

Driving force behind air effort is a push to car pool

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, March 27, 2008

Start thinking more about air quality and stop driving so much.

That message soon will become a mantra from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Officials have announced a consciousness-raising campaign called Healthy Air Living, and you'll be hearing about it.

The centerpiece, announced in Valley workshops this week, will be July 7 through 13, when the district hopes cities, businesses, organizations and individuals make a concentrated effort to cut down driving.

"We want people to try new things," district executive director Seyed Sadredin said Wednesday at a workshop in Fresno. "See if carpooling or telecommuting becomes a behavioral change that stays around all year long."

The district plans to blitz local government officials, schools, businesses and many types of organizations with messages about Healthy Air Living. The district will offer help for many types of pollution reduction, but the biggest target is vehicle emissions.

Cars and trucks contribute about 85% of the ozone-making gas called oxides of nitrogen, which is the biggest air quality problem in the Valley. This region's air problem ranks alongside the South Coast Air Basin as the worst in the country.

State estimates show vehicles daily travel about 100 million miles in the Valley.

That's a 70% increase since 1990, yet the Valley's population has grown by only 40% in the same period, state figures show. People are driving more these days, officials said.

But regional air officials do not directly control emissions created by vehicles and their fuels. That authority belongs to the California Air Resources Board and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

But because those emissions are the biggest problem in the Valley, regional officials say they are determined to reduce them with voluntary cooperation from cities, counties, businesses and residents.

The most obvious target is people who commute alone in a vehicle to work each day. Business owners may opt to have people work from home a few days each week, communicating via computer and telephone.

Other solutions include carpools, bicycling and riding the bus. Businesses might consider installing bicycle racks, showers and lockers for people who ride their bicycles.

Once people arrive at work, business owners might consider allowing their employees to have lunch delivered, instead of driving to a restaurant.

"Commuting is something we do every day," said Tom Jordan, senior policy adviser at the district. "We can plan for it. We can do something about it."

Supervisors OK Kern ethanol plant despite air quality concerns

In the San Francisco Chronicle, Wednesday, March 26, 2008

Bakersfield, CA (AP) --Kern County supervisors have approved plans to build a corn-powered ethanol plant north of Bakersfield.

The project from Cilion Inc., approved Tuesday night, is slated to generate as many as 55 million gallons of the fuel additive each year.

Environmental justice advocates rallied against the project, saying it would pump out nitrous oxide emissions that would worsen air quality in the polluted San Joaquin Valley.

Planners say the project's value to the community trumps the environmental concerns.

Two weeks ago, Hanford city leaders approved another ethanol plant to be based in Kings County, but agreed to pay a \$1 million mitigation fee to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

State air board may slash zero-emission mandate

Proposal would cut by nearly two-thirds the number of clean-air vehicles that big carmakers must sell over the next decade.

By Ken Bensinger, staff writer

L.A. Times, Thursday, March 27, 2008

Hoping to buy an emission-free vehicle in the next few years? Finding one might soon get much tougher.

California's Air Resources Board will vote today on whether to cut, by nearly two-thirds, the number of electric-battery and hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles that major carmakers must sell here over the next decade.

The proposed change to the state's Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate has stirred up protests from environmentalists and alternative-transportation advocates, who say automakers have little incentive to produce such vehicles unless obligated. Others say the state will be unable to meet its own greenhouse gas-reduction targets without requiring more production of emission-free vehicles. Passenger vehicles emit about 30% of California's greenhouse gases.

"This is a very significant reduction," said V. John White, executive director of the Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies in Sacramento. "We need to look at getting car companies to push more technology than they want to, sooner than they want to, not making concessions to industry."

Automakers argue that even the reduced mandate is too tough, considering the extremely high costs associated with developing new drivetrain technology. In a March 14 letter to the air board, the six largest automakers selling in California -- General Motors Corp., Toyota Motor Corp., Ford Motor Co., Chrysler, Honda Motor Co. and Nissan Motor Co. -- expressed concerns that parts of the mandate were "overly stringent" and that the changes "place an inordinate burden upon the resources" of the companies.

The proposed revised mandate would require those carmakers to market 2,500 electric or fuel-cell vehicles here from 2012 to 2014, followed by 25,000 more from 2015 to 2017. (Smaller-volume carmakers are not required to make emission-free vehicles.)

Those numbers are far below the existing requirement, which calls for 25,000 such vehicles in the earlier period and 50,000 more between 2015 and 2017. (The mandate for 2009-2011, which isn't up for a vote, requires 2,500 emission-free vehicles.) According to the Air Resources Board, the reduced numbers would save automakers as much as \$1.3 billion a year.

Board Chairwoman Mary Nichols said the panel would probably opt for an unspecified compromise on the number of vehicles and might consider a future overhaul of the program. She denied that automakers influenced the board's decision-making process. "This isn't about backing down under pressure from auto companies," Nichols said. "It's about what's feasible."

The ZEV mandate, established in 1990, has long been controversial. Originally, the regulation called for 2% of all cars sold in California to be free of tailpipe emissions by 1998, ramping up to 10% by 2004, with stiff penalties for noncompliance. The goals pushed carmakers to try new technologies, and by the late 1990s, carmakers began testing electric vehicles such as the Chevrolet EV1.

Green-car advocates embraced the vehicles, but the carmakers filed suits against the air board alleging that the mandate was a crushing financial burden. That prompted modifications of the ZEV mandate that in effect ended those electric-car programs while providing what the board calls an "alternative path" to compliance that called for far fewer emission-free vehicles.

The successive revisions have created a mandate so complex that even board member Daniel Sperling acknowledges, "There's only a handful of people in the world who understand it."

Almost 20 years after the ZEV mandate began, fewer than 5,000 highway-legal, electric and hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles have been produced for use in California by the six automakers, or about 0.33% of the roughly 1.5 million cars sold in California per year. The contentious series of decisions by the board leading to the reduced ZEV requirements were depicted in the 2006 film, "Who Killed the Electric Car?"

With new reductions on the table, "it feels like deja vu," said Chris Paine, the film's director and a former EV1 driver, who will film today's meeting. "Five years later and we haven't learned a thing."

Most carmakers have some combination of hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles and electric cars in development. But without a mandate calling for mass production, critics contend, automakers have little incentive to bring the expensive machines to market. A single fuel-cell vehicle can cost as much as \$1 million when produced in small volumes.

In addition to slowing technological development, critics say the proposed rollback would make it nearly impossible for the state to meet its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% before 2050.

A study released this week by the Union of Concerned Scientists said California would need at least 379,000 zero-emission vehicles on the road by 2020 to reach that goal.

Carmakers contend that having to make emission-free vehicles could cause significant financial distress. Many automakers have reported huge 2007 losses. The industry is facing deep sales drops and the prospect of the worst year, in terms of U.S. sales volume, in more than a decade.

"Certainly the state has played a role in helping encourage technology development," GM spokesman Dave Barthmus said. "But we clearly believe that if we're going to succeed, we have to develop our own energy alternatives on our own terms."

Along with the six carmakers subject to the ZEV mandate, Volkswagen, Daimler (maker of Mercedes), BMW, Mitsubishi Motors Corp. and Hyundai Motor Co. all filed public comments with the air board, arguing, among other things, that if they someday do sell enough cars to be subject to the ZEV mandate, they should be given as long as 12 years to comply. Environmental organizations, plus Google Inc., electric carmaker Tesla, the mayor of San Francisco and the states of Vermont and Massachusetts (they and eight other states have signed on to the ZEV mandate) were among the groups filing comments calling on the board to step up its ZEV requirements.

On Wednesday, activists, actors, environmentalists and political figures held a rally in Sacramento against the proposed changes.

Board officials say they expect upward of 200 people to speak before the panel prior to its vote. With each given as long as three minutes, the session could last more than 10 hours. Among those planning to speak is Tim Carmichael, senior policy director at the Coalition for Clean Air.

"This proposal is 180 degrees from what we know the state needs to achieve our climate and air-quality goals," he said. "Without a strong ZEV, I don't see any real innovation coming from the big carmakers."

City urges residents to get in tree planting mode

By Shannon Milliken

Hanford Sentinel, Thursday, March 27, 2008

The sun is shining and birds are chirping. And earlier this month, the city parks department and tree commission members took advantage of the early spring weather and planted trees at Hamilton School and Freedom Park, on Hanford's proclaimed Arbor Day.

Before the hot weather hits, the parks department and tree commission members are urging local residents to pitch in and plant trees in their own yards, as part of city beautification and the effort toward Hanford's regaining the distinction as a "Tree City U.S.A."

The shade bearers boost the healthiness of local [air quality](#), and give birds a place to "rest and nest," said Bill Blanken, chairman of the Hanford Tree Commission.

There is not much time before the weather is too warm. Here are tips from Blanken and a local Master Gardener on planting of and caring for trees.

Blanken said one of the most important pieces of advice he can give is to adequately water trees. Be careful not to go under or overboard, and the frequency is dependent on the size and type of tree.

According to tips provided by the University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners of Tulare and Kings counties, the soil at the planting site should be of good tilth. That means that it should

drain readily, but a handful of the watered soil shouldn't fall completely apart when squeezed, said Master Gardener Mary Lou Chase.

When watering, stay away from the tree trunk, Chase said. Tree planters should water on the ground just inside where the leaves farthest from the trunk hang.

"You don't really want water touching the trunk if you can help it," Chase said. "It can foster insects and disease."

According to the tips from Master Gardeners, planters should dig a hole at least two times wider but no deeper than the tree's root ball. Do not add gravel to the base of the hole because water can collect there.

Avoid planting the tree too deep. The soil line of the tree should be higher than the surface of surrounding soil, according to Master Gardener tips.

Remove nursery stakes from trees prior to planting, Chase said. The stakes tied too tightly to planted trees can "strangle" the young trees, Chase said. Stakes should be placed at least a foot away from a tree's trunk, and tied to the trunk with a figure eight, using a somewhat elastic material, according to Master Gardener tips. The stakes should be removed soon after the tree can stand on its own.

Chase said that although it can be tempting to overcrowd your yard when planting trees and shrubs, it's best to give them room.

Stick to the list. Hanford has a master list of more than 20 types of trees that supposedly grow well in the area. On the list are the red maple, Chinese hackberry, carob, camphor tree, Chinese pistache, California sycamore, several oak varieties, Chinese evergreen elm and more. The list can be obtained through the city of Hanford parks department.

There is one type of tree on the list that Chase doesn't recommend: the Dawn redwood. Although the type grows well in other areas of the Valley, Chase said it often doesn't thrive or look beautiful in Hanford.

If you miss the window remaining for planting trees, October and November can also be a good time, Chase said. Contact Master Gardeners with further questions at 685-3309, ext. 225 or 582-3211, ext. 2736.

Students rally for high-speed rail

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, March 27, 2008

A crew of college students brought its tour in support of high-speed rail to Bakersfield on Wednesday, promoting both the concept of the rail line and the \$10 billion bond on November's ballot.

"This is so incredibly important," said Andrew Peake, a Bakersfield resident currently attending University of California, Davis. It would help solve both the problem of too many cars on the highway and too much pollution in the air, he said.

"Anyone who's been stuck on the 99 outside of Fresno, I think they'll support this," he said.

The proposed rail system would connect San Francisco with Los Angeles and would run right through — and stop in — Bakersfield.

About 20 students were at the rally in Bakersfield, part of a group of 30 touring the state this week. The other 10 had been detached for an event in Palmdale.

"We're here to demonstrate the widespread excitement for high-speed rail," said Roxanna Farshchi, a student at University of California, Santa Barbara. She said if the \$40 billion rail system isn't built, the state will have to expand its highways and airports at an even greater cost. And the state needs to cut back on carbon emissions and other [air pollution](#), she said.

The group was joined by Bakersfield Mayor Harvey Hall and Fran Florez, the Shafter city councilwoman and candidate for Assembly who serves as vice chairwoman of the state's High Speed Rail Authority.

Commission to fund 2 Spare the Air days

Peter Fimrite
S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, March 27, 2008

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission agreed Wednesday to pay for two Spare the Air days this year, allowing riders free passes on 28 transit systems when it is smoggy.

The commission agreed to the free rides on non-holiday weekdays during the smog season between June 1 and Oct. 15. The free rides, which are expected to cost the commission \$3.5 million, will kick in when the Bay Area Air Quality Management District declares that the amount of pollution in the air warrants it, said John Goodwin, the commission spokesman.

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, March 27, 2008:](#)

Fran Florez will help valley

After reading a recent letter to the editor, I could not help but reply because of all the inconsistencies.

The writer said he was disheartened to learn that Nicole Parra would not seek reelection. That is not a choice that she can make. She will be termed out at the end of this year.

The writer surmises that Fran Florez will be no different from Dean Florez. The truth is that Fran was elected to office before Dean. He is following in her footsteps, not the other way around.

Besides that, Florez's policies have been good for our county. He has initiated the first real legislation to start to clean up our [air quality](#), stopped the importation of sludge, slowed the invasion of dairies and fought to fix Highway 46. If only all of our legislators were as hard working as Sen. Florez! Unfortunately, they are all too busy running off on junkets to Hawaii or blocking bills that would require millionaires to pay taxes on their yachts.

What is wrong with electing a mother and grandmother from our area who has proven she is qualified by being a mayor and commissioner and who has worked 35 years in the banking industry? Fran Florez raised a state senator in this great valley -- and if she could do that, imagine what she would do as our next assemblywoman in terms of continuing the fight against L.A. waste haulers that want to trash our area.

CANDI EASTER, Bakersfield

[S.F. Chronicle commentary, Thursday, March 27, 2008:](#)

California air board should stand by zero-emission vehicle mandate

By Nick Magel

The California Air Resources Board, the same agency that relentlessly pushed through the groundbreaking Pavley law to clean up tailpipe emissions, is now considering backing off - and allowing automakers to produce only 10 percent of the original zero emissions vehicles. This would mean that only 2,500 of the vehicles, not 25,000, make it onto California roads.

While the agency decides what to do, Californians continue to struggle with record asthma rates, adversities of climate change and limited solutions to clean transportation. The potential decision to limit the zero emissions vehicles is a direct contradiction to statewide public opinion - and the new emissions law.

The state Air Resources Board appears to have been undermined in its efforts to ensure that clean cars are produced by the likes of Ford, GM, Toyota, and made available to the anxious people of California. The board championed the groundbreaking emissions law, and zero emissions vehicles create an inroad toward cleaner air in California.

This is an opportunity for California to demand that the auto industry eliminate tailpipe emissions and reduce climate-changing greenhouse gases. Ford, GM, Toyota, and the other big auto companies have committed to producing vehicles that will meet the mandate. It's high time that the air board holds them to that commitment, instead of changing the benchmarks to reward their inaction.

Reducing zero emissions vehicle requirements to 2,500 by 2014 is dangerous on two fronts.

First, it allows the auto industry to not make 90 percent of these vehicles that they originally agreed to produce and gives the industry a free pass to continue dirty business as usual, pushing vehicles with high tailpipe emissions onto California roads.

California, the world's eighth largest economy, is home to about 24 million motor vehicles, which are responsible for about 40 percent of the state's greenhouse gas pollution. California is a giant force in the global economy and American auto culture. The board's decision will reverberate far beyond the state of California, as California environmental regulations have long been a catalyst for federal regulation.

If California does not lead in holding the auto industry accountable, then who can? The global science community, from the U.N. Panel on Climate Change to Al Gore, has spoken: We are in a climate crisis, and there is no convenient grace period where individuals, industry or government have the convenience of inaction.

Second, the danger of not enforcing the vehicle mandate is that such inaction could potentially erase the economic feasibility of these clean cars. The zero emissions vehicle program was originally developed to induce more industry research and innovation into clean cars, making them affordable to potential consumers.

Rather than create the market for the next generation of clean cars, the industry decided to drag its feet and invest in marketing the 1990s as the decade of the SUV. When it comes to zero emissions vehicles, the automakers continue to tell us that they cannot currently achieve what they had signed on to. That's suspicious rhetoric, considering that the auto industry agreed to adhere to the original zero emissions vehicle mandate, and has left a trail of such vehicles in the wake of industry green washing, namely the GM EV1, Ford EV Ranger, and Toyota RAV EV. It's time the industry stops telling us what it can't do - automakers have proven they are capable of producing these affordable vehicles.

The same air resources board that fought for our health and safety by not backing down to big automakers and pushing through the Pavley emissions law must now look to two corners of the ring.

In one corner are an industry and its lobbyists, and in the other corner stand millions of Californians committed to transforming our transportation model to curb climate change and create clean communities for generations to come.

The only question that remains is: Will the California Air Resources Board choose the corner that makes it an environmental leader or an industry lapdog?

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[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, March 27, 2008:](#)

Don't back off on ZEVs

Air board should keep standards high for zero-emission cars.

The California Air Resources Board is set to vote today on a staff proposal to substantially reduce the number of zero-emission vehicles, or ZEVs, the six major car companies would have to produce for California by 2014.

To keep its long-term goal of cleaning the air and to achieve more recent mandates to reduce global warming gases, the board should reject its staff's recommendations and stand by its ZEV commitment.

Pure ZEVs are cars that produce no tailpipe pollution. They are usually powered by batteries or by fuel cells. Under current rules, car companies are required to produce 25,000 ZEVs between 2012 and 2014. CARB's staff wants that number reduced by 90%, to just 2,500.

To make up for the ZEV reduction, the staff proposes to increase by 75,000 the number of partial zero emission vehicles that car companies would have to produce. They are primarily plug-in hybrids, cars that run on both batteries and gasoline.

Plug-in hybrids are a good automotive innovation. They are not pollution-free, but they use less gasoline than current hybrids. The board is right to encourage their development. But it should not do so at the expense of pure ZEVs.

Only when the state mandates more pollution-free cars on the road can it encourage a serious level of investment in fuel-cell and battery technology and the kinds of infrastructure both technologies need to make pollution-free cars commercially viable. Fuel cell-powered pure ZEVs will need hydrogen fueling stations and battery-powered ZEVs will need charging stations. Those kinds of infrastructure won't be developed or built if the state cuts back its ZEV mandate.

Car companies have had the know-how for decades to build pollution-free cars. Recognizing that, California regulators first required car companies to produce ZEVs in 1990. Back then, CARB required that 10% of cars sold in California by 2003 be pollution-free. In the 18 years since that first aggressive mandate was imposed, the state has steadily weakened its commitment.

Every retrenchment has been a blow, not just to automakers who invested in innovations, but to the battery industry and those who sought to invest in fuel-cell technology. If the air board goes along with its staff recommendation to cut ZEV requirements by 90%, urgently needed investment in clean technology will dry up once again.

Such investments are needed more than ever. When the state air board first mandated ZEVs, California was seeking a way to reduce air pollution. Since then, the global-warming crisis and man's contribution to it has become more widely recognized and understood.

California has enacted a historic law that seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a major contributing factor to global warming. Pollution-free cars, ZEVs, can play a crucial role in reaching the state's goal of reducing greenhouse-gas emissions.

For the state air board to pull the plug on ZEVs at this point sends exactly the wrong message. The board should reject its staff's recommendations and keep the pressure on car companies to produce cars that don't pollute our air or contribute to global warming.