

## High polluting vehicle bill moves on for full Assembly vote

Staff reports

Turlock Journal, Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2007

A bill designed to decrease the number of high polluting vehicles on California's roadways was approved by the Assembly Appropriations Committee last week.

Senate Bill 23, authored by Senator Dave Cogdill (R-Modesto), would create a voluntary program to remove high polluter vehicles within the district by exchanging high polluter vehicles for donated vehicles, as provided. The bill would require the district to certify that the exchange of any two vehicles results in quantified lower net emissions. The bill would limit the program to 200 vehicle exchanges annually. The bill would also authorize the district to use any interest generated from the funds allocated to the district from the Traffic Congestion Relief Fund for the purpose of administering the program.

With the Appropriations Committee's approval, SB 23 will now proceed to the Assembly floor for a vote of the full Assembly.

"I am pleased that the Assembly Appropriations Committee approved this important measure," said Cogdill. "Substantial emission reductions and therefore cost-effective and equitable air pollution control would be gained by retiring or repairing these high polluting older vehicles and replacing them with cleaner ones. This would significantly improve Central Valley air quality and allow the state to meet federal clean air goals."

Vehicular emissions are a primary source of pollution, particularly in the Central Valley -- nearly 60 percent of the [air pollution](#) in the Central Valley is caused by motor vehicles.

## Sequoia Shuttle uncertain for next year

By Nick McClellan, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, Sept. 5, 2007

Operators of the Sequoia Shuttle, which connects Visalia with Sequoia National Park, say it's uncertain whether the just-concluded service will return for a second summer.

But city transit manager Monty Cox is optimistic.

"We know [this year] was pretty good," Cox said.

The shuttle began offering \$10-per-round-trip service shortly after Memorial Day and ended its first-year run Monday. Shuttles were, on average, about 30 percent full, Cox said.

He said he's satisfied with the figure.

"We had very little time to do the kind of marketing that we planned to do," Cox said. "Given those factors and the short time frame we had to get it started, we were very pleased."

The service is partially funded by a three-year federal grant administered by the city and Sequoia National Park.

Cox said the future of the Sequoia Shuttle will be determined based on the fulfillment of overall goals established for the program. Those include: Those include:

- Reducing the number of cars in the park.
- [Reducing air pollution.](#)
- Encouraging park visitors to stay in Visalia when visiting the park.

This also was the first summer of operation for Sequoia National Park's Giant Forest and Moro Rock/Crescent Meadow internal shuttles. Ridership figures were encouraging, said parks spokeswoman Alexandra Picavet, and the service is expected to be offered two more years.

"The shuttles exceeded our expectations for the year at 35 percent filled," Picavet said. "It was a great success, especially considering it was the first year and there was limited advertising of its availability."

Both Cox and Picavet said that the immediate future of the services will be determined in the coming weeks.

"I can tell you that all indications are looking positive," Cox said.

Cox said tweaks to the Sequoia Shuttle program could include the purchase of more buses and an increase in the number of shuttles available during peak weekends.

"We did figure out that the holiday weekends are something we have to gear up for quite a bit more," he said.

Drivers for the Sequoia Shuttle timed their arrivals in the park to bypass construction on the General's Highway, Cox said.

When time permitted, he said, some drivers offered stops at on-the-way destinations like Reimer's Candy & Gifts in Three Rivers.

Cox said riders from around the world took advantage of the shuttle system. Out-of-the-area visitors had the option of taking Amtrak to the Hanford stop, riding a bus to Visalia and taking the shuttle to the parks.

"I anticipate by next year," Cox said, "our biggest problem [will be] not having enough buses."

## **Bullet trains could soon fly through valley**

Mark Rivera - Staff reporter

Turlock Journal, Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2007

The list of supporters for high-speed rail in California is a mile long, but so is the row of hurdles and hoops that officials are jumping over and through to make the dream come true.

Public hearings continue through this month as the California High-Speed Rail Authority receives comments on the Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was certified in November 2005. The most recent meeting was held on Aug. 30 in the chambers of the administration building in Merced.

Proposed is a California High-Speed Train system that will provide a "safe and reliable mode of travel that links the major metropolitan areas of the state." The draft Program EIR/EIS currently under review further analyzes the Bay Area to Central Valley portion of the system. The report has been available for public viewing since July 20 and the process will end on Sept. 28.

The thorough Program EIR/EIS includes analysis of impacts on wetlands, farmlands, air quality, biological resources and flood hazards. Other topics include visual quality and aesthetics, noise vibration, traffic, energy, public utilities, construction impacts and more.

By 2030, the Authority modestly predicts it will have an annual ridership of 79.6 million for the shortest alternative for the network through Pacheco Pass, and as many as 96.2 million for the combined Altamont Pass and Pacheco Pass alternative. With these numbers, the Authority hopes to reduce the number of miles traveled by car in the Bay Area and the Valley by anywhere from 7 percent to 12 percent. That number increases as the ridership increases.

The Authority cites many reasons for the need of a statewide high-speed rail system. Poor and deteriorating air quality and pressure on natural resources is perhaps one of more pressing reasons for San Joaquin Valley residents. Other reasons include the increasing frequency of accidents on highways and railroads in congested travel corridors, a growing demand for inter-city travel, and reduced mobility as a result of limited connections between airports, transit systems and passenger rail throughout the state.

The proposed rail system would connect Sacramento, the Bay Area, Southern California and the valley in "ways never imagined before," according to Senator Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento).

"High-speed rail offers California a real opportunity to take advantage of economic opportunities that could radically improve the lives of millions," said Steinberg in an Authority publication. "The additional jobs created by such a service would help drive the state's economic engine in the 21st century."

Those who showed up to the Merced meeting showed strong support for the high-speed rail system, and also thanked the Authority for holding a meeting in the valley. When the meetings were originally scheduled, the closest any meeting came to the valley was Gilroy, near one of the proposed Valley-to-Bay Area transition points, Pacheco Pass.

"The Central Valley is poised for great growth and there is tremendous opportunity here," said Merced County Board of Supervisors Chairperson John Pedrozo. "I believe the proposed California high-speed rail system may hold the answers to many of the problems we face in the region and the state."

Many in attendance also encouraged the Authority to place the high-speed rail system's repair and maintenance facility at the former Castle Air Force Base, citing its ideal central location to the state, abundance of space and facilities as reasons why.

The Program EIR/EIS, along with other high-speed rail environmental documents and information sources are available at the Authority's Web site at <http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov>. Comments or questions can be addressed by calling the Authority at 916-324-1541.

## **Global warming could pose heart threat**

By MARIA CHENG, AP Medical Writer  
In the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Sept. 5, 2007

VIENNA, Austria — Global warming may be melting glaciers and forcing polar bears onto land, but doctors warn it could also affect your heart.

"If it really is a few degrees warmer in the next 50 years, we could definitely have more cardiovascular disease," said Dr. Karin Schenck-Gustafsson, of the department of cardiology at Sweden's Karolinska Institute.

On the sidelines of the European Society of Cardiology's annual meeting in Vienna this week, some experts said the issue deserves more attention. It's well-known that people have more heart problems when it's hot.

During the European heat wave in 2003, there were an estimated 35,000 deaths above expected levels in the first two weeks of August. In France alone, nearly 15,000 extra people died when temperatures soared. Experts say much of that was due to heart problems in the elderly worsened by the extreme heat.

The hardening of the heart's arteries is like rust developing on a car, said Dr. Gordon Tomaselli, chief of cardiology at Johns Hopkins University. "Rust develops much more quickly at warm temperatures and so does atherosclerosis," said Tomaselli, who is program chair at the American Heart Association.

In higher temperatures, we sweat to get rid of heat. During that process, blood is sent to the skin where temperatures are cooler, which opens up the blood vessels. In turn, the heart rate rises and blood pressure drops. That combination can be dangerous for older people and those with weakened cardiovascular systems.

Extreme events like the recent devastating fires in Greece may complicate the problem. The increasing number of forest fires that have swept through Southeast Asia in the last decade have also brought a spike in heart disease, experts say.

But because there are so many scientific uncertainties about climate change, like how fast it will occur, or what other factors, such as pollution levels or natural phenomena, might affect it, doctors are unsure what exactly to prescribe.

In addition, there are too many unknowns in connecting global warming and heart disease to make predictions about how many more people will have heart problems in the future.

Other factors may also make climate change more dangerous, such as the fact that in the future the majority of the world's population is expected to live in cities. With concrete skyscrapers, fewer trees and pollution spewed from factories and cars, cities are at least a few degrees hotter than surrounding rural areas.

Doctors also suspect pollution, which is expected to get worse with climate change, contributes to heart disease. They think that when the lungs are irritated by tiny airborne contaminants, that could set off a bad reaction in the heart.

"A lot of cardiovascular risk could be avoided by targeting the urban heat effect," said Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, a climate change expert at the World Health Organization. Although some European countries have put heat warning systems into place to alert people when they might be at increased risk, more needs to be done, Campbell-Lendrum said.

Still, higher temperatures won't be bad news for everyone. "Skiers aren't going to like it, but warmer weather could encourage some people to exercise more and actually improve their health," said Dr. John Cleland, a heart failure specialist at the University of Hull in Britain.

The human body is not designed to handle extreme heat for long periods of time; mechanisms like sweating are only effective as a temporary fix. But that could change if our environment becomes radically different. Some experts speculate that humans might even develop some kind of biological way to better tolerate heat.

"The problem is that this process of evolutionary adaptation for humans takes not decades, but tens of thousands of years," said Dr. Claudio Ceconi, spokesman for the European Society of Cardiology. "We unfortunately won't be able to evolve quickly enough to keep up."

In the meantime, Cleland said to focus on things we can control, like diet and fitness. "We should think more about going outside for a bicycle ride even when it's not bright and sunny," he said.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wednesday, Sept. 5, 2007:](#)

## **Politics vs. clean air**

### **Game playing in Capitol stalls fund for Valley efforts.**

More evidence of California's dysfunctional Legislature: A bill to raise vehicle registration fees to pay for cleaning up the Valley's dirty air enjoyed the rare combined support of environmentalists and farmers alike. The bill had bipartisan support in the Legislature.

The chairman of the Assembly Appropriations Committee said he agreed with the bill's goals. So he held it in committee, effectively killing it for this session of the Legislature.

Assembly Member Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, apparently was in a snit because several other bills have been held up in the Senate, including one of his own that would allow San Francisco to raise vehicle fees to support its general fund.

Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, offered Senate Bill 240 and worked hard to win support. He got it after making several compromises with powerful interests, and was surprised when the bill stalled. Perhaps he shouldn't be. This is the California Legislature, after all.

Florez's bill would have added up to \$30 a year to vehicle registrations in the Valley, with the money going to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The funds would have been spent on various clean-up programs in an effort to meet federal air quality standards in the Valley, the nation's most polluted air basin.

The air district hopes to raise \$200 million for the programs, and the \$78 million the added fee would have raised by 2010 would be a significant fraction of that total. The district was counting on that money. But nothing is ever easy in the state Legislature.

It's not over for SB240. Florez says he will bring the measure back next year. Citing the strong support for the bill, Florez hopes to give it an "urgency" tag, which would mean it could go into effect immediately upon passage by the Legislature and the governor's signature.

We hope that works. Cleaning up the Valley's foul air is an expensive undertaking. This bill spreads its portion of that financial burden evenly across every sector of the Valley. It's fair and it will be effective.

That's more than we can say about the political game playing that occupies so much time in Sacramento these days.

[Sacramento Bee editorial, Wednesday, Sept. 5, 2007:](#)

## **Editorial: Key bill -- and Núñez's legacy -- in the balance**

### **SB 375 is an essential complement to last year's landmark global warming law**

Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez has rightly earned international plaudits for authoring Assembly Bill 32, the landmark law that requires California to reduce its greenhouse gases 25 percent by 2020.

Passage of this 2006 law has propelled California to the forefront of the fight against global warming. If it can be properly implemented, this law could propel California to a cleaner future and could create a model for other states and nations to follow.

Yet as Núñez knows, the state's transportation network poses California's greatest challenge in meeting the mandates of AB 32. Emissions from cars, trucks and other transportation sources generate 41 percent of California's greenhouse gases, and they are growing all the time.

Unless steps are taken to greatly reduce these emissions, the state's population growth -- with more people driving farther for work or play -- could overwhelm all other efforts to cut greenhouse pollution.

That's why it's so crucial that Núñez and other state lawmakers support Senate Bill 375, an attempt to encourage smart transportation planning in the years ahead.

In a nutshell, SB 375 would create incentives for metropolitan regions to reduce pollution from cars and trucks by calculating how those emissions would vary under different development scenarios.

Dispersal of state transportation dollars would depend on regions conducting these reviews, as the Sacramento region and some other areas have done. Regions that chose to develop in a land-efficient, transit-friendly pattern -- as opposed to leapfrog development -- would get relief from certain requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act.

This would help cities to grow up, instead of out, with better prospects for transit and fewer long-distance commutes -- a major cause of smog and greenhouse pollution.

Over the last several months, the bill's author, Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, has worked with an array of interest groups to finetune the bill and address concerns. All along, he has faced continuing opposition from the California Chamber of Commerce and the California Building Industry Association, which have yet to propose a workable alternative for curtailing emissions from the transportation sector.

Even more mystifying is the behavior of the League of California Cities. Although the League claims it isn't trying to kill Steinberg's legislation, it attacked the bill in a recent letter to the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, and has waffled, at times, on what changes it wants to see.

On Friday, the League's executive director, Christopher McKenzie, acknowledged that the letter sent to SACOG contained inaccuracies and didn't fully reflect his organization's views. Nonetheless, the League's actions have helped turn the tide against SB 375, which has already passed the Senate, and Steinberg now plans to make it a "two-year" bill.

Núñez should not let this happen. At this point in last year's Legislature, Núñez was able to knock heads and resolve differences over AB 32. He should do so again with SB 375. California's global warming law - and the speaker's environmental legacy -- depend on California tackling its transportation challenges now, not waiting until some hazy future.

[L.A. Times editorial, Wednesday, Sept. 5, 2007:](#)

## **Paying for a clean port**

### **It's hard for the mayor to back a 'green' plan as long as state and local interests compete for funds.**

To those who follow developments at L.A.'s giant port complex, the source of much of the region's smog, traffic and economic growth, it seems very odd that Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa is failing to back a critical state bill that would provide money to help clean up port operations and get cargo off the roads and onto rail lines. Green growth at the ports, after all, has been a policy priority of the mayor's.

But the back story on SB 974, sponsored by Democratic Sen. Alan Lowenthal of Long Beach, is complicated and involves a state/local split that has been worsened by terrible decision-making in Sacramento. Villaraigosa may not be exactly right, but he isn't exactly wrong, either.

Lowenthal's bill would impose a \$60 fee on each filled 40-foot container moving through the state's ports. The \$394 million generated annually would be spent on projects that reduce air pollution and speed the movement of goods along rail lines. None of the money could be spent on road or highway projects, a bone of contention with port officials and the mayor, who want to use the funds to shore up two crumbling bridges near the ports.

Lowenthal had good reason for shunning road projects. Shippers are threatening to sue the state if the bill passes, arguing that the fee would constitute an illegal tax rather than a user fee. Proceeds from user fees are supposed to be spent only on projects that benefit the payers or clean up their messes, so spending the money on roads -- which are used by the general public in addition to trucks carrying cargo -- might make the state vulnerable to legal challenges.

At the same time, Villaraigosa and the ports have good reason not to trust Sacramento to spend the money appropriately. The governor and the Legislature have a bad habit of grabbing money designated for specific purposes to fill gaps in the general fund. And the California Transportation Commission, which would allocate some of the container-fee money, has been dawdling with the \$3.2 billion in bonds that voters approved last year for port cleanup and infrastructure. Los Angeles is underrepresented on the commission, and its decisions so far on bond money make it clear that the panel has no interest in giving the city its fair share.

Further complicating matters is that the ports want to impose their own container fee under their clean-air plan, which is expected to be approved this fall. That would allow the ports to collect and allocate the money, and they would doubtless spend it on rebuilding the bridges as well as on rail and clean-air projects. Local officials would much rather maintain local control of the money than send it to Sacramento.

The danger with this jurisdictional spat is that it could end with neither container-fee proposal getting the nod. Though we trust the ports with the money more than we do the state, what really matters here is that shippers and retailers start paying their share to build the infrastructure needed to move their goods while lessening the deadly environmental effects. Lowenthal and the ports should work out their differences and work together on a single container-fee plan, then use all their influence to get it passed.