Officials only made six Spare the Air requests this summer
By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee
Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007

Air quality watchdogs asked the public to voluntarily reduce driving and other pollution-creating activities only six times during the summer, the lowest total in the last several years.

By comparison, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued such requests 23 times last year and 18 times the year before. Usually, officials make the requests -- which are called Spare the Air days -- between 20 and 40 times each summer.

Officials say pollution-fighting efforts all through the Valley are paying off.

"I want to give credit where it's due, which is to Valley residents and businesses, who have really stepped up to the challenge of reducing their emissions," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin.

Spare the Air days are called when air quality is expected to be unhealthy. This summer, the six days occurred on June 14 and 15, July 5 and 6, Aug. 3 and Sept. 7.

The district asks the public for such voluntary actions from June through September, the height of the ozone season. The season will end on Sunday.

Driving is the biggest source of ozone-producing chemicals, but other activities, such as using gasoline-powered lawn mowers or lighting charcoal with starter fluids, contribute to the problem.

Ozone is the main gas in smog, which is known to trigger asthma attacks. Children, the elderly and people with respiratory problems are especially vulnerable.

Bad summer air days drop to 6
By Michael Miyamoto, Staff writer
Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007

The number of summer days where the air in Tulare County was declared unhealthful dropped to six this year, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported.

The number of days, known as Spare the Air days because the air district urges people to curtail polluting activities, has dropped since the program started in 2003. There were 23 in 2006, 18 in 2005, 15 in 2004 and 39 in 2003.

Still, Tulare and Kern counties had more Spare the Air days this year than the district's other counties. San Joaquin County had only one.

"I want to give credit where it's due, which is to Valley residents and businesses," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the air district. "[They] have really stepped up to the challenge of reducing their emissions."

Spare the Air season runs from June through September.

Vehicle use contributes the majority of ozone-forming pollutants in the Valley, officials say. Ozone, the primary ingredient in smog, can exacerbate respiratory conditions and trigger asthma attacks.
Children, the elderly and those with existing respiratory conditions are especially vulnerable. But when ozone reaches an unhealthful level, everybody is at risk.

"It appears that Valley residents have gotten the message that each of us in our daily lives can affect air-pollution levels," said Jaime Holt, the district's chief communications officer. "This year's performance is really a testament to the commitment by all of us to cleaner air."

The air district includes San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties, and a portion of Kern County.

**Drop in Spare the Air days shows progress**  
BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer  
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007

Kern County and the rest of the valley saw a major decrease in Spare the Air days this summer, a sign that progress is being made to clean the air, air regulators said Wednesday.

Six Spare the Air days were called in Kern County this summer, down from 23 last year.

The special designation is called on days when air quality is expected to be unhealthy. Residents are asked to voluntarily avoid or cut down on pollution-creating activities on these days by carpooling, linking trips and not using lawn equipment.

Officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said the public's cooperation and efforts by businesses to reduce emissions led to fewer Spare the Air days this season.

"This year's performance is really a testament to the commitment by all of us to cleaner air," said Jaime Holt, an air district spokeswoman.

Spare the Air season runs from June through September when smog levels are at their highest due to hot weather.

Smog is formed when emissions from tailpipes and factories react in the sunlight. Ozone, the key ingredient in smog, can exacerbate asthma and other lung conditions.

**Air efforts made a difference, district officials say**  
By MICHAEL G. MOONEY  
Modesto Bee, Thursday, September 27, 2007

Valley residents and business owners should give themselves a big pat on the back this morning. Why?

Thanks to your efforts, say officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the number of Spare the Air days here reached its lowest level in five years.

Just six such days were called throughout the air district's northern region -- Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties -- this summer, which ended Sunday.

Typically, between 20 and 40 Spare the Air days are declared during the course of a summer, depending upon location.
"I want to give credit where it's due," said Seyed Sadredin, air district executive director, "which is to valley residents and businesses who have really stepped up to the challenge of reducing their emissions."

This summer's relatively mild temperatures also played a role, according to air district spokeswoman Janelle Schneider.

"Our (weather) conditions were a contributing factor," she said. "Ozone formation happens in intense heat and sunlight."

Over the summer, the Modesto area recorded just 10 days of 100 degrees or more. During the summer of 2006, that temperature was reached or eclipsed on 19 days.

Spare the Air days are called when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy for everybody (151 and higher on the Air Quality Index) or unhealthy for specific sensitive groups (101-150) in adjacent counties.

This year, that declaration was made just six times in the district's northern region -- June 14-15, July 5-6, Aug. 3 and Sept. 7 -- compared with 42 days in 2006 and 26 in 2005.

In the northern region, which typically records the lowest number of Spare the Air days, just one was declared in San Joaquin County, two in Stanislaus and three in Merced County.

During the summer of 2006, 10 Spare the Air days were recorded in San Joaquin, 13 in Stanislaus and 19 in Merced.

In the district's two southernmost counties, Tulare and the valley portion of Kern, there were six Spare the Air days in each county, compared to 23 apiece the previous year.

"It appears that valley residents have gotten the message that each of us in our daily lives can affect air pollution levels," said district spokeswoman Jaime Holt.

Spare the Air season runs from June through September each year, the height of the ozone season.

Vehicle use contributes the majority of ozone-forming pollutants in the valley.

Ozone, the primary ingredient in smog, can exacerbate respiratory conditions and trigger asthma attacks. Children, the elderly and people with respiratory conditions are especially vulnerable, but when ozone reaches an unhealthy level, everybody is at risk.

**Art contest gives kids opportunity to help air**

By Dhyana Levey
Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, September 27, 2007

Children with a creative eye and steady hand can submit artwork for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's 2008 Clean Air Kids Calendar.

Deadline is Monday, Oct. 15.

Use crayons, markers or paints to draw a color picture that relates to cleaning up the air. Fourteen drawings will be chosen for next year's educational, bilingual calendar. Photographs of the student artists, their ages, schools and hometowns will accompany each of the drawings.

Only students living in the district can participate.

The district distributes 20,000 of these calendars free each year to schools, libraries, healthcare facilities and businesses.
Some examples of clean air messages include: carpool to school or work; ride your bike or skateboard; check before you burn wood in your fireplace; my pet and I like clean air; and barbecue with propane or natural gas.

Design the picture on an 8 1/2-by-11-inch piece of white paper, lengthwise or horizontal. Write a clean air message or sentence on the picture in English or Spanish. On the back, write your name, grade, age, name of school, teacher's name, home telephone number and home address. Do not fold or staple the drawing.

All pictures must be your own original artwork.

Mail or deliver the drawing in a large envelope to the San Joaquin Valley Air District, Attn: Calendar Contest, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726.

**City schools will further reduce bus pollution**

BY TARA MCLAUGHLIN, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007

More school buses will likely be spewing less pollution in the coming months.

The Bakersfield City School District will have more time to make buses better for the environment after the board approved extending an agreement with air regulators Tuesday.

Twenty-one buses have already been retrofitted with gadgets to cut particulate-matter emissions by 85 percent, officials said. With the extension, an additional 10 buses can be retrofitted. Exposure to this kind of pollution aggravates asthma and can lead to early death for people with heart and lung disease, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Retrofitting the buses now means they won’t have to be replaced to comply with the air district's 2016 deadline for cleaner bus fleets.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District provides $10,000 per retrofit, according to documents provided by BCSD. The school district pays $1,000 plus the cost of installation. Another agreement may be available next year, which could fully fund 35 more bus upgrades and save BCSD $94,850, the school district said.

The air district must sign the amended agreement before it is instated, according to Todd DeYoung, supervising air quality specialist with the air district.

In other matters, Sequoia Middle School "has done an excellent job of staying focused on accelerating student growth," according to a report presented to the board. The school is in its second year of state oversight, said Principal Gary McCloskey.

According to earlier news reports, Sequoia was in trouble with the state after accepting a state grant to reform the school in 1998. A condition of that grant was to meet certain testing targets within two years, which it did not.

"We feel very good," McCloskey said. "We continue to improve."

Sequoia's Academic Performance Index, which is a number between 200 and 1,000 calculated from students' statewide tests, jumped 46 points to 625. It must improve for two consecutive years to exit review.
The state-established target is 800.

**Judge: Dairy violates Clean Air Act**

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007

A federal judge ruled Tuesday that a Kern County dairy violated the federal Clean Air Act.

The C&R Vanderham Dairy near Shafter was built in July 2005 to house about 1,300 cows. The dairy, along with the regional air district, has said it's too small to be regulated.

The Association for Irritated Residents, a Kern County environmental group, sued the dairy's owners, saying they did not follow proper procedures for obtaining air permits and installing pollution controls.

Cows and manure from dairies give off emissions that react in sunlight to form smog. Numerous studies have shown that exposure to smog exacerbates asthma and damages lungs, contributing to school and work absenteeism.

The judge ruled against the dairy.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said the dairy is caught in the middle of a housekeeping issue.

For years, dairies and other agriculture operations in California were exempt from pollution regulations. That protection was repealed under SB 700, a state law by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, that passed several years ago. The law required the agriculture industry to be regulated but allowed small farms to remain exempt.

The Vanderham dairy falls under the small farm classification, air district officials said, and therefore should not be subject to stringent pollution regulations.

However, before SB 700 was enacted, the air district submitted an air pollution control plan to the federal government that called for subjecting agriculture to the same regulations other industries had to follow.

The plan contained virtually no exemptions for small farms.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved the air district's plan.

When SB 700 passed, the district submitted an amendment to the federal government to allow small farms to be exempt. But the EPA has not ruled yet.

The federal judge ruled Tuesday that the dairy must comply with regulations as they currently exist in the district's federally approved plan.

"It's kind of a rotten deal for (the dairy)," said Phil Jay, an attorney for the air district. "(The environmental groups) think they found a loophole to hammer this guy."

Rick Vanderham, one of the dairy's owners, said he held a valid operating permit from the air district.
Tom Frantz, a Shafter resident and member of Association of Irritated Residents, said in a news release Wednesday: "This is a significant step toward better health in the San Joaquin Valley because our lungs will no longer be forced to subsidize the dairy industry."

Civil penalties against the dairy will be considered in further court proceedings. The judge also will determine at that time if the dairy must shut down until it obtains the necessary air permits.

**Judge rules Kern County dairy needs air pollution permit**

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wed., September 26, 2007

Fresno, Calif. (AP) -- A Kern County dairy violated the federal Clean Air Act when it built a new plant before obtaining an air permit and complying with the latest air pollution requirements, a federal judge ruled Tuesday.

The Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment sued C&R Vanderham Dairy nearly two years ago in U.S. District Court in Fresno, claiming the dairy needed to apply for an air permit before beginning construction.

The plaintiffs argued that volatile organic compounds in decomposing dairy manure, livestock feed, and cows' digestive systems contributed to the region's polluted air. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District had said the Vanderham dairy did not need an air permit because it would only house 1,320 milk cows.

The dairy finally obtained an air permit in April.

Judge Oliver Wanger's ruling said federal policy required the dairy to get a district permit before starting construction, to install the best available pollution control technology and to buy emission reduction credits to offset excess pollution.

A March court date was set to determine what fines the dairy will need to pay and whether it must stop work until it shows compliance, said attorney Avinash Kar, who argued the case on behalf of the Association of Irritated Residents, a Shafter-based group.

"It's about time the district started requiring dairies to clean up their act," Kar said.

**Bakersfield hits No. 17 in job growth, retention**

By Andy Kehe, Californian staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007

More or less, job seekers are finding out that in Bakersfield less is more.

And they are accepting jobs in big numbers and staying.

Due to its relative low cost, strategic placement and close proximity to the Southland, Bakersfield emerged as a top-20 performer in a study ranking the nation's 200 largest metropolitan areas for their job growth and job retention.

The Milken Institute, a publicly-supported think tank dedicated to improving economic conditions, moved Bakersfield up 13 positions from its 2005 rankings to No. 17, behind only No. 3 Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario among 21 California metro areas. Bakersfield is No. 1 among the seven Central Valley metro areas, including Sacramento. Fresno ranked ninth among California metros and 66th overall.
But at 7.9 percent in July, Bakersfield’s unemployment rate still lagged behind the state average of 5.3 percent.

“The housing boom, even though it has moderated some, spurred lots of growth in Bakersfield,” said Ross DeVol, director of regional economics for the Santa Monica-based Milken Institute. “Bakersfield is a low cost metropolitan area for California and its proximity to the Southern California region makes it a warehouse/transportation hub.”

The north-central Florida city of Ocala, with a metropolitan population of 316,000, emerged as No. 1, followed by Wilmington, N.C. Six Florida metros ranked in the top 14 and five California metros ranked in the top 30.

A rebound in the high tech sector was offered by the Milken Institute as the reason for radical improvements in the rankings by many cities and California cities’ advancements in general. However, Bakersfield ranked 112th in high tech growth over a five-year period ending in 2006, but ranked 18th in overall job growth during the same period. Job growth has slowed some since then. After ranking ninth in 2005 for job growth, Bakersfield slipped to 47th for the most recently measured period from March 2006 to March 2007.

“Clearly, there has been a slowing down due to the housing situation, but it hasn’t been as severe in other parts of California such as the Inland Empire,” DeVol said. “It all gets back to housing and quality of life - people, professionals end up taking positions in Bakersfield for less wages than they got in Los Angeles, but once adjustments are made for standard of living, it turns out to be a substantial increase.”

**Milken Institute’s top 20 best performing metropolitan areas in job growth and job retention**

1. Ocala, Fla.
2. Wilmington, N.C.
3. Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario
4. Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale
5. Orlando-Kissimmee, Fla.
7. McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, Texas
8. Provo-Orem, Utah
9. Las Vegas-Paradise, Nev.
10. Raleigh-Cary, N.C.
11. Myrtle Beach-Conway-North Myrtle Beach, Fla.
13. Cape Coral-Fort Meyers, Fla.
16. Huntsville, Ala.
17. Bakersfield
18. Salt Lake City, Utah
19. Boise City-Nampa, Idaho
20. Austin-Round Rock, Texas

**Valley's smog-prone trucks could be replaced**

**Officials expect to see chunk of $1B transportation bond**

By E.J. Schultz, Bee Capital bureau

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, September 26, 2007
SACRAMENTO -- The valley could get as much as $340 million in state money in coming years to replace pollution-spewing trucks, according to new information about a clean-air program set to make its debut next year.

Fresno-area leaders have lobbied hard for the money and are pleased with what they see so far, though many details still need to be finalized.

"The valley's effort to get our voice heard in Sacramento has reached the decision makers, and we're pleased about that," said Pete Weber, a civic leader who has teamed with valley air regulators to lobby for the money.

The program was created in November when voters passed Proposition 1B. The $19.9 billion transportation bond includes $1 billion for projects to reduce pollution along trade corridors.

The state Air Resources Board, which will distribute the $1 billion, released "draft concepts" last week that will guide development of the program over the coming months.

Most of the money, about $560 million, will go toward reduction of pollution at ports in the Bay Area and Southern California. But $340 million was reserved for upgrading long-haul diesel trucks and installing auxiliary power systems at truck stops to reduce engine idling.

The valley has some of the worst air in the nation, and trucks are a major contributor to the problem. Among vehicles, diesel trucks account for 80 percent of a key smog-making gas called oxides of nitrogen, or NOx.

Furthermore, nearly half of the diesel truck traffic in the state's four major transportation corridors passes through the valley, accounting for an estimated 11.6 million miles daily.

Armed with that data, valley officials are confident they will land a major chunk of the truck money when grants are announced.

"It's our understanding that most of the $340 million will be aimed at the valley," Weber said.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials estimate the money could help remove about 7,000 polluting trucks. The district also hopes to snare some of the port money to replace older trucks that run from valley farm packinghouses to the ports.

The state air board will allocate $250 million of the $1 billion in 2007-08, with grants scheduled to be announced in the spring.

The valley air district is finalizing a truck replacement proposal that would work this way:

Trucking companies could apply for grants to help replace trucks from model years 2000-04. The companies then would give those trucks to companies running even older trucks. The older trucks then would be crushed.

The idea is that you "replace two dirtier trucks with one transaction," said Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director.

Environmentalists agree with the need to replace trucks, but worry that the district's program leaves room for abuse. For instance, a large company might use state money to pay for a truck replacement it already had planned, said Liza Bolanos, coordinator for Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, a nonprofit group representing public health and environmental organizations.

"We want to make sure that this money is used to incentivize actions," she said.

Sadredin said the district is confident it can identify worthy recipients.

"We will not give it to a truck owner that would have replaced their trucks anyway," he said.
Valley could get millions to replace dirty trucks
Lodi News Sentinel, Wednesday, September 26, 2006

FRESNO — Air in the smog-laden San Joaquin Valley could get cleaner under an emerging plan to direct as much as $340 million in state funds to take dirty diesel trucks off the road.

The draft concepts released last week by the California Air Resources Board propose upgrading the fleet of diesel trucks traveling through the valley through transportation bond funds from Proposition 1B, which voters approved in November.

Air quality advocates called the proposal an important step toward lowering smog-forming nitrogen oxides, a byproduct of the heavy truck traffic passing in the state’s farming region. The money would also go to install auxiliary power systems at truck stops to reduce engine idling.

“This is the first concrete step toward ending the Valley’s clean-air crisis,” said Kevin Hamilton of Medical Advocates for Healthy Air. “Finally, someone is showing real leadership to end this public health emergency.”

State air quality managers are charged with distributing a total of $1 billion to reduce pollution at ports and along trade corridors.

Board members were scheduled to vote on the draft concepts at a hearing Thursday.

HARD bike track ruling delayed

HAYWARD — Residents at the 140-unit Skywest Townhomes can live with:

Noise and air pollution emanating from the neighboring Hayward Executive Airport. Lights at adjoining Bohannon Field. Traffic from the nearby Target store.

What they don't need, they said Monday, is the dust, noise and light from a proposed BMX motocross dirt racing track between San Lorenzo Adult School and Bohannon Field.

A track behind the school on Bockman Road would affect a minimum of 300 to 400 Hayward and San Lorenzo Village residents, Skywest resident Mary Clements told Hayward Area Recreation and Park District directors.

Skywest homes off Clubhouse Drive border Bohannon Field. Clements asked directors to imagine living in one of the townhomes.

"How would you be affected by the noise from the participants, the spectators and the loudspeaker?" Clements, a 30-year Skywest resident, said of the proposed dirt track. "From the dirt that will fill the air and the lights that will be used for night performances. We will not be happy to keep our windows and coverings closed."

HARD directors were scheduled Monday to approve a contract with the San Lorenzo Unified School District for joint use of the 1-acre property.

Instead, directors postponed a decision until Oct. 22 at the request of the San Lorenzo Village Homes Association. Association directors will discuss the track on Oct. 18.

The area behind the adult school has been under consideration since last spring. HARD General Manager Eric Willyerd said more public comments are needed before a vote is taken.
Clements and her neighbors, Edward and Elizabeth Page, said they learned of the proposed track in a Daily Review article last week. The article was circulated among townhome residents, and HARD subsequently received several e-mails voicing objections.

Edward Page noted that a BMX site in a crowded neighborhood alley south of the Bayfair BART station was closed last summer.

"Why are you even considering putting a larger facility in another neighborhood?" he asked directors.

The East Bay Olympic Committee, an affiliate of the National Bicycle League, would be responsible for building, operating, insuring and maintaining the track with its mounds of dirt hurdles and obstacles.

**Commission OKs building power plant**

*Company hopes to have Hayward natural-gas facility working by 2010*

By Matt O'Brien, staff writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, September 27, 2007

HAYWARD — The California Energy Commission voted unanimously on Wednesday to allow Calpine Corp. to build a 600-megawatt power plant near the Hayward shoreline.

Commissioner John Geesman, speaking at a Sacramento meeting after listening to a chorus of project opponents, said the natural gas-fired Russell City Energy Center is consistent with California’s efforts to displace coal power with natural gas-fired energy generation.

Pacific Gas and Electric Co., which supplies electricity to most of Northern California and will buy electricity from the Hayward plant, has said it relies on coal plants for just 1 percent of its power mix. But out-of-state coal plants still provide a hefty percentage of power for other parts of California.

The Russell City plant is designed to run round-the-clock and provide electricity for about 600,000 residents of the Bay Area. Calpine plans to have it built and connected to the PG&E grid by summer 2010.

The commission’s 4-0 vote ended a protracted, nearly seven-year approval process that escalated into heated public debate in recent months. Commissioner James Boyd was absent.

Among those who asked the commission to hold off on its decision Wednesday was James Sorensen, director of the Alameda County Community Development Agency, who said county supervisors and the community remain concerned about air pollution, the plant’s effects on aviation safety and other issues.

"The community isn’t convinced," Sorensen said.

Calpine Corp., a San Jose-based company that has partnered with General Electric to finance the 12-story plant’s construction, expressed thanks to the commission after the vote Wednesday.

Calpine originally won state approval to build Russell City in 2002, but delays caused the company to lose the industrial land on which it was planning to build. It later found another parcel of city-owned property a few blocks away.

The Hayward City Council unanimously voted in October 2005 to facilitate the project with a land swap while Calpine, which has been in bankruptcy proceedings since December 2005, sought to gain a new building permit from the state.

But the past year has seen a high level of public scrutiny of the plant, which caught many by surprise. Much of the controversy arose after another company, Tierra Energy of Colorado, proposed building a second power plant nearby. Until now, Hayward has had none.
Local residents have opposed the plants primarily because of the thousands of pounds of pollutants they are projected to release into local air every day. The companies must mitigate that pollution, but through a regional pollution trading system that many locals have criticized for putting too much of a health burden on Hayward.

In order to comply with regional air quality regulations, Calpine will be allowed to buy pollution credits that were banked into a pollution-trading system long ago.

One credit is for the 1991 shutdown of a Hercules refinery and another is for two units of San Francisco's Potrero Power Plant that were shut down in the 1980s.

The company will also create a $1.7 million program to provide some East Bay residents with partial rebates to replace their fireplaces and wood stoves. The program is supposed to eliminate about 43 tons of fine particulate matter from being emitted into the air annually.

Paul Haavik, a Hayward resident who served as a public intervenor in the plant proceedings, said the retrofit program is "unreasonable" because it would require more than 4,000 retrofits and cost residents about $5.6 million.

The $300 rebate offered for a retrofit is only a portion of the $1,500 most retrofits cost, Haavik said.

He said "people are disappointed" with the commission's decision Wednesday, but his goal now is to make sure the mitigation is done right and that a second power plant is not built in Hayward.

Calpine has touted the efficiency of its proposed Russell City plant, which will work on a combined-cycle system that reuses some of the exhaust that older gas-burning plants would have wasted.

Apart from a few comments defending the commission's public noticing process from criticism, the hearing Wednesday did not engender much discussion from commissioners, who are appointed by the governor and each represent a different area of expertise.

The commission was scheduled to vote on the plant two weeks ago but was delayed by a last-minute intervention from the Federal Aviation Administration.

Earlier this month, the FAA issued a letter declaring its concerns about how high-velocity plumes of exhaust rising hundreds of feet into the air could affect aircraft heading to and from the Hayward Executive Airport, just 1.5 miles away.

The same concerns caused Energy Commission staff members to issue a report in July recommending against construction of the plant at the proposed location.

But an FAA official who testified before commissioners Wednesday downplayed the agency's earlier concerns, saying the chance of the plumes causing an accident would be very low.

**Commission unveils its ideal regional rail map**

**Plan would expand transit in Bay Area, but critics call it incomplete without public input and research on future riders**

By Erik N. Nelson, staff writer

Contra Costa Times Thurs., Sept. 27, 2007

There may or may not be high-speed "bullet trains" whizzing across the Bay Area in 2050, but the region's first plan for a unified commuter rail system since BART was envisioned in the 1950s would connect Antioch with Tracy, feature a second BART tube under the Bay and extend all the way to Monterey in the south and Cloverdale in the north.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission unanimously adopted its first regional rail plan Wednesday, brushing aside criticism from public transportation advocates and a Central Valley
delegation that the plan was incomplete without more public input, deliberation and research on future ridership.

The 121-page document, assembled during two years by representatives of the MTC, BART, Caltrain and the California High-Speed Rail Authority, is more of a "concept plan," said MTC Executive Director Steve Heminger, and not something that would dictate or preclude any future rail improvements.

Still, it represents a major step forward for a region where different and sometimes competing agencies have developed separately. Most recently, BART managers have bemoaned Caltrain's "Baby Bullet" express trains from San Jose to San Francisco, introduced just as BART hoped to attract commuters on its 2003 San Francisco International Airport extension into San Mateo County.

"There hasn't really been a good comprehensive assessment of rail needs in the Bay Area since the original BART plans in the late '50s," said MTC Planning Director Doug Kimsey. "It's a look; it's a snapshot of what we think the Bay Area regional rail system should look like," regardless of financial and other constraints.

The plan was one of the requirements of Regional Measure 2, approved by voters in 2004, which raised tolls on seven state-owned area bridges by $1 to help pay for congestion-relieving transportation projects.

In addition to looking at the area's regional rail network, planners also were told to look at how the network would dovetail with the state's high-speed rail network. That part was separated in the plan, ostensibly because the California High-Speed Rail Authority is undergoing an environmental review process comparing two hotly contested alignments from the Bay Area to the Central Valley, one through the heavily congested Altamont Pass and the other through the more rural Pacheco Pass to the south.

The commission, which is on record supporting the Pacheco Pass, tentatively has planned to review the authority's environmental study of the two alignments and perhaps revisit its position on the issue next month.

Although the rail plan has a lot to offer, "it's still inadequate," Andy Katz of the Sierra Club told the commissioners before they approved the plan. "It looked at where the ridership is, but not where the ridership is going."

He urged the commissioners to revisit the plan after the California High-Speed Rail Authority established a route.

Stuart Cohen, executive director of the Oakland-based Transportation and Land Use Coalition, said that though he thought "the process did not work that well," he liked several aspects of the plan, including its acknowledgment that different corridors would be better served by different types of rail systems.

For instance, Caltrain's corridor up the Peninsula would benefit from the rapid acceleration of lighter-weight, self-propelled electric rail cars, whereas the corridor between eastern Contra Costa County and Tracy could more easily be outfitted with conventional, heavier locomotive-pulled trains.

Among the plan's recommendations are:
- For BART, a second Transbay Tube, a fourth parallel track through downtown Oakland and express trains to increase capacity.
- Building already-planned BART extensions to San Jose and East Contra Costa County.
- Building the so-called SMART train through Marin and Sonoma counties.
- Adding extra tracks along the existing Capitol Corridor commuter route from Oakland to Richmond and in Solano County to cut freight and passenger congestion.
• Adding and electrifying Caltrain tracks.
• Extending commuter rail to Salinas and Monterey in the south.
• Connecting Union City and Redwood City at the Dumbarton Bridge with lightweight, electric train service.

White House Taking Unearned Credit for Emissions Cuts
Pushing Voluntary Curbs on Greenhouse Gases, Administration Lauds Results of Programs It Opposed
By Juliet Eilperin and Steven Mufson Washington Post Staff Writers
Washington Post, Thursday, September 27, 2007

Seeking to counter international pressure to adopt binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions, the Bush administration has been touting the success of three mandatory programs to curb U.S. energy consumption: gas mileage standards for vehicles, efficiency standards for home appliances and state laws requiring utilities to increase their use of renewable energy sources.

But for most of the Bush presidency, the White House has either done little to promote these measures or, in some cases, has actively fought against them. Moreover, the fuel economy and appliance initiatives were first taken years ago to slash energy consumption, long before climate change became a pressing issue.

The administration initially delayed plans to set improved energy-efficiency standards for 22 appliances, which led to a court battle with the Natural Resources Defense Council, an advocacy group. Under a 2006 legal settlement, the Energy Department is now working to finish the rules. The White House also tried to reverse strict efficiency standards for central air conditioners upon Bush's taking office in 2001, a move the NRDC had reversed in a separate lawsuit.

Although the administration imposed modest boosts in the gas mileage standards for light trucks starting in 2003, Bush did not endorse any substantial increase in the mandates for cars until this year's State of the Union address, a proposal that has yet to materialize as regulation.

And while the administration says it supports states that set renewable portfolio standards, which force utilities to use certain levels of renewable energy, it opposes adopting nationwide standards.

"These are just simply words," said Roland Hwang, the NRDC's vehicle policy director. Hwang added that Bush's new goal of increasing overall vehicle fuel efficiency is admirable, but there's "a big question mark" as to whether it will come to fruition before he leaves office.

The administration opens two days of climate change talks this morning that include 16 nations that account for most of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, an event that could become a linguistic minefield over what constitutes "mandatory" measures. In the rest of the world, mandatory limits on global warming gases take the form of a cap-and-trade program that sets nation-by-nation ceilings on emissions. It was the system set up under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol modeled on a U.S. program to stop pollution that causes acid rain.

The administration says it opposes "mandatory" limits on greenhouse gases for the United States but is willing to back "voluntary" limits and mandatory cuts on an industry by industry basis.

"We have a broad portfolio of measures, mandates, incentives and public and private partnerships," said James L. Connaughton, who chairs the White House Council on Environmental Quality, in an interview last week.

But British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's special representative for climate change, John Ashton, said yesterday that self-imposed targets are not enough. "We need to make commitments to each other, not just to ourselves," Ashton said.
In the run-up to this week's meeting, European delegates have been pushing Bush administration officials to be more precise about the session's outcome. White House aides have been trying to get U.S. allies to commit in advance to endorsing a document whose language they would not disclose, but some delegates have balked.

One delegate said Europeans did not have high hopes for the session but wanted to prevent the Bush administration from using the event to undermine the United Nations' climate negotiating process.

"We didn't come here thinking we will have real results from this," said the European official, who would not be identified because he was not authorized to discuss the issue.

Several developing nations cite the U.S. government's voluntary approach as a reason why they should not be required to adopt mandatory emissions cuts. In a news conference yesterday sponsored by the Center for Clean Air Policy, a policy and research group, Brazil's special representative for climate change, Sergio Serra, said that over the course of this decade, Brazil and China alone will have enacted emissions cuts equivalent to what the United States will accomplish with its voluntary efforts.

"There's a myth that developing countries are doing nothing to address climate change," Serra said.

Yesterday, the Environmental Protection Agency announced that U.S. average fuel economy improved in both 2005 and 2006, the first consecutive annual increases since the mid-1980s, producing a current average of 20.2 miles per gallon for cars and light duty trucks.

"Automakers are answering President Bush's call to improve fuel economy and decrease our nation's dependency on foreign oil," said EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson in a statement.

The administration has vowed to further increase fuel efficiency by 4 percent a year over 10 years, which would result in a combined fleet average of nearly 35 miles per gallon in 2017. Hwang praised that goal but said he was waiting to see if the EPA actually publishes rules to accomplish it.

On another front, the administration is finalizing two of the 22 standards that will apply to a variety of home appliances, including dishwashers, clothes dryers, water heaters and ovens. Improving those standards and six others over the next five years will lower carbon emissions by 4.7 billion tons over the next 23 years, according to Megan Barnett, a Department of Energy spokeswoman.

"It's a quick and easy way to reduce emissions," she said.

The government's voluntary efficiency program, which awards efficient appliances, products and buildings an "Energy Star" label, translated into greenhouse gas emissions savings last year equivalent to taking 25 million automobiles off the road for a year, according to the EPA.

But Ned Helme, president of the Center for Clean Air Policy, said if the United States had ratified the Kyoto Protocol, which Bush repudiated when he took office, the nation would have had to cut 2.8 billion tons of carbon emissions in 2010, and that these voluntary programs are "not even in the ballpark."

"There's no way the appliance standards and [fuel efficiency] standards would achieve the Kyoto targets for the U.S. in 2010," Helme said.

**Senators urged to invest in green tech**

By Frank Davies, Medianews staff
WASHINGTON — Entrepreneurs, scientists and venture capitalists, including two leaders on energy issues from the Bay Area, urged senators Tuesday to invest in green tech programs they said would create jobs and help achieve energy independence.

The green tech proponents were met with opposition and skepticism from a couple of economists and analysts, including former House Republican Majority Leader Dick Armey, who warned that a dramatic, mandated shift to renewable fuels would drive up energy costs and hurt the economy.

Sen. Barbara Boxer, who chairs the Environment Committee, scheduled the hearing Tuesday during what was billed as climate week, with international meetings on global warming hosted by the United Nations and the Bush administration. Boxer said efforts to mandate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions would help the economy and create many new jobs.

Vinod Khosla, one of Silicon Valley's leading venture capitalists, assured senators that he was testifying not to make an environmental case for climate change legislation but an economic one.

The development of alternative fuels, even at an early stage, is creating jobs in California, Khosla said, and that will take off when governments do more to limit oil and coal use.

A University of California, Berkeley study found more jobs will be generated by investing in renewable energy than in a comparable investment in fossil-fuel sources that exist today.

What we need is a level playing field, said Khosla, citing large government subsidies and tax breaks for oil and coal.

Sigmar Gabriel, Germany's environment minister, told the Senate committee that his country's investment in renewable energy has helped create 1.5 million jobs in the last five years. The director of the Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory at Berkeley, Daniel Kammen, said the United States is trying to catch up to European nations and Brazil, who are reaping economic benefits from investment in renewable energy.

Kammen, who worked on California's low-carbon fuel standard, noted that the U.S. ethanol industry created 147,000 jobs in 2004, generating $2 billion in new tax revenue, yet Congress and the Bush administration have cut the budget for energy research and development since the 1990s.

But Armey warned that limitations on carbon-based fuels constitute a supply shock that would inevitably drive up energy costs for consumers and businesses. Armey now heads Freedom Works, a grassroots group that promotes market-based solutions to problems.

There are real doubts now that green tech will be a job creator, Armey said. The very best you could say is that it would mean no net job reduction.

Armey and Kenneth Green, an environmental policy analyst at the American Enterprise Institute, said emissions controls in the United States, if not enacted in other countries, would drive more businesses to India and China, where energy costs would be lower.

Emission controls would definitely mean higher costs, Armey said, while Khosla said many economic models ignore the impact of technological innovation and missed the takeoff of Internet businesses in the 1990s.

Innovation will lead to declining costs (for renewable fuels), and China and India will move quickly to take advantage of that, Khosla said in a brief interview after the hearing.

Elsewhere on the green tech front, Oakland activist Van Jones said more than 50 businesses today will announce support for Green for All, a project to fund job-training for solar-panel installers and other skilled work. The city of Oakland has kicked in $250,000 for one program.
Employers say they will need a highly trained green-collar workforce, and this could mean good jobs for African Americans and others in cities, said Jones, who cofounded the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, based in Oakland.

Jones said plans for launching the job-training project will be announced at a meeting today of business and community leaders at the Clinton Global Initiative in New York.

**Rice urges nations to find cleaner fuels**

By John Heilprin, Associated Press
in the Modesto Bee, Thursday, September 27, 2007

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice challenged the world's biggest polluters Thursday to find ways to shift toward energy sources that reduce global warming, without harming their economies.

She made clear the U.S. preference for voluntary measures, determined by each nation, to help stabilize concentrations of carbon dioxide and other industrial gases that are heating the atmosphere like a greenhouse.

"Let me emphasize that this is not a one-size-fits-all effort," Rice said at the start of a two-day climate meeting called by President Bush. "Though united by common goals and collective responsibilities, all nations should tackle climate change in the ways that they deem best."

Rice said the challenge of global climate change depends on working with businesses to develop cleaner-burning cars and other new technologies without starving national economies of the energy they need to grow.

"Managing the status quo is simply not an adequate response," she said. "We must cut the Gordian knot of fossil fuels, carbon emissions and economic activity. This current system is no longer sustainable, and we must transcend it entirely through a revolution in energy technology."

The United States has lined up with China, India and other major polluters in opposition to the mandatory cuts in Earth-warming greenhouse gases sought by the United Nations and European countries under the Kyoto Protocol. It is an attempt to bridge the differences between industrialized and fast-developing nations, none of which want to compromise economic growth.

Though the meeting includes Britain, France, Germany and other nations in the Kyoto accord, many European officials expressed concern that Bush's meeting would sidetrack the U.N. negotiations that have been the main forum for addressing global warming.

"We can't do this on the basis of talking about talking or setting goals to set goals," John Ashton, a special representative on climate change for the British foreign secretary, said in an interview. "We know that a voluntary approach to global warming is about as effective as a voluntary speed limit sign in the road. We don't just need an approach that works; we need an approach that works very quickly."

A White House statement said the meeting will emphasize creating more diplomatic processes to find a solution to global warming, rather than setting firm goals for reducing carbon dioxide and other gases blamed for heating up the atmosphere.

The nations summoned by Bush will seek agreement on how they might set their own strategies beyond 2012, when the U.N.-brokered Kyoto Protocol expires, but also could include "a long-term global goal," the statement says.

Despite the emphasis on bureaucracy, James Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council of Environmental Quality, told participants: "This has to be about more than presentations."
Bush's meeting notably includes the fast-emerging economies whose exclusion from the group of industrialized nations participating in Kyoto has been cited by his administration as reasons for rejecting that international climate accord.

"This relatively small group of countries holds a key to tackling a big part of the problem," said Yvo de Boer, the top U.N. climate official.

Yet Bush also has competed for attention with the climate change summit that was held Monday in New York City at which U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned 80 world leaders that "the time for doubt has passed" and urged fast action to save future generations from potentially ruinous effects of global warming.

The U.S.-led talks Thursday and Friday unite countries at both ends of the economic spectrum, the haves and have-nots, in opposition to mandatory cuts in greenhouse gases, but for different reasons. The already-industrialized nations do not want to harm their economies, as Bush has argued. Developing nations do not want to give up ground toward industrializing - and meeting basic human needs.

"For a developing country, the main task is to reduce poverty," Xie Zhenhua, vice chairman of China's national development and reform commission, told a forum Wednesday sponsored by the Center for Clean Air Policy, a think tank.

Mexico's environment minister agreed. "We have always to bear in mind that half our population is at the poverty line," said Juan Rafael Elvira Quesada. "We are also extremely concerned about the consequences, the adverse effects of climate change."

They expressed a strong preference for the climate negotiations to determine a post-2012 strategy later this year sponsored by the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, for which Ban's summit Monday was intended to build momentum.

"All these discussions should be taken within the framework of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol," Xie said.

Developing countries still are trying to curb their emissions while lifting the welfare of their citizens, said Sergio Serra, Brazil's first ambassador in charge of global warming issues.

"It is a myth to think the developing countries are doing nothing to address climate change," he said.

**Banks Urging U.S. to Adopt the Trading of Emissions**

By James Kanter


PARIS, Sept. 25 — A group representing some of the world’s leading banks will urge the United States and other industrial nations this week to move quickly to introduce a lightly regulated system for trading carbon emissions permits.

Permit-trading systems offer banks a potentially vast new business. For it to grow, leading economies — particularly the United States — will need to set limits on the quantities of greenhouse gases that can be released and to allow companies in other parts of the world to buy emissions permits.

"Where politicians opt to implement carbon constraints, then it should be cap-and-trade," said Imtiaz Ahmad, head of emissions trading at Morgan Stanley in London and vice president of a lobbying group called International Carbon Investors and Services, which is being created to represent the banks.
The banking companies, which include Citigroup, Lehman Brothers Holdings and Morgan Stanley, are giving strong signs that Wall Street wants Washington to open the way to reduced emissions using a trading system based on the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement the United States did not ratify, rather than by enacting carbon taxes.

The group also includes European institutions like PNB Parabas, Barclays Capital and Deutsche Bank as well as niche investment banks like Climate Change Capital and the law firms of Baker & McKenzie and DLA Piper.

A Kyoto-style trading system already operates in the European Union, where governments limit the polluting emissions that industries are allowed and require purchases of permits for any excess. But the European system had a rocky start. Overallocation led to volatility and a collapse in the price of permits last year.

Even though analysts say the European overallocation problem has largely been corrected, the banks are pushing for the European Union to auction permits to ensure that they are scarcer and costlier. The banks want any comparable American system to establish a maximum price for carbon permits.

“Price caps should play a very limited role in the system,” said Gia Schneider, a vice president for carbon markets at Credit Suisse, which is a member of the lobbying group. “Such policies could lead to market distortions and stymie efforts to raise enough capital to fund new energy technologies such as windmills and solar power.”

The idea of price caps has been floated by Senator Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, who has suggested a so-called safety valve provision to prevent the price of carbon trading from rising too high.

Carbon traders say emissions permits could become the world’s largest commodities market if developed economies agree to take part in second-phase Kyoto negotiations, to be held in Bali, Indonesia, in December.

Fresno Bee commentary, Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007:
DEEDEE D’ADAMO: New, aggressive plan to clean Valley smog

The Air Resources Board has heard Valley residents: You want cleaner air faster. And you’re right to expect state, local and federal agencies to take aggressive action to clean the air in the Valley.

We've lived through too many smoggy and soot-filled days. We've seen too many children suffering from asthma worsened by high pollution levels. And the residents are tired of missed deadlines and talk of arcane regulatory process.

That's why ARB's new strategy to bring about cleaner air quicker should come as a sign of better things to come. We took the words to heart that we heard from you at the June board hearing, and we've redoubled our efforts to find new solutions to old problems.

Since then, we've held two community meetings in Arvin and Parlier, and three San Joaquin Valley Task Force meetings in Fresno to solicit new ideas. We'll also hold another community meeting in Merced in the next few weeks.

We heard a lot of good ideas that we can follow up on. When you couple our new proposals along with plans we already had in the works, we are now confident that, in terms of the federal standard, we will see a 90% improvement in Valley ozone levels by 2018. The remaining 10% will
be a challenge, and we'll need to rely on the emergence of innovative technologies to meet the target of no violations of the federal ozone standard by 2024.

We are going to accomplish this ambitious goal using a variety of state tools and relying on our local and federal partners to contribute as well. For our part, we are proposing to:

Substantially strengthen an already existing proposal to clean up diesel trucks;

Work with the agricultural community to clean up emissions from farm equipment such as tractors;

Partner with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to accelerate the timeline of the recently passed rules for off-road construction equipment by offering financial incentives to Valley businesses aimed at getting older, dirtier engines retrofitted or replaced sooner; and

Increase staff devoted to enforcing diesel emission regulations in the Valley.

All of these upcoming strategies will include comprehensive economic analyses to ensure that we continue to support a vigorous local economy. Whenever we propose a new regulation, our staff meets with affected businesses to go line by line through their books to fully understand how the rule will affect their bottom line, adjusting the regulation as needed to make sure business can adapt without having to close down or move to another area with less stringent regulations.

As for other emissions reductions measures in the works, last year, ultra low-sulfur diesel began appearing at the pump, which is greatly reducing emissions already along the Highway 5 and 99 corridors. The new blend contains 97% less sulfur, which means huge oxides of nitrogen and particulate matter reductions.

In the coming year, we will also begin soliciting local project proposals under Proposition 1B, which earmarked $1 billion for goods movement pollution control. All told, this program is projected to reduce statewide combined emissions of NOx and diesel particulate matter by more than 250,000 tons during the life of the bond-funded equipment. We fully anticipate that a sizable chunk of this funding will wind up addressing truck and train emissions in the San Joaquin Valley.

So we're on the right track, but now comes the hard part: setting in place the specific measures. As we move forward, we are committed to running an open process that includes regular public along the way. We have ambitious plans, but we can't carry them out without all of our partners, including communities, government and industry.

As a mother of three and a Valley resident for more than 20 years, I am encouraged by the work everyone is undertaking to clear our skies sooner rather than later. Please join us as we move ahead on this crucial public health plan.

DeeDee D'Adamo is a member of the California Air Resources Board.

Fresno Bee commentary, Wed., Sept. 26, 2007:
STAVROS DIMAS: Big carbon cuts - scary, but doable

This June, Group of Eight leaders confirmed the need for "substantial global reductions" in the man-made emissions of greenhouse gases that are dangerously warming the earth. By 2050 global emissions will have to be at least 50 percent below their level in 1990.
Such radical calls are crucial to prevent a climate catastrophe. They also make countries nervous. The reason? They're worried carbon reductions will hurt economic growth.

But this is no longer an excuse. As the 2006 landmark Stern Review has underlined, it is climate change itself, not action to prevent it, that risks crippling our economies.

And here's the good news. The European Union has already demonstrating the effectiveness of a cap-and-trade program. The United States should see its appeal - after all, America developed it to tackle sulfur dioxide pollution.

An ambitious new United Nations treaty containing binding reduction commitments for all developed countries is essential if we are to prevent climate change from assuming devastating proportions that will wreck our economies and put the lives of tens of millions of people at risk over the coming decades. For the new agreement to take over seamlessly from the Kyoto Protocol in 2012, negotiations must be launched in Bali, Indonesia, and completed by late 2009.

To stabilize global warming at the "relatively safe" level of no more than two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above the preindustrial temperature, worldwide emissions of greenhouse gases will need to stop increasing within 10 years.

As a first step in reaching this target, developed countries must take the lead by committing under the new treaty to reduce their collective emissions to 30 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. The advanced developing countries must also contribute by slowing their emissions growth.

These are without doubt enormous challenges, but our analysis shows that deep emissions cuts are both technologically feasible and economically affordable. The sooner we take action, the cheaper it will be.

And time is running out.

That is why the EU has already taken action to cut its greenhouse gas emissions substantially and is prepared to do more in the future. We believe that one of the keys to cutting emissions cost-effectively is emissions trading, an instrument pioneered by the U.S. for controlling sulfur dioxide pollution.

The EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS), launched in 2005, is the cornerstone of our climate change strategy. We are convinced that a global carbon market based on international emissions trading must be central to the new climate treaty in order to facilitate deep emissions reductions at least cost after 2012.

The EU ETS currently addresses carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from 10,500 major industrial sources collectively responsible for almost half of our total emissions of this gas. The system works by using market forces to put a price on carbon emissions.

This approach has two important advantages. First, by attaching a real economic cost to CO2 emissions, it creates a direct financial spur to cut emissions and invest in low-emission technologies. Combined with targeted government support, this is a real driver of ecoinnovation.

The second big advantage of cap-and-trade systems is that being able to buy and sell emissions allowances gives companies flexibility in deciding how best to cut their emissions. This promotes the biggest emissions reductions for the lowest cost.
Norway will soon link to our system. New Zealand, Australia, Switzerland, and Canada are planning trading systems, as are California and 10 Northeastern U.S. states.

I hope it will not be long before the U.S. government also puts its faith in the great American invention of emissions trading. Being a full player in the rapidly expanding global carbon market can only be good for America - and for our prospects of winning the battle against climate change.

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register editorial, Thursday, Sept. 27, 2007:

**Planned-community law is good move**

Opponents of Yokohl Ranch, the humongous master-planned community proposed by the J.G. Boswell Co., might have good reason to oppose that particular project.

But they ought to embrace the action by county supervisors this week approving new provisions in the general plan regarding large planned communities.

The best defense against the detrimental side effects of growth is thorough planning. The new ordinance seeks only to make sure the county has provisions in its general plan that will give it some leverage of control when large, planned communities are proposed for Tulare County.

Note the choice of wording in the previous sentence: when, not if. Master-planned communities are the wave of the future in California urban planning, at least for areas that have relatively open space. Master-planned communities are easier and cheaper to plan and build than the traditional method of adding on to an urban project one tract at a time.

The San Joaquin Valley has more open, accessible space than any other area of the state except the desert. The foothills of Tulare and other Valley counties are natural targets for residential development, provided they can solve the problems of access to water and infrastructure.

Tulare County is right to prepare for that trend.

The proposal that is attracting all the attention right now, though, is Yokohl Ranch, and it is becoming the 900-pound gorilla that everybody is trying to ignore.

Supervisors are being a little disingenuous when they say that the ordinance they adopted Tuesday was not in response to Yokohl Ranch. Maybe not, but while the supervisors can remove their tongues from cheeks, they probably can’t get Yokohl Ranch out of their heads.

Yokohl Ranch would be a planned unit development on 36,000 acres of rangeland in the Sierra foothills east of Exeter. The Boswell Co. owns the land and runs about 10,000 head of cattle in the valley.

Boswell proposes building a planned, self-contained community on 30 percent of that land over the next 20 to 30 years that would eventually include: 10,000 homes; a population of as many as 50,000 people; a couple of resorts, including one oriented toward sports such as golf and tennis and another oriented toward riding, hiking and backpacking; schools, shopping and commercial centers; and its own public safety services.

Developer Eastlake Co., a subsidiary of Boswell, has been working on this project already for several years. Eastlake has already built similar projects near San Diego and in Colorado.
A project of this magnitude has massive implications, and it rightly scares the daylights out of some people. Boswell vows that Yokohl Ranch would be built at no expense to Tulare County. The Boswell Co. will supply the water and pay for the infrastructure. Yokohl Ranch would pay for its own public safety, schools and other services through a series of user fees.

Even if Boswell can keep all those promises, the effect of 50,000 people on the county and on the city of Visalia will be considerable.

Those 50,000 will also bring their traffic, their garbage and sewage, their need for recreation and jobs and commerce.

They will also bring their property and sales tax dollars, their businesses, their talents and a stable base as property owners.

Either way, the county needs to be prepared for them.

Citizens for Responsible Growth strongly protested the county supervisors' action this week, saying the Yokohl Ranch project would bring traffic problems, air pollution and other issues related to congestion.

The group is especially concerned about the effect on the county's water.

The group has many valid points. The Yokohl Ranch project will need to be monitored closely and carefully regulated. To do that, the county must have the statutory authority in place.

One of the shortcomings of the county's general plan has been the lack of any provision for large planned communities. This new action will correct that when the general plan revision is adopted, expected shortly.

Meanwhile, it would be good for all county residents to become familiar with the Yokohl Ranch plan and form their own judgments. Better to be prepared for this new, radical development than wake up one

**Merced-Sun Star editorial, Thurs., Sept. 27, 2007:**

*Our View: Altamont better route for rail*

There are more pressing concerns facing the state before funding for a high-speed rail system should be considered.

Some 10 or 15 years from now, when California's first bullet train is expected to speed north from Los Angeles up the Central Valley, should it veer west through the Altamont Pass into the East Bay or through the Pacheco Pass into San Jose?

After years of study, the state's High-Speed Rail Authority board is poised to make that crucial routing decision in the next few months. For now, the most persuasive arguments indicate that Altamont would be a better choice than the Pacheco route.

Not only would Altamont directly serve more San Joaquin Valley towns, including Merced, Turlock, Modesto, Manteca and Tracy, it would bring the first phase of high-speed rail closer to Sacramento and Stockton, the Central Valley's major population centers.

The proposed Altamont alignment through the East Bay is more urbanized, passing through Livermore, Pleasanton, Dublin, San Ramon and Fremont, directly serving more than a million people.
By contrast, the Pacheco route traverses undeveloped areas that would be likely to spawn sprawl. It passes near the relatively sparsely populated cities of Los Banos, Gilroy and Morgan Hill.

Altamont not only has the potential to serve more riders than Pacheco, it has an established commuter-rail system. Because it has a lower elevation, Altamont would be cheaper to build and allow for faster runs.

Whichever route is chosen, the Legislature should not ask voters to decide on a $10 billion high-speed rail bond on the November 2008 ballot. California has too many other pressing transportation infrastructure needs, including conventional rail, which would deliver much needed congestion relief sooner. Moreover, strategic investments in conventional rail could benefit any high-speed rail system in the future.

The worthy goal is that bullet trains would travel at speeds up to 220 mph, making the travel time from downtown San Francisco to Los Angeles just under 2½ hours. But those who question why California can't have sleek, fast, modern bullet trains like those in Europe and Japan need to understand that high-speed rail abroad emerged from efficient and successful conventional passenger-rail service. Before the state borrows billions to build high-speed rail here, California needs to do all it can to enhance what's already in place.

There are signs that that is beginning to happen.

Over the last decade, ridership has soared along the Capitol Corridor, the intercity train service that runs between Auburn and San Jose, and the Pacific Surfliner running between San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles and San Diego. Locally, Capitol Corridor passenger counts have increased by almost 14 percent over the last 12 months, with trains carrying 1.4 million passengers annually. Ticket revenue is up a hefty 20 percent over last year.

Capitol Corridor now offers 32 trains on weekdays, but delays and disruptions are still too common.

Capitol Corridor alone has four capital projects ready to go that would improve reliability and increase speeds. Those fixes would cost tens of millions of dollars, not billions.

By investing in those more modest rail improvements, California will create a solid foundation for eventual construction of high-speed rail.