, and produce less-polluting hydrogen electricity.

"We think that the environment is the primary issue of the 21st century ... and a utility has a vital role to move these technologies forward toward realization at a commercial scale to serve the customers and the economy of California in the future," said Richard Rosenblum, senior vice president of power generation for Rosemead-based Southern California Edison.

Rate increases would probably not be required for the study, and the average cost per customer would be about 45 cents a month for 24 months, Rosenblum said. Such a plant would fit into any future greenhouse gas trading market the state might develop and would comply with all its greenhouse gas regulations, he said. Electric utilities in the European Union earned huge profits off such a market program last year.

Renewable energy and consumer advocates expressed skepticism about the proposal, saying Edison is earning sharply higher profits and could easily afford research without ratepayer subsidies.

"They're making huge profits from the ratepayers at very, very high rates of return in Southern California, so I think if they really believe in this, shareholder money should be used," said V. John White, head of an environmental and renewable energy consortium based in Sacramento.

Southern California Edison, which serves an estimated 13 million people, is the largest subsidiary of Edison International, which reported a 30% jump in first-quarter earnings to \$333 million thanks to higher wholesale electricity prices and a rate hike imposed on California customers in 2006. Revenue rose to \$2.9 billion in the first three months of 2007, up almost 6%.

Critics also questioned the project's technological viability and said there could be environmental harm from storing pollutants underground. Opponents also disputed the idea that coal should be a big part of

the state's future power supply, saying greenhouse gas laws and policies were intended to do just the opposite.

"Clean coal is just a pipe dream at this point. There's no existing technology that scrubs all the emissions out," said Bill Magavern, senior representative for the Sierra Club in California. "California should be getting away from coal and investing in actually clean technologies like solar and wind."

Jane Williams, executive director of California Communities Against Toxics, said, "We're moving 50 years back in time. We're going to inject toxic materials into the ground and perpetuate the fossil fuel industry" if the project goes forward.

Edison is investing heavily in wind and solar power, Rosenblum said, adding that a clean coal plant would provide a reliable baseline power source for when the wind didn't blow and the sun didn't shine.

He said the technology had all been tested in pieces, but that the "signature project" would combine them into one full-scale power plant.

Michael Peevey, president of the Public Utilities Commission, said that he had been briefed on the proposal and that it appeared to have merit.

"I don't want to prejudge the details of all this, but I'm supportive of finding ways to clean up coal," Peevey said. "We face a huge challenge in this country to try to figure out how we meet the climate change challenges that we have. We can't do it all with solar, wind and natural gas."

Others wondered whether the proposal was a bid to find new uses for plants in other states, including the Mohave plant in Nevada, which Edison shuttered at the start of 2006 rather than install expensive air pollution control equipment.

Rosenblum said that although the Mohave plant could be a possible site, that was not the intent of Thursday's proposal. He said that the project was being designed for California customers and that other subsidiaries or companies would be barred from using it unless the PUC allowed it.

EPA is urged to turn over new leaf

Local air pollution fighters want to include trees as a weapon.

By Bobby Caina Calvin - Bee Staff Writer
Sacramento Bee, Friday, May 18, 2007

For years, tree lovers have touted the virtues of the capital's canopy -- its lush beauty, its cooling shade and its apparent ability to scrub the air of tailpipe emissions and other pollutants.

But can the tree huggers persuade the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to embrace trees as weapons in the fight against bad air?

Preliminary results from an ongoing three-year study of urban forests show promise, according to the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, which is rushing to include trees in the federally mandated air quality plan it's sending the EPA early next year.

The Urban Forests for Clean Air project, run by a U.S. Forest Service team based at UC Davis and funded by \$725,000 in grants secured by the Sacramento Tree Foundation, claims that 1 million trees could remove about 1,800 pounds of air-fouling carbon emissions and other pollutants -- or about 3 percent of the hydrocarbons spewed into the region's air basin on a sweltering summer's day.

"We've been working really hard in California to reduce air pollution. As we've gone down this path of reducing emissions, it's getting more expensive and harder to find new sources of where to cut emissions," said Larry Greene, executive director of the air quality district.

Trees represent biotechnology at its most basic. The six-county Sacramento region has 17 million trees.

Leaves scour the skies and absorb pollutants. Bark and canopies trap soot. Roots and branches store carbon dioxide. And the cooling effect of trees, which act as umbrellas, hampers the formation of ozone.

"We want to think out of the box," said Greene, whose agency is charged with drafting measures to reduce harmful emissions for a region that has among the country's worst air pollution -- behind only Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley.

Over the years, myriad rules have been imposed on businesses and homes to cut emissions and low-lying ozone that contribute to the region's smog.

"There isn't much that local air districts and other entities such as cities and counties can do to achieve large-scale reductions," said Dave Jesson, an environmental protection specialist with the EPA's San Francisco office.

Local, state and federal agencies have targeted smokestacks, automobiles, fuel station nozzles, lawn mowers, wood stoves and a host of other emission sources.

"Those regulations have pretty much been exhausted. We've gone as far as we can go. It's time to try innovative approaches," Jesson said.

Jesson said the EPA is "closely watching Sacramento's pioneering efforts both in terms of smart growth and this tree project."

The capital region has long failed to meet federal air quality standards and is unlikely to do so by its target of 2013. Indeed, the local air quality district may ask the agency to reclassify the district's status from "serious" to "severe" -- a seemingly odd move. But the designation would give the district an additional six years -- until 2019 -- to meet federal standards.

Whether the planting of 1 million trees will be allowed into the district's air quality arsenal will depend on the science.

"It's one thing to have an intuitive feel that trees clean air ... but it's another thing to quantify the extent that trees do that. It just hasn't been done," said Greg McPherson, director of the U.S. Forest Service's Center for Urban Forest Research at UC Davis.

"We can't leave it to intuition. We have to quantify it, and we have to have quality data."

This summer, the tree study will send volunteers throughout the region for a comprehensive tree census for the project.

"We need to take stock of what's out there," said McPherson. "We need data that will withstand the rigors of the EPA's modeling formulas."

Unlike tailpipe catalytic converters or scrubbers in smokestacks, it is much more difficult to measure the impact trees have on the environment.

"There is all this uncertainty," said Jim Simpson, a Forest Service meteorologist assigned to the urban forest project. "We have uncertainty about the future growth of trees, the survival rate of certain trees, uncertainty over the right mix of species and uncertainty over where they should be located."

A growing body of research shows that trees could be a potent element in the region's attack on air pollutants -- so much so that the air quality district is boldly raising the possibility of imposing rules on nurseries, including banning the sale of species that have little environmental value or that could even harm the region's air quality.

When it comes to cleaning the air, some trees are better than others. While trees release small amounts of air-fouling gases, some species, including certain palms, emit more than others.

"Maybe we'll end up requiring that only certain trees can be planted. Or we could ask nurseries to sell only certain trees -- why not?" said Greene, the region's air quality chief. But he quickly added that such regulations are premature.

"We as a society decided that this is an important health issue, so we're talking about all the possibilities," he said.

The Sacramento Tree Foundation, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this week, has championed the expansion of the region's tree canopy. It touts the study's early findings as evidence of the benefits of trees.

"Nationwide, trees have never been accepted into air quality attainment plans, because no one has ever been able to prove that trees improve air. This would be a first in the nation," said Rob Kerth, director for the tree foundation's Greenprint project, a massive tree-planting effort that would plant at least 4 million trees over the next 40 years.

"We believe that if we plant millions of new trees, we'll all be better off," he said.

"We don't say trees are our saviors," Kerth said, "but they are part of the solution. Not only are they enjoyable, there's a federal air quality incentive to plant more of them."

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Friday, May 18, 2007:](#)

Bullet train deserves support

Proposed state budget threatens to put a stake in the heart of the much needed high-speed rail system.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority must do a better job of selling its bullet train idea to Californians. And it seems the most important person who still needs to be "sold" on the idea is the governor.

The authority has been talking about and planning a high-speed system, or bullet train, to run from the top to the bottom of the state for more than a decade. It already has spent more than \$30 million on the effort that many believe is critical to getting polluting cars off California's congested highways and enabling Californians to travel around the state more easily. But so far, the average Californian has seen little progress.

Unless the authority spreads the word and convinces Californians and the governor that progress -- as slow as it may be -- is being made, support for building a high-speed rail system will remain anemic.

Construction of the \$40 billion system will require voters approving a \$10 billion bond. The remaining construction funds will come from federal and local governments and private investors. Placing the bond measure on the ballot has been postponed twice. It is tentatively being planned for a ballot next year.

But Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is pulling the brake even before the train can leave the station. He wants to see a plan from the authority explaining exactly how the system will be financed. And until he sees this plan, he refuses to spend a lot of taxpayers' dollars on preliminary work.

High speed rail authority officials and their supporters requested \$103 million be placed in the governor's proposed 2007-08 state budget to pay for design and engineering work. They hope to have construction plans ready to go if and when voters approve the funding.

Instead, the governor allocated only \$1.2 million just enough to keep the authority's office open, according to rail officials. Another \$3.5 million will come from the Orange County Transportation Authority, but only if the rail authority commits at least that much money for engineering and environmental work for a line between Los Angeles and Anaheim.

The financing plan the governor is demanding does not exist. And likely it will not exist until well after the Legislature and the governor approve a budget for next year.

The governor is right. Why spend a lot of money on a system with such a questionable future and even more questionable financing?

But the \$1.2 million the governor is proposing in his budget is beyond stingy. It is a stake in the heart of this much-needed project.

Schwarzenegger and legislators need to agree on a more reasonable funding level to keep the preliminary design and engineering work on high-speed rail at least chugging along.

Authority officials and system advocates must speed up their efforts to develop a financing plan, as well as a marketing scheme to sell Californians on the need to have a bullet train and shell out the bucks to pay for it.

For more information about the high-speed rail proposal, visit www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Friday, May 18, 2007:](#)

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: Forgive me for I have sinned (again)

What do leftist, mostly secular elites share with medieval sinners?

They feel bad that the way they live sometimes doesn't quite match their professed dogma.

Many in the medieval church were criticized by internal reformers and the public at large for their controversial granting of penance, especially to the wealthy and influential. Clergy increasingly offered absolution of sins by ordering the guilty to confess. Better yet, sometimes the well-heeled sinners were told to pay money to the church, or to do good works that could then be banked to offset their bad.

Of course, critics of the practice argued that serial confessions simply encouraged serial sinning. The calculating sinner would do good things in one place to offset his premeditated bad in another. The corruption surrounding these cynical penances and indulgences helped anger Martin Luther and cause the Reformation.

Maybe it was inevitable that the old practice of paid absolution would appeal to elite baby boomers -- a class and generation that always seems to want it both ways by compartmentalizing their lives.

The only difference is that the new sinners are not so worried about God's wrath as they are about their reputation among their judgmental liberal gods.

Take the idea of "carbon offsets" made popular by Al Gore. If well-meaning environmentalist activists and celebrities either cannot or will not give up their private jets or huge energy-hungry houses, they can still find a way to excuse their illiberal consumption.

Instead of the local parish priest, green companies exist to take confession and tabulate environmental sins. Then they offer the offenders a way out of feeling bad while continuing their conspicuous consumption.

You can give money to an exchange service that does environmental good in equal measure to your bad. Or, in do-it-yourself fashion, you can calibrate how much energy you hog -- and then do penance by planting trees or setting up a wind generator.

Either way, your own high life stays uninterrupted.

Paying penance in cash

Some prominent green activists pay their environmental penance in cash, barter or symbolism to keep the good life. Al Gore, for example, still gets to use 20 times more electricity in his Tennessee mansion than the average household.

Take also the case of Laurie David, the green activist and wife of "Seinfeld" co-creator Larry David. She has recently generated plenty of publicity for her biofuel-powered bus tour to promote environmentalism. But in other circumstances, David still flies on gas-guzzling private jets.

The best thing about this medieval idea of penance is that it can now be repackaged as politically correct "offsets." During the last few decades, the return of these modern indulgences has caught on in a variety of ways.

Liberal presidential candidate John Edwards, for example, lives in a 30,000-square-foot home, gets \$400 haircuts and recently made a lot of cash by working for a profit-driven, cutthroat hedge fund. How's he supposed to alleviate his guilt over this? Presto! He can lecture others about the inequity of an American system that unfairly created two unequal societies -- his rich nation and many others' poor one.

Don Imus was serially warned that his foul and sometimes racist banter would eventually get him into big trouble. Still, as he kept up his trash talking aimed at Jews, women and blacks, Imus also generously donated to, and even set up charities for, wounded veterans and poor children.

Thus, when his slurs inevitably crossed the line one too many times, Imus not only confessed and apologized, but, inevitably, claimed his indulgences of past good deeds in hopes of offsetting the present bad ones.

These varieties of contemporary offsets could be expanded. But you get the picture of the moral ambiguity. Penance, ancient and modern, was thought corrupt because it was not sincere apology nor genuine in its promise to stop the sin.

Thanks to carbon offsets, Al Gore keeps his mansion -- and still feels good while warning others we all can't live as he does.

John Edwards chooses to offset his own privileges by sermonizing about unfairness in America.

And who can forget George Soros? The billionaire can lavishly fund liberal causes such as left-wing think tanks, Web sites and ballot initiatives -- and thereby offset his millions made speculating on exchange rates and bankrupting small depositors. He's become a hero to those who ordinarily demonize such financial piracy.

In other words, "offsets" is merely a euphemism for words like cynicism and hypocrisy. So by all means help save the planet, worry about the poor, establish charities. Just spare us the medieval idea that such penance ever excuses your own excess.

Victor Davis Hanson is a classicist and historian at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

[S.F. Gate commentary, Friday, May 18, 2007:](#)

Open Forum

Getting the carbon out

By Alex Farrell and Daniel Sperling

California is once again leading on environmental policy. Today, we will unveil the recommendations of an interdisciplinary University of California team about how to implement Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's new policy to reduce global warming emissions from our cars and trucks.

This new policy, the low-carbon fuel standard, will require oil companies and other fuel providers to reduce carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions of transportation fuels by at least 10 percent by 2020.

When added to other policies to improve vehicle technologies and increase green transportation options, what emerges is a balanced approach to fighting global warming and our addiction to oil.

The California Air Resources Board is expected to adopt this new standard at its June meeting as the most important of the "early action" items to meet the state's global-warming goals. The low carbon fuel standard concept is supported by presidential candidates Sens. Barack Obama, D-Ill., and John McCain, R-Ariz., is part of Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein's climate policy strategy and is a key component of the "Advanced Clean Fuels Act of 2007" introduced by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif.

With a low carbon fuel standard, government will not pick winners. Fuel providers will choose how they reduce the carbon intensity of their products, from options such as blending low-carbon biofuels into conventional gasoline, selling low-carbon fuels such as hydrogen, or buying credits from providers of other low-carbon fuels (such as low-carbon electricity or natural gas).

This allows businesses to identify new technologies and new strategies that work for them and for their customers.

At first, fuel providers will most likely offer liquid fuels that work in today's cars but are made from biomass. Much of it will be ethanol made from corn. Over time, the need to lower the carbon intensity of fuels will encourage innovation to improve biofuels. Then, as the low-carbon fuel standard tightens, it will hasten the transition to a new generation of fuels and vehicles, including plug-in hybrids and hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles.

Eventually, consumers will have an array of low-carbon fuel and vehicle choices.

A low carbon fuel standard has two primary strengths. First, it creates a durable but flexible framework to guide the transition to a low-carbon future. Second, it stimulates innovation and investment in low-carbon and very-low-carbon fuels and vehicles.

The first advantage is key to the second. Oil companies and automakers consistently tell us that they are amenable to carbon controls that are predictable and based on science. Indeed, several major oil companies tell us they support this proposal and believe it should be adopted broadly, beyond California. They say they prefer this approach over mandates for specific technologies and fuels. They appreciate the flexibility and certainty it provides, though they will undoubtedly quibble over the magnitude or speed of the emission-reduction requirements.

The low-carbon fuel standard addresses not only global warming, but the intertwined problems of high oil prices and foreign oil dependence. It does so by stimulating private companies to develop new technologies and bring them to market. Thus, it will, for the first time, create viable alternatives to petroleum, which lessens the need for oil imports and undermines OPEC cartel pricing.

The result will be less volatile and, yes, lower fuel prices.

An alternative to this low-carbon fuel standard would be taxes or caps on carbon, possibly placed across the entire economy. However, these approaches would not effectively stimulate technological innovation in transportation fuels, an absolute necessity if we are to solve global warming and energy problems. Neither gasoline price increases in the United States in the last five years nor decades of very high fuel prices in Europe have caused the oil industry to begin to change their fuel sources. Under a cap-and-trade approach, fuel providers will almost certainly seek to buy credits elsewhere and pass the cost on to consumers.

This points toward a sector-specific approach, not a one-size-fits-all mentality. In electricity generation, for instance, emission caps are effective, for the simple reason that there are many existing choices to reduce carbon emissions, including natural gas, hydropower, nuclear, wind and so on. In residences and commercial businesses, product standards will continue to work well. In transportation, a low carbon fuel standard is needed to stimulate the development of alternative fuel technologies, while complementary vehicle standards will improve fuel efficiency.

The low carbon fuel standard differs significantly from President Bush's proposal to indiscriminately expand "alternative fuels" without paying attention to their environmental consequences. His plan would likely bring us coal-based liquid fuels and more of today's corn-based ethanol, but it does not provide the incentives and rules needed to transform these technologies so that they can compete in energy markets that take climate change seriously.

Solving the climate change and oil import problems will take time, our cars last for more than 15 years, on average, and the energy supply system also changes slowly.

If we are successful, the new low carbon fuel standard will give the American agricultural, energy and automotive industries incentives to start now to lower the carbon intensity of today's fuels and begin to develop the next generation of truly low-carbon fuels and vehicles.

With the climate changing, there's no time to waste.

Alex Farrell, assistant professor of energy and resources at UC Berkeley, and Daniel Sperling, professor and director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at UC Davis, are leading a University of California study of the low-carbon fuel standard.

[Letters to Contra Costa Times, Friday, May 18, 2007:](#)

Cutting down mature trees a big mistake

New York receives \$5.60 in benefits for every dollar spent on trees, according to The New York Times (April 18). The article also referred to an Athens, Ga., study that found that houses with a tree in front sell for almost 1 percent more than similar homes without trees.

I raise this following a decision by the Board of Directors at Bay Harbor Park Homeowners Association, Pittsburg to remove some 40 trees, i.e. about 12 percent of its trees. Most are sycamores. They will be

replaced with palm trees. This is questionable since sycamores are more valuable because they provide more shade and their larger leaf-mass consumes more damaging carbon dioxide.

Apart from the potential to drop home values as the Athens study suggests, the destruction of 40 mature trees will affect the larger community that needs trees to regulate harmful carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

No environmental impact study is required, despite the damage to air quality.

It is time Pittsburg joined other cities protecting their arboreal assets with ordinances. That way organizations like Bay Harbor Park would need to conduct environmental studies to justify their decisions when the public good should be considered.

Chris Forsyth, Pittsburg

Empty buses

It has been the same thing for years, empty buses, sometimes back to back, and a third bus, less than a minute behind the first two.

County Connection Route 110 goes past my house on Kirkwood Drive in Concord. Phone complaints to County Connection produce no positive results, yet there is talk about banning fires in fireplaces and wood stoves, to curb pollution.

Excuse me, whose head is stuck where?

Don Babcock, Concord