

Fresno declines power authority

Pollution concerns overshadow promises of cheaper electricity

By Marc Benjamin

The Fresno Bee, Wednesday, Aug. 1, 2007

The Fresno City Council decided Tuesday to bow out of a public power authority amid concerns that the authority's plans for a local electricity-generating plant could worsen the Valley's dirty air.

The council voted 4-3 against joining the San Joaquin Valley Power Authority, swayed more by air pollution concerns from environmentalists, minority groups and labor unions than by promises of cheaper electricity.

Fresno would have been the largest member of the authority, consuming about 45% of the authority's electricity. Thirteen other communities in Fresno, Tulare and Kings counties already have joined.

Officials at the Kings River Conservation District, which is managing the power authority, have said the project can proceed without Fresno.

The authority plans to purchase electricity on the open market and is studying whether to build its own natural gas-fueled power-generating plant near Parlier.

As an inducement to Fresno, Kings River officials recently offered to give the city a 60-day notice if it decides to build the power plant.

That would have allowed Fresno to join the authority but later opt out of the power plant and avoid its costs.

As part of the proposal, Council Member Blong Xiong said Fresno's savings should be funneled back into "green" projects for the city.

Some council members, however, said the 60-day notice couldn't save the deal.

"I don't give much credibility to the last-minute resolution," said City Council President Henry T. Perea. "This power plant is not off the table."

But Council Member Larry Westerlund said the authority will give the city a significant say in any power plant it builds.

He said nine to 12 power plants are being proposed for the Valley and the city of Fresno will not be able to oppose any of those without going to San Francisco or Sacramento.

To build the plant in Parlier, the power authority has proposed buying emission reduction credits -- money paid for the right to pollute -- from somewhere near the plant.

But Kevin Hall, representing Service Employees International Union employees and a Sierra Club member, said there are not enough emission credits in the Parlier area to offset pollution from a natural gas-powered plant.

That means the authority would need to buy credits outside the Parlier area, he said.

Officials with the Kings River district said the authority could save the average homeowner about \$5 a month compared with current bills from Pacific Gas & Electric Co. PG&E officials have disputed how long the authority could promise lower rates.

Committee approves bill to push EPA to give Cal emissions waiver

The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, July 31, 2007, 10:56:24

A Senate committee approved legislation Tuesday that would require the EPA to rule by Sept. 30 on California's petition for permission to implement the state's tailpipe emissions law.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen L. Johnson has promised a decision by the end of the year, but that's not fast enough for California officials. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has warned he'll sue if there's not a decision by Oct. 1.

The legislation requiring faster action by EPA passed the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on a party line vote of 10-9. It was authored by Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., and co-sponsored by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who chairs the environment committee.

"Passage of the Nelson-Boxer waiver bill sends a signal that EPA should stop stalling and act now on California's request so California and 12 other states can begin setting and enforcing standards on carbon emissions from the transportation sector," Boxer said.

Under the Clean Air Act, California has special permission to implement its own pollution regulations if it gets a federal waiver. Other states can then adopt California's standards or stick with the federal rules.

In this case, California wants permission to put in place a state law to cut greenhouse gas emissions, mostly carbon dioxide, by an estimated 25 percent from cars and 18 percent from sport utility vehicles beginning in 2009. If California gets its waiver, a dozen other states are prepared to follow in its footsteps.

California submitted the waiver request in December 2005. The EPA began considering it actively only after a Supreme Court decision this past April specified that the agency has authority to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases linked to global warming.

Boxer and other Democrats and environmentalists are growing convinced the Bush administration will deny California the waiver because of pending federal regulations being crafted in response to an executive order from Bush to cut motor vehicle emissions. Those rules are due from EPA and other federal agencies by the end of 2008.

A House version of the Nelson-Boxer bill has been introduced by Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash.

Californians blow hot air on warming

Residents grow opinionated, hypocritical on environmental issues

By Steve Geissinger - MEDIANEWS SACRAMENTO BUREAU

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, August 1, 2007

SACRAMENTO - Many Californians' alarmed talk about global warming amounts to a lot of hot air.

Experts say residents are growing more opinionated on the issue -- and hypocritical.

A survey by the Public Policy Institute of California shows most residents think dirty air from cars is helping foster disasters such as drought and hurting their health through ailments such as asthma.

They want immediate action from government officials and presidential candidates with strong environmental protection stands. They support current attempts to lower greenhouse-gas emissions from autos.

"For the first time, a majority of Californians say global warming poses a very serious threat to the state's future economy and quality of life," said PPIC President Mark Baldassare.

The 54 percent who hold that view mark a 5-point increase since July 2006 and a 15-point hike since July 2005.

"More Californians are associating global warming with a greater variety of environmental threats. It's not just air pollution. It's concern over increased droughts and flooding," Baldassare said.

But the poll released last week also found two-thirds of workers put up with pain at the gasoline pump so they can drive solo to jobs - a fourth in SUVs.

Just 13 percent carpool and 7 percent use public transit.

"You have to wonder about the gap between behavior and opinions," said Jack Pitney, a political science professor at Claremont McKenna College.

The survey also indicated 70 percent of Californians are ready to buy more fuel-efficient cars, despite the extra cost.

But analysts say, in another case of saying one thing and doing another, it may be that few of them will ever actually pay to back up their comments.

"It's easy to tell a pollster you're willing to sacrifice for a cleaner environment," Pitney said. "But it's harder to do it."

Some of the building concern can be attributed to politicians' rhetoric, said David McCuan, a political science professor at Sonoma State University.

"But in reality, Californians' real challenges are local - housing, education, roads, and a fair wage from a steady job," McCuan said.

Experts also say that people voice opinions contrary to their actions in hopes that the collective momentum will force the hard choices on them that they can't make by themselves.

"We buy gas guzzlers but vote for gas sipping," says columnist James Surowiecki in the current New Yorker magazine. "Our desires as individuals to protect ourselves in large cars and to outclass our neighbors encourage us to buy bigger and bigger vehicles with more and more horsepower."

"In calling for laws requiring better gas mileage in our cars, voters are really saying that they're unhappy with the collective result of the choices they make as buyers," he says. "Sometimes, they know, we need to save ourselves from ourselves."

Residents truly embracing the fight against global warming "need to connect the environmental dots," Pitney said.

"Over the long run, high gasoline prices are the most efficient way to encourage conservation," he said. "Yet I've never seen any Californians cheering when the pump price goes up."

Supervisors happy with draft of general plan

Final draft copy expected to be ready in March

By David Castellon, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Aug. 1, 2007

Tulare County supervisors Tuesday said they're happy with the latest draft of the county's new general plan, a road map used to determine growth strategies and policies through the year 2030.

"This is a much better product than what we had before," said Allen Ishida, chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

County officials are shooting to have a final draft ready for approval by the end of March.

The revised general plan has been in the works since September 2003. A first draft was released for public review in July 2006 and the second was released in November. The draft revealed Tuesday addressed comments by supervisors, county personnel and the public, said Theresa Szymanis, the Tulare County Resource Management Agency's division manager for countywide planning. Supervisors held a special afternoon session Tuesday to go over the nearly 2-inch-thick draft, ask questions and suggest further revisions.

"This is head and shoulders better than ... last time," Supervisor Phil Cox said.

Still, he suggested a change to an opening paragraph that implies, Cox said, that the county is "opening the floodgates" to new development. He also asked the plan define the often-used term "important agricultural land."

According to the latest draft of the general plan:

- Buildings, uses or land parcels established before the implementation of the general plan will be allowed to remain — even if their uses don't coincide with the plan.
- East Orosi and Sultana would be designated as "communities" rather than "hamlets."
- New towns must be planned communities.
- The agricultural use of alternative forms of energy, including ethanol, solar power and wind farms, will be encouraged.

- The four new land-use designations would be "urban reserves," "mixed use," "town centers" and "Native American reserves."

Officials said the general-plan draft will be revised further based on board members' Tuesday comments. The result should be available on the county's Web site by early September, Szymanis said.

A draft of an environmental impact report related to the general plan is expected to be released to the public by the end of October, she said.

Resource Management Agency officials said they'll also address the measuring and prevention of global warming in the general plan. The plan already includes provisions on environmental protection, including references to [air pollution](#), but its current version has no "significant" policy on global warming, said George Finney, the agency's assistant director of long-range planning.

California's attorney general has sued San Bernardino County for not specifically addressing the issue in its general plan, he said. It's unclear what the attorney general is looking for in county plans, however, Ishida said.

"I think we have the elements here," Finney told the supervisors.

Lodi scores low on race acceptance

Survey: Residents feel city is not tolerant of diversity

By Matt Brown, News-Sentinel Staff Writer

Lodi News Sentinel, Wednesday, August 1, 2007

Lodi residents feel the city is not open toward people of a diverse background, according to a citywide survey that asked participants to rank diversity acceptance among other city characteristics such as job opportunities, [air quality](#) and the city's overall image.

Lodi gave diversity acceptance a score of 36 on a scale where 100 is excellent. The city's image received a 57.

Other findings included strong support for a greenbelt between Lodi and Stockton and a feeling that the city was growing too fast.

The results were part of the National Citizen Survey, which was conducted in May. Questionnaires were mailed out to 1,200 Lodi households and nearly 340 responded, giving the survey a statistical margin of error of 3 to 5 percent.

Cities can compare results to 500 other jurisdictions in the Colorado-based National Research Center's database, company President Tom Miller told the City Council during its shirtsleeve session on Tuesday.

Independently, the results can be used as a report card of how the residents view their city.

Not all of the 500 cities in the database used the question on race and diversity, but of the 120 cities that did, Lodi ranked last.

Vice Mayor JoAnne Mounce said she thought Lodi had a good sense of community. She said the city's low ranking in acceptance of diversity reflects the separation of the east and west sides.

"The Eastside is culturally diverse," she said. "We need to enhance it instead of segregating it."

A local group known as the Breakthrough Project has been working on improving race relations in Lodi for nearly a decade.

Group member Art Raab said he thought the ongoing debate on illegal immigration was probably behind such a low ranking on diversity.

He added that while residents giving Lodi such a low score is disheartening, it also shows that people are aware it's a problem.

"There's two sides of that coin," he said. "There's recognition that there's much more to be done."

Raab said it's more disturbing when people won't admit that racial intolerance exists.

Councilman Larry Hansen said the city's lack of acceptance of diversity could partly be explained by the recent FBI investigation of a suspected terrorist cell in the Pakistani community.

But he said surveys like this are useful.

"Clearly there is more work to be done," he said. "If you're not willing to hear the answers, don't ask the questions. We're clearly willing to hear the answers."

Citizens also said Lodi is growing too fast. Residents overwhelmingly support an agricultural greenbelt between the city and Stockton to retain Lodi's small town appeal.

Other findings included that residents feel unsafe in Lodi's parks after dark, and that jobs, affordable housing and recreational opportunities are not abundant. Drugs are also considered a major problem by half of the population.

Lodi is, however, easy to get around by car, bus and bike.

Almost 70 percent of residents said population growth was too fast. Another 85 percent said they either strongly support or somewhat support a greenbelt between Lodi and Stockton.

Councilwoman Susan Hitchcock sought to seize on what the survey showed was public support for a greenbelt.

"It clearly says there is support for a community separator," she said. "We have to have the backbone to implement policy to make that happen."

Only 28 percent of respondents said they feel safe in Lodi's parks after dark, which ranks Lodi 109th out of 136 cities that answered this question. A full 86 percent of residents feel safe during the day in their own neighborhoods and Downtown, which is about average compared with other cities.

On the same 100-point scale, job opportunities received a 30 and recreational opportunities a 41. Access to affordable housing scored 25, access to affordable childcare 31 and access to affordable health care 37.

Mayor Bob Johnson was perplexed that residents wanted slower growth but more economic stimulation, two contradictory values in his mind.

"Creating jobs in Lodi equates to growth," he said. "Which is it? You can't have it both ways, folks."

The one area Lodi scored well in was mobility. Residents rated ease of travel by car, bike, foot and bus above other cities, although only 24 percent of residents have ridden a bus in the last year.

Citizens' top priorities are stimulating economic development, creating jobs and creating affordable housing. Low on residents' wish lists are building an aquatic center and an indoor sports center. Residents slightly support a quarter-cent sales tax increase to fund police and fire services.

Council members said the survey, which cost \$10,000, is a useful tool in helping shape policy decisions.

"It opens the discussion on a number of things," Councilman Phil Katzakian said. "That's a really good thing."

Katzakian said he was surprised to learn of the staggering support for a greenbelt, and he wanted to know why people feel unsafe in parks at night.

City Manager Blair King said he would like the city to repeat the survey every two years to measure progress. He said there was room for improvement.

"We want to look at our core services and try to improve those," he said.

Sample survey results:

The survey asked participants to rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Lodi.

How do you rate Lodi as a place to live? 65 out of 100

How do you rate Lodi as a place to work? 48 out of 100

Openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds. 36 out of 100

Job opportunities. 30 out of 100

Access to affordable housing. 25 out of 100
Ease of bus travel in Lodi. 55 out of 100
Safety in your neighborhood during the day. 82 out of 100
Safety in Lodi's parks during the day. 77 out of 100
Safety in Lodi's parks after dark. 38 out of 100
Services to low income people. 35 out of 100
Source: The National Citizen Survey.

[Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, July 31, 2007, and Merced Sun-Star, Editorial, August 1, 2007:](#)

Our View: Lungs victorious over lobbyists

California Air Resources Board holds the line on diesel soot by adopting landmark rules to help improve the state's air.

The room was packed. The hearing dragged on for nine hours. The drama centered on whether the California Air Resources Board would succumb to intense industry pressure and reject or seriously weaken a plan to cut diesel soot from construction equipment.

It didn't. Last Thursday, the air board, which has survived much recent turmoil, decided to side with lungs instead of lobbyists. By a vote of 6-3, it approved landmark rules to help clean up the state's air. New air board Chairwoman Mary Nichols exercised decisive leadership in favor of cracking down on diesel soot.

Statewide, construction equipment accounts for a fifth of diesel particulates released into the air. These particles are highly toxic because they lodge deep in the lungs. People living near construction sites and construction workers are especially at risk.

Under the new rules, the gunk that billows from bulldozers and 180,000 pieces of diesel equipment statewide will be cut 74 percent by 2020. Nitrogen oxides emissions from this equipment (a cause of smog) are projected to drop 32 percent.

All this will help air districts in the South Coast and San Joaquin Valley, which stand to lose federal funds if they don't take steps to cut smog. The rules will also help Sacramento, a hub of construction activity.

These new rules come with costs. The air board estimates the industry will need to spend \$3.5 billion to retrofit and replace dirty equipment. The reduced pollution will prevent 4,000 premature deaths, the air board estimates, and avoid up to \$26 billion in health costs and lost lives.

The air board agreed to give small fleets until 2015 to comply. Medium-sized fleets must start complying in 2013. Large fleets (those with off-road equipment that totals more than 5,000 horsepower) must start cleaning up the air in 2010.

This is a big victory for cleaner air. Now the board must focus on another source of diesel pollution -- the trucking industry. We hope this won't be another bruiser, but if the air board has to put the hammer down -- well, a big 10-4 to that.

[Orange County Register, Editorial, Tuesday, July 31, 2007:](#)

A regulatory bulldozer

New regulations on heavy equipment amount to a tax of billions on construction businesses

With scant public attention, state bureaucrats have imposed what amounts to a new tax of \$3 billion to \$13 billion on a California industry, depending on whose estimate you believe.

The state Air Resources Board last week mandated 85 percent of the 180,000 bulldozers, dirt-movers and off-road construction equipment in California must be replaced or retrofitted to reduce air pollution.

We liken this to a tax because it has the same effect: the government unilaterally forcing private companies to spend huge amounts of money that reduces their profits. The state Legislature and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger boast they haven't raised taxes. But that's more a credit to constitutional limitations on their powers than to personal restraint. Government achieves the same bottom line with businesses by imposing costly regulations. And few regulations are as costly as is this one.

The construction industry didn't object to phasing out equipment to reduce emissions of particulate matter and nitrogen oxides. Industry spokesmen sought merely a five-year extension of the 2020 deadline for full compliance. The ARB rejected the delay and insisted businesses can afford to comply by that year.

Once again, a government bureaucracy concocts arbitrary rules to meet arbitrary goals by imposing arbitrary costs on the private sector. However, ARB's newly appointed Chairwoman Mary Nichols said the agency showed businesses how they can afford the switch-over.

"When (the ARB) couldn't figure out how to pay for it out of (the companies') revenue, they basically concluded (the companies) could borrow money," said Mike Lewis, spokesman for the Construction Industry Air Quality Coalition. That means the cost of compliance not only will draw down or wipe out companies' profits, but it also will require businesses to assume substantial debt. The mandates will drive many contractors out of business, Lewis said.

Moreover, Lewis told us, the ARB is aware that new engines required to meet 2020 standards won't be available until 2014. Companies must take short-term steps to retrofit or replace equipment, then incur added costs after 2014 when the fully compliant engines reach market.

Onerous costs (\$3 billion by ARB estimates and \$13 billion by industry estimates) and duplicative efforts apparently were unpersuasive for the ARB.

"It hasn't been easy to come up with a proposal that is both cost-effective and fair," ARB's Nichols said. It seems to us the ARB decision is neither cost-effective nor fair. The ARB says construction companies can pass through added costs to customers, in case anyone thought the fallout is limited to bulldozer drivers.

This is just the beginning of many environmental mandates to come. The ARB soon will take up regulations to enforce last year's sweeping, so-called state Global Warming Solutions Act and strict emission limits on big-rig trucks. Of course, those added costs -- for companies that don't go broke -- can always be passed on to their customers.

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Tuesday, July 31, 2007:](#)

Steve Westly: Time to clean up port pollution

By Steve Westly - Special to The Bee

What would you do if you were told that your children had twice the chance of developing asthma and 20 times the risk of getting cancer?

Unfortunately, this is a reality for families living in regions around California's major ports in Alameda, Los Angeles and Long Beach. That is why the Legislature should pass, and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger should sign, Senate Bill 974. The bill by Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, would fund air pollution cleanup and rail improvements at California's largest ports.

The overall economic impact from port pollution-related health problems is estimated to be \$61 billion a year. This includes the 1.1 million students who stay home from school every day due to the health effects associated with pollution from the goods-movement industry. Additionally, 12,000 workdays were lost last year because of pollution from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

But port pollution isn't just making us sick; it's making us late.

Analysts estimate that traffic congestion near ports in California cost the state \$10 billion in 2003. By 2020, three times as much cargo will pass through California's ports, and truck traffic is expected to increase by 65 percent.

The economic costs to our state pale in comparison to the human toll of port pollution.

According to the California Air Resources Board, an estimated 2,400 Californians die prematurely each year due to pollution from transporting goods. In Long Beach, 15 percent of children have been diagnosed with asthma, almost double the national average.

SB 974 is a common sense solution to this environmental, public health and economic problem. The bill calls for a \$30 fee on all cargo containers entering California's three major ports. Half of the funds would

go toward cleaning up existing sources of air pollution, and the other half would be used for infrastructure improvements, including rail, that would reduce our dependence on diesel-powered trucks to transport goods. Diesel accounts for most of the pollution at our ports. Common sense air mitigation practices and increasing rail usage will make our ports and our air cleaner for future generations.

As a lifelong environmentalist and clean-tech investor, I know there is a role for the private sector to play as well. The clean-tech revolution is taking place in California, and there are a number of companies developing products that can help clean up our ports, including alternative fuels. The private sector can, and will, provide the solutions to the public health and economic challenges we face in California as a result of air pollution, but it requires an equal commitment from government to make it possible.

Cleaning up our ports and preparing for the future shouldn't be a partisan issue; it's a practical issue that requires immediate action. As stewards of this great state, we have a responsibility to our children, and to future generations, to leave the environment in better shape than it was when we inherited it. SB 974 addresses the problem in a comprehensive way, and for this reason I urge the governor, the Legislature and all Californians to support it. Parents should never have to choose between where they live and their children's health.