

Arvin councilmember, outspoken air board member resigns

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, May 29, 2008

Raji Brar announced Wednesday that she has resigned as an Arvin city councilwoman and member of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The 32-year-old, who is pregnant with her second child, said she wants to focus on her growing family.

"It was a hard choice and it took me a long time to consider everything, but I definitely want to err on the side of family first," Brar said. "And I didn't want to compromise the quality of work I do on the council in doing that."

Brar was elected to the Arvin City Council in 2006 and subsequently appointed to the air district board, representing the southern valley.

The air board position is designated for an elected official from a southern valley city so Brar is no longer eligible to hold it.

On the board she raised awareness about rural Arvin's designation as one of the smoggiest cities in the nation. She was also one of the few air board members to oppose the two major pollution cleanup plans in the past year because they took too long for people living in areas like Arvin to breath cleaner air.

"She was one of the first air quality advocates on the board, ever," said state Sen. Dean Florez, who has been critical of other board members' ties to industries that are adversely impacted by tough pollution regulations.

Brar is the daughter of parents who came to the San Joaquin Valley from India to work as farm laborers. She grew up in the valley and opened a Subway sandwich shop in Arvin several years ago. After opening her business, Brar became interested in revitalizing Arvin's downtown and decided to run for city council.

She has also served on the Arvin Redevelopment Agency and Arvin Chamber of Commerce.

Researchers: City residents produce less carbon

By H. JOSEF HEBERT, Associated Press Writer
Fresno Bee, Tri-Valley Herald, Wash. Post and other papers, Thursday, May 29, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) --While cities are hot spots for global warming, people living in them turn out to be greener than their country cousins.

Each resident of the largest 100 largest metropolians areas is responsible on average for 2.47 tons of carbon dioxide in energy consumption each year, 14 percent below the 2.87 ton U.S. average, researchers at the Brookings Institution say in a report being released Thursday.

Those 100 cities still account for 56 percent of the nation's carbon dioxide pollution. But their greater use of mass transit and population density reduce the per person average. "It was a surprise the extent to which emissions per capita are lower," Marilyn Brown, a professor of energy policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology and co-author of the report, said in an interview.

Metropolitan area emissions of carbon dioxide are highest in the eastern U.S., where people rely heavily on coal for electricity, the researchers found. They are lower in the West, where weather is more favorable and where electricity and motor fuel prices have been higher.

The study examined sources and use of residential electricity, home heating and cooling, and transportation in 2005 in the largest 100 metropolitan areas where two-thirds of the people in the U.S. live. It attributed a wide disparity among the 100 cities to population density, availability of mass transit and weather.

Lexington, Ky., had the biggest per capita carbon footprint: Each resident on average accounted for 3.81 tons of carbon dioxide in their energy usage. At the other end of the scale was Honolulu, at 1.5 tons per person.

Carbon dioxide is released from burning fossil fuels and is the leading "greenhouse gas." It drifts into the atmosphere and forms a blanket that traps the Earth's warmth. About 6.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide are released into air annually in the United States.

From 2000 to 2005, carbon dioxide from transportation, electricity use and residential heating in the largest metropolitan areas increased 7.5 percent. For the entire nation, it rose 9.1 percent. The average per capita footprint in those 100 cities rose at an annual rate of 1.1 percent a year, half the average yearly increase of 2.2 percent nationwide.

In explaining differences among cities, the researchers cited weather, the type of fuel used for heating and cooling, the development of rail transportation, the amount of urban sprawl and the cost of energy.

Cities with the largest carbon footprints are mostly in the eastern half of the country from Indiana to western Pennsylvania — areas that rely heavily on coal for electricity production and natural gas for heating.

The smallest carbon footprint was in cities in the West and New England.

Half of the dozen cities with the stingiest carbon output were in California, where electricity prices and motor fuels are expensive. Also cited was the Seattle-Portland, Ore., region, which relies heavily on hydropower.

Cities in Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana dominated the bottom tier of high carbon emitters.

These urban areas are "kind of a poster child of what high carbon intensive growth looks like," said Brown. She noted their reliance on coal for electricity and natural gas for heating, a shortage of mass transit, and often older, energy-inefficient buildings.

Urban Areas on West Coast Produce Least Emissions Per Capita, Researchers Find

By Felicity Barringer

N.Y. Times, Thursday, May 29, 2008

The West Coast's metropolitan areas had among the lowest carbon emissions per capita in the country in 2005, according to a new ranking of 100 urban areas.

The region's mild climates, hydropower and aggressive energy-reduction policies give its residents smaller carbon footprints, on average, than those of their counterparts in the East and Midwest.

The Honolulu area ranked No. 1 in the study, from the Brookings Institution, followed by the area including Los Angeles and Orange Counties in California, the Portland-Vancouver area in the Northwest and the New York metropolitan area. A cluster of Rust Belt urban areas were at the bottom of the rankings, including Toledo, Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Lexington, Ky., which ranked last.

The authors offer a partial portrait of overall emissions, concentrating on residential electricity and fuel use and the mileage traveled by cars and trucks — factors that contribute about half of overall carbon emissions.

The calculations do not include industrial emissions, those from commercial or government structures and those from air, rail or sea transportation. But they provide a new look at metropolitan areas.

The report was accompanied by policy recommendations, including federal legislation setting a price on carbon emissions, increasing financing for energy research and development, revising

federal policies that reward states with high levels of travel and fuel use and providing more, and more predictable, financial support of mass transit.

While the report did not go into the precise causes of each ranking, it provided hints at the factors that correlated with higher or lower scores. Population density and the availability of rail transportation were associated with lower per capita carbon emissions; the Los Angeles area is the most densely populated in the country, according to Brookings figures.

Other metropolitan areas in the top 25 included Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, New Haven, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and Rochester.

Also associated with high rankings were government policies that promoted energy efficiency, particularly electricity rate-setting policies. Rate-setting by state regulators has traditionally been geared to make more money for a utility if it sells more electricity. While rates may remain relatively low, pleasing customers, utilities have little incentive to encourage energy conservation.

"The worst footprints are in the traditionally regulated states," said Marilyn A. Brown, a professor of energy policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, who is one of the report's three authors. "Utilities are reacting to what turns a profit for their shareholders," and get no economic benefit from conservation, Dr. Brown said.

The Washington metropolitan area ranked No. 100 in per capita residential carbon emissions and No. 89 on the overall list; also in the bottom 25 over all were the Augusta, Ga., Birmingham, Ala., Knoxville, Tenn., Nashville, Oklahoma City and St. Louis metropolitan areas.

"The Washington, D.C., metro area's residential electricity footprint was 10 times larger than Seattle's footprint in 2005," the report said. "The mix of fuels used to generate electricity in Washington includes high-carbon sources like coal while Seattle draws its energy primarily from essentially carbon-free hydropower."

By contrast, California set extensive energy efficiency requirements for home appliances; per capita energy use has remained largely flat in the state for 30 years. This factor, combined with its low-carbon electricity and warmer climate, were the most likely reasons that 8 of 10 California metropolitan areas ranked in the top 25 on the Brookings list.

Among the report's recommendations was a change in federal law that would require home sellers to disclose the annual energy costs of the dwelling in the years before the sale.

The combination of transportation and residential emissions data sometimes masked the forces driving a region's per capita carbon emissions up or down.

For instance, the proximity of a port, with its related freight traffic, depressed the overall scores of some areas, including Jacksonville (No. 80 over all) and Sarasota, Fla. (No. 81) and the Riverside-San Bernardino area east of Los Angeles (No. 32).

Considering only residential emissions, Jacksonville and Sarasota ranked Nos. 42 and 46, respectively; the Riverside area ranked No. 4. But both Florida areas have ports, and the Riverside area is the destination of many trucks carrying freight from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. All three ranked near the bottom on the list of transportation-related carbon emissions per capita.

The measurement system was created by three Brookings authors — Dr. Brown, Frank Southworth, who is on the senior research staff at Oakridge National Laboratory, and Andrea Sarzynski of the Brookings Institution.

Los Angeles' carbon footprint is a light one -- sort of A study says the metropolitan area ranks second-greenest in the U.S., allowing for certain caveats.

By Margot Roosevelt, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Thursday, May 29, 2008

OK, here's a quiz: Does sprawling, freeway-scarred, SUV-worshipping, coal-dependent Los Angeles have a heavier or lighter carbon footprint compared with the 99 other big cities in America?

If you guessed heavier, think again.

According to the Brookings Institution, a prestigious Washington think tank, the Los Angeles metropolitan area emits less planet-warming carbon per capita than any big city except Honolulu, at least by some criteria.

In a report to be released today on energy use in residential buildings and highway transportation, Brookings ranks Los Angeles as greener than New York, with its network of subways; more virtuous than Portland, Ore., with its smartgrowth greenbelt, and, yes, even better than San Francisco, its eco-vain rival.

"We are not at all surprised," said Nancy Sutley, L.A.'s deputy mayor for energy and environment, citing the city's "moderate climate, with fewer heating and air-conditioning days, and its relatively newer, less drafty housing stock" than in many parts of the U.S.

Moreover, she added, "sprawl is a lot worse in other parts of the U.S."

But before the boasting starts, some words of caution: The calculations did not account for the fact that half the city's electricity comes from coal-fired power plants. Instead, Brookings used a state-wide average that included the hydroelectric and nuclear plants in Northern California.

Omitted from the data are emissions from industries and commercial buildings, and from local roads apart from federal highways.

The researchers also chose metropolitan statistical areas, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Those areas may allow for a uniform geographical comparison, but in the case of the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana area, that omitted commutes from as far as Ventura, San Bernardino or Riverside counties.

"The data is fuzzy," said Andrea Sarzynski, a senior research analyst at Brookings. "We do the best we can."

The 83-page report gives much of the credit to California's overall carbon-saving plans, including a stringent state building code and strict utility pricing rules for energy conservation. Three other Golden State cities -- San Jose, San Francisco and San Diego -- rank among Brookings' top 10 in small per-capita footprints.

By contrast, the report highlights the heavy carbon footprints of Southern, Midwestern and Northeastern regions of the country.

"The Mississippi River roughly divides the country into high and low emitters," it says. "In 2005, all but one of the 10 largest per capita emitters were located east of the Mississippi."

The north-south divide is also evident, with seven of the highest per capita emitters south of the Mason-Dixon line, including two each from Tennessee and Kentucky -- both coal-reliant states with little mass transit.

The report's timing is no accident.

As the Bush administration fended off pressure in recent years to sign the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty limiting greenhouse gases, more than 800 U.S mayors signed a "Climate Protection Agreement" to cut their cities' emissions to 7% below 1990 levels, the Kyoto target.

But "metros can't go it alone in solving as vast a problem as climate change," said Mark Muro, director of Brookings' "Blueprint for American Prosperity" initiative.

Emissions from residential, commercial and transportation sectors each increased by more than 25% over the last 25 years, the report notes, while industrial emissions declined as manufacturing dwindled.

Next week, the U.S. Senate is expected to take up legislation to limit carbon emissions nationwide. Its provisions, which include a cap-and-trade system for greenhouse gases, are highly controversial, and Brookings wants aggressive measures to encourage climate-friendly cities.

The report calls on the federal government to put a price on carbon, making coal-fired electricity more expensive, and to establish a renewable electricity standard, requiring that a certain percentage of the nation's power come from alternative sources such as wind and solar plants.

Twenty-six states and the District of Columbia already have renewable portfolio standards. The California Legislature is considering boosting the state's percentage from 20% to 33% by 2020.

The report also calls on the federal government to stop favoring highway building over mass transit. And it suggests legislation that would reward utilities for conserving, as California does. Another recommendation: Require all home-sellers to disclose the energy costs of their homes for several years.

Although some had quibbles with their rankings, city officials praised Brookings for showing the need for the federal government to focus on cities. Two-thirds of Americans live in large metropolitan areas and three-quarters of economic activity takes place there, according to the report.

Suit targets air quality along freeways

Environmental groups want to force the EPA to do more comprehensive monitoring.

By Louis Sahagun and Janet Wilson, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers
L.A. Times, Thursday, May 29, 2008

A coalition of environmental groups plans to sue the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today to force it to overturn motor vehicle emissions limits for Southern California, charging that the targets fail to address hazardous pollution faced by 1.5 million people who live next to freeways.

In a petition to be filed in the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, the Natural Resources Defense Council is demanding comprehensive monitoring of air quality along freeways, including the 710 Freeway, where traffic flow averages 12,180 vehicles per hour -- more than 25% of them diesel trucks.

Of particular concern to the coalition are measurements taken by South Coast Air Quality Management District monitors that are far from heavily traveled roadways where cancer risks from diesel particulates are greatest.

Federal policy prohibits local air regulators, including the AQMD, from using measurements near a known large pollution source, in this case a truck-clogged freeway that serves the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, to calculate regional air pollution amounts.

Regional air and transportation officials said they sympathized with the environmental groups but were worried such a lawsuit could cost Southern California billions in federal transportation funds, including money earmarked for expansion of the 710 Freeway to speed up idling diesel trucks.

"They're potentially opening up a Pandora's box that may jeopardize regional transportation funding" by delaying the process, said Barry Wallerstein, executive officer of the AQMD. Air districts in the Coachella Valley, Atlanta and elsewhere have lost such funds for not setting vehicle emission levels in time, he said.

Wallerstein added that the local district would begin monitoring diesel particulate pollution on freeways this summer.

The EPA also rejected tougher motor vehicle emissions limits proposed by the local district and the state air board, Wallerstein said.

He said suing to overturn the renegotiated levels could allow EPA to weaken them even further.

"The Bush administration has already tried to weaken these once," he said.

The measurements, known as "motor vehicle emissions budgets," were recently approved by the EPA for use in developing a sweeping regional clean air plan to meet federal air quality standards and acquire critical transportation project funding.

David Pettit, a senior attorney for the resources defense council, said the budgets overlook those most affected by these emissions.

"Millions of people in and around Los Angeles breathe air so dirty it flunks federal standards."

"Those living near freeways breathe the dirtiest air," he said, "and EPA's own data show the cleanup plan it just approved won't protect them from risk of cancer, asthma and other diseases. That's against the law. . . . The clean air plan was designed to protect everyone, not just those lucky enough to escape the reach of deadly diesel fumes."

Angelo Logan of East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice agreed with Pettit.

During a tour of a neighborhood of modest stucco homes a stone's throw from the 710 Freeway in Commerce, he said, "It's as though they are saying the 1.5 million people who live along the freeways don't matter; that their lives aren't as valuable as other peoples'."

The home where Bob Eula, former mayor of Commerce, has lived for 65 years is framed by rail yards, the 710 Freeway and congested Washington Boulevard.

Standing in the shade of a pine tree in his frontyard, Eula nodded toward a column of soot rising from a nearby diesel-powered crane. "It's hell," he said. "This whole neighborhood should be eliminated and its people moved to a safer place. Let the freeway and railroads have it."

Matt Haber, a spokesman for the EPA, acknowledged that "we don't have an answer yet" for protecting people who reside near freeways.

"It's a huge issue in which science is not as good as it is for the general population."

Studies have increasingly zeroed in on the harmful effects of diesel soot.

Airports fast-track rail projects

By Thomas Frank

USA TODAY, Thursday, May 29, 2008

Even after Tampa International Airport converted two economy parking lots to six-story garages, congestion remained a nightmare. But help might be on the way in Tampa — and in many other airports around the nation.

The airport set aside a 3.5-mile corridor on airport property for a light-rail system that it wants built to ease traffic.

"We don't want to continue building more and more and more parking," Tampa Airport executive director Louis Miller said. "We're totally out of room."

Many airports are finding themselves in a similar situation and are looking to new rail systems to ease roadway congestion and also to cut pollution by giving passengers and workers an alternative to driving.

In at least a dozen cities including Dallas, Denver and Seattle, transit agencies are building or planning rail lines that would connect some of the nation's busiest airports to downtown areas up to 25 miles away. That could more than double the number of airports with rail service and make getting to an airport easier.

In Denver, the Regional Transportation District projects that a proposed 24-mile light-rail line will take travelers from downtown to the city's airport in about 38 minutes — roughly the amount of time it now takes to make the drive. By 2025, the drive to the airport will take 50 minutes.

"What's really driving this is roadway congestion, the inability to add lanes and to add roads," said Dick Marchi, head of policy and regulatory affairs for the Airports Council International. "High gas prices are a sweetener that makes rail more acceptable to the public."

Some rail projects face multibillion-dollar costs that make their future uncertain.

Riding a proposed 13-mile rail line from downtown Sacramento to the city's airport would take a few minutes longer than driving, according to a February report by the Sacramento Regional Transit District. That's because Sacramento International Airport sits next to an interstate highway and congestion "is relatively light," said Mike Wiley, general manager of the transit district.

Environmental benefits also are questionable. When the report compared building the rail line with vastly expanding local bus service, it found rail "would provide a small benefit to the region's air quality" because it would reduce overall driving by just 0.02%.

Wiley says people will take the train, which could be done by 2017, even if it takes longer than a drive because the rail line will have frequent, reliable service and will take passengers directly to the terminal. "People have a very strong willingness to use public transit as long as it doesn't add an undue amount of time," Wiley said.

About 10 rail systems now take passengers from city centers to airport terminals, usually in older cities such as Boston, Chicago and Cleveland. In other cities such as Los Angeles and Baltimore, rail lines stop a few miles from an airport where passengers board a free shuttle bus to terminals.

Many regions now considering rail to airports are newer and seeing massive growth in the suburbs around an airport.

"Building light rail around Denver may have looked impractical 10 years ago. Now it's practical," said Stephen Van Beek, president of the Eno Transportation Foundation, a Washington, D.C., research group.

The longtime leader in mass transit is Reagan National Airport: 15% of passengers arrive by subway, which is just 15 minutes from downtown Washington, D.C., the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority says. That's the highest percentage of any U.S. airport, though it's far below the rate at many European airports, according to Marchi of the airports council.

Reagan Airport spokeswoman Tara Hamilton calls rail service an "invaluable marketing tool" for luring airlines. "When they're making decisions about what airports and markets to go into, airlines look at everything, including ground transportation," Hamilton said.

Some transit officials say it's essential for trains to drop people at an airport terminal instead of at a shuttle 2 miles away.

"If it gets too complicated, people won't take advantage of it," said Carrie Bohnsack-Ware, spokeswoman for the Utah Transit Authority, which hopes to break ground this year on a 10-mile rail line from downtown Salt Lake City to the city airport. "It has to go to the terminal or it doesn't justify the cost."

Maureen Riley, executive director of Salt Lake City International Airport, said the rail line will be "a huge asset" by giving passengers an alternative to driving to the airport.

In Phoenix, the region's first rail line will open in December with a stop near Sky Harbor International Airport. In the short term, the airport will bus airline passengers to the terminal, 10 minutes away.

By 2013, the airport expects to build a small satellite terminal at the rail stop where passengers can print boarding passes, possibly check luggage and board an airport train to terminals. The mini-terminal and train are part of a \$1.5 billion project aimed at easing road congestion that could become intolerable, said airport assistant aviation director Jane Morris.

"If you can't expand the roads," Morris said, "you have to look at high-occupancy ways to get people into the terminal and out."

Sapphire Energy turns algae into 'green crude' for fuel

The San Diego company says its product can produce ultra-clean gasoline and diesel for existing vehicles.

By Elizabeth Douglass, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Thursday, May 29, 2008

A San Diego company said Wednesday that it could turn algae into oil, producing a green-colored crude yielding ultra-clean versions of gasoline and diesel without the downsides of biofuel production.

The year-old company, called Sapphire Energy, uses algae, sunlight, carbon dioxide and non-potable water to make "green crude" that it contends is chemically equivalent to the light, sweet crude oil that has been fetching more than \$130 a barrel in New York futures trading.

Chief Executive Jason Pyle said that the company's green crude could be processed in existing oil refineries and that the resulting fuels could power existing cars and trucks just as today's more polluting versions of gasoline and diesel do.

"What we're talking about is something that is radically different," Pyle said. "We really look at this as a paradigm change."

Sapphire's announcement is the latest development from companies and researchers focused on finding ways to cut harmful emissions from the nation's giant fleet of cars, trucks, trains and planes.

Sapphire's process would help curb the nation's reliance on imported crude and alleviate concerns about the world's dwindling supply of oil, Pyle said. And by using carbon dioxide spewed out by such things as coal plants, the production process would help remove harmful emissions from the atmosphere.

The green crude also would produce fewer pollutants in the refining process and fewer harmful emissions from vehicle tailpipes, Pyle said.

The company wouldn't give details about the production process or where its pilot project would be located. It expects to introduce its first fuels in three years and reach full commercial scale in five years.

Pyle wouldn't cite the price tag for producing a barrel of green crude, but he described the expected cost as competitive with extracting oil from deep-water deposits and oil sands. The company already has produced green versions of jet fuel, diesel and clear, premium-grade gasoline, he said.

Today's biofuels -- in the United States, that's biodiesel and corn-based ethanol -- have helped displace petroleum but also have troublesome characteristics that reduce their appeal. Corn-derived ethanol and soybean-based biodiesel eat into land used to grow food, and their production and distribution consume large amounts of energy.

Many companies are making strides in producing ethanol from nonfood sources such as switch grass, plant waste or recycled paper.

Virent Energy Systems Inc., based in Madison, Wis., in March unveiled a joint venture with Shell Oil Co. that would produce "biogasoline" from plant sugars -- creating fuel that could be distributed through existing pipes and stations and used in existing vehicles.

And there are plenty of companies working toward producing oil from algae. The idea isn't new, but interest and research have grown so significantly that websites such as Oilgae.com are devoted to the topic.

"One thing that is encouraging is the level of attention and the investment that's happening to really try to find better ways to fuel our transportation system," said Don Anair, vehicles analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Anair said he was encouraged by Sapphire's reported research results. But he said he'd want to see the greenhouse gas effects of the entire process, from production to combustion, before passing judgment on Sapphire's green crude.

"Changing to this green crude could certainly have very good benefits in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, but it may not address some of the traditional tailpipe pollutants that are responsible for smog or ozone," he said.

Even if the fuel doesn't contain nitrogen, Anair added, the combustion process adds air to the mix and generally creates harmful nitrogen oxides.

That caveat was echoed at the state Air Resources Board, which is charged with guiding California's goal of reducing the carbon content of fuels and sharply cutting statewide greenhouse gas emissions.

"The emissions reductions may be coming from the refining process but we would still have emissions issues in and from the vehicle," air board spokesman Dimitri Stanich said after reviewing Sapphire's news release. "We wish them luck and look forward to their technical studies that demonstrate the cost and feasibility of their production processes."

The emissions from Sapphire's fuels are being tested by an outside company. Pyle said that because the fuels don't contain sulfurs or nitrogen, "our expectation is that there will not be those kinds of emissions."

The company is privately owned and backed with funding from Wellcome Trust, a British charity, and venture capital firms such as Arch Venture Partners and Venrock. Sapphire's technology was born out of collaborations with Scripps Research Institute, UC San Diego, the University of Tulsa and the Energy Department's Joint Genome Project. Pyle said the genome researchers helped the company pinpoint the kind of algae best suited to making oil.

Robert Nelsen, managing partner at Arch, could barely contain his enthusiasm for the venture.

"We want to displace the existing petroleum system with a continuous production system that is essentially an oil field on top of the ground that produces oil on a continuous basis for as long as you want it to," he said.

"You wake up in the middle of the night thinking about the implications of this."

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, May 29, 2008:](#)

Smarter growth is a must for Valley's future

Greater population densities will require growing up instead of out.

Fresno County leaders have a chance today to redirect the course of growth in the region, ending the long-time practice of sprawling ever outward from existing cities and concentrating new development in denser clusters. The effect would be a cleaner environment, better opportunities for mass transit and more livable and vibrant communities.

The vision is contained in the Fresno County portion of the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Blueprint. The Council of Fresno County Governments, consisting of mayors of the county's 15 cities and representatives from the county Board of Supervisors, must approve the plan, which will later be incorporated in a Valleywide proposal.

The key to the future of growth is greater densities. The plan being considered today would put twice as many homes on the same acreage as is common now. That's a big change, and one that many think won't go over well with the public.

But if we are to sustain viable agriculture in the Valley and preserve open space for habitat and recreation, we must start growing up instead of out. Denser residential and commercial development also reduces the need for long commutes and other vehicle trips, which in turn, reduces our dependence on increasingly expensive oil and helps us meet the goals of cleaner air.

Much of the work must be done in existing urban areas, where redevelopment offers a chance to resurrect blighted areas, turning them into attractive neighborhoods. That also reduces the pressure to grow outward.

Greater densities also make mass transit -- including the proposed high-speed rail system -- more economically sound. And if done right, denser urban environments make for more interesting, lively and entertaining communities.

The transition won't be easy. Few things are held more sacred in this country -- and especially in California -- than the single-family suburban home on its expansive lot. And that won't disappear.

But the future will make that dream increasingly expensive, both in terms of dollars and in the cost to the environment, agriculture and the quality of life we enjoy.

The fact is that as many as 7 million new residents will be living in the Valley by 2050, and they can't be accommodated under current growth patterns without turning the entire Valley into one seamless stretch of strip malls, cookie-cutter residential developments and bleak vistas. Think "San Fernando Valley," and ask yourself if that's your idea of living.

If it's not, then we have to get used to a new way of planning and growing. The Blueprint process is a good start.

[Stockton Record Editorial, Thursday, May 29, 2008:](#)

Questionable standards

Although S.J. meets federal guidelines, air pollution still kills thousands

By The Record

At least 2,000 people, possibly as many as 2,900, die prematurely each year in San Joaquin County because of tiny specks of dust and soot.

And that in a county that meets current federal pollution standards for this particular pollutant, known as PM2.5. Think what it would be if we were out of compliance, as is the case in much of the southern San Joaquin Valley.

A new California Air Resources Board report said that statewide, anywhere from 14,000 to 24,000 premature deaths annually can be attributed to exposure to PM2.5 pollution.

And what is it? PM2.5 spews from cars and trucks, wood-burning fireplaces, industrial facilities, roads and farmers' fields.

The danger of PM2.5 pollution is that its particles are so small: about 3 percent as wide as a human hair. They can lodge deep in the lungs and enter the bloodstream. People with asthma, chronic bronchitis and heart disease are especially at risk.

Figuring out exactly how many premature deaths result from PM2.5 is not an exact science. For example, the margin of error in the air board's study was so large that the actual number of annual deaths could range from 4,300 to as many as 41,000 statewide.

What that means is that even though precise figures can be debated, beyond debate is that there is a problem. And that even in communities where current pollution standards are being met - including Stockton and San Joaquin County - those standards might not be good enough.

It is important, therefore, that we keep a close watch on this canary in the mine shaft, continue to hone the science and be prepared to act quickly and decisively if necessary.

[Washington Post Commentary, Thursday, May 29, 2008:](#)

Leading On Climate Change

How Action in Congress Can Move the World

By Tony Blair

The climate change bill that senators are to begin debating next week is a hugely important signal of intent on behalf of U.S. legislators. Yes, negotiations could still alter the legislation. But the

bill's core proposition is correct: Unless the United States radically reduces its greenhouse gas emissions, along with other major emitters, the damage to the climate will be irreversible.

Radical reduction is unlikely to happen through voluntary action alone. Measures in the bill, through a mandatory cap-and-trade scheme, would reduce emissions 70 percent from 2005 levels by 2050. These cuts would be based on a carbon market incentive system that moves with the grain of action around the globe.

Over the past few years, the debate on climate change has shifted profoundly. The scientific consensus that human activity is causing global warming has become overwhelming. The effect of unabated climate change is shocking and, as was shown by the report of Sir [Nicholas Stern](#) -- the first authoritative study of the economics of climate change, commissioned by the British government in 2006 -- it is far riskier economically to ignore climate change than to act to abate it.

New environmental technologies, in fact, already drive a multibillion-dollar industry. Last year, an estimated \$148 billion was invested in clean-energy technologies, companies and projects, a 60 percent increase from 2006.

Round the planet, people are developing exciting technologies, changing their behavior and agitating for action so that responsibility on the environment will come in a way that is consistent with necessary economic growth.

Meanwhile, fears over energy security create a synergy with the climate debate. With oil above \$130 a barrel, there are reasons to act irrespective of concern for the atmosphere. Reducing carbon dependency also goes to the heart of our basic security needs for the future. I have long thought that energy policy is only a small way behind defense in terms of strategic importance to our way of life.

Much is happening abroad. Europe has introduced the Emissions Trading System, with over half of emissions now tradable; despite the early teething troubles to be expected from any new policy framework, the system is delivering emissions reductions and sending a clear, market-based signal to companies across the continent. Japan has indicated that it is open to a binding national target. China has already set new energy intensity targets. India is to unveil its first national climate action plan in the next few weeks.

Israel recently announced support for a project that aims to add 100,000 electric cars to its roads by the end of 2010, providing tax incentives that will make those cars cheaper than gas-powered cars as a first step toward moving completely to electric.

The [Group of Eight](#) major industrialized nations will have climate change high on their agenda at their July meeting. At the same time, [President Bush](#) will hold the Major Economies Meeting.

The Clean Development Mechanism, while also by no means perfect, has established a basis for channeling resources efficiently to finance emissions reduction across the developing world.

Clearly, many countries and companies are realizing that, far from being a detriment to their economies, acting early to cut emissions can increase productivity and give them a competitive edge. And it's not just outside the United States: A majority of U.S. states have climate action plans, and many American cities are already working toward emissions reductions.

Hanging over all of this progress, however, is a political reality: There will be no consequential action on climate change unless there is a global deal. For that to happen, the United States has to lead to ensure that we have an effective agreement in which China and India take part.

Science shows that the world must move to a low-carbon economy. America could use its technology and entrepreneurial spirit to drive this revolution.

That's why the legislation sponsored by Sens. [Barbara Boxer](#), [Joe Lieberman](#) and [John Warner](#) matters. It says -- and shows -- that America will act. It will allow the United States to say to others: You must act, too.

The [U.N.](#) process has produced the formula: There should be common but differentiated obligations for developing and developed nations. A great ambition, but what does it mean? That is the subject of the project I am leading that will produce its first report at the end of June.

Without an American commitment, a global deal is impossible. This is an important moment where the United States can show strong leadership. If the United States commits to the 50 percent global target for a reduction in emissions by mid-century and to legislation that mandates action, it will transform the prospects for effective change. It would allow this country to shape the debate and, most important, the solution. I hope it happens.

The writer was British prime minister from 1997 to 2007. He recently launched the Breaking the Climate Deadlock initiative to promote a new global agreement on climate change.

[Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, May 29, 2008:](#)

Poor air quality in the parks is a disgrace

What a shame that Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are some of the most polluted parks in the country. But it's no surprise, being shouldered by two of the top 10 most polluted cities in the United States.

Unfortunately, our national parks are not isolated islands of protection, and the recent "State of the Air" report released by the American Lung Association reinforces this.

High levels of particulate matter and ozone plague the parks, causing park staff to discourage traditional activities like hiking or biking. Scenic vistas that helped to popularize the parks are reduced to a hazy sight, similar to large metro areas.

And, during a time of economic downturn, the monetary benefit of clean air is too strong to ignore.

This area welcomes millions of national park visitors each year - spending millions in tourist dollars and supporting thousands of jobs. We need to be stewards of these economic engines.

Will visitors want to visit a smoggy, health-threatening park? What condition will these historical and cultural symbols be in when our children inherit them?

The forecast for the future looks hazy, unless we can work together to clean the Central Valley's air.

LAINE HENDRICKS, Fresno

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, May 29, 2008:](#)

Watson serves county well

I have confidence that 4th District voters will retain Ray Watson as their supervisor. Ray has been an advocate for quality of life issues since he was elected to the Board of Supervisors in 2002. On many occasions, I was particularly glad that Ray was seated on the dais with me because I could always count on his support for well-reasoned proposals that ensured a higher quality of life for Kern County residents.

Ray has focused on improving efficiency in county government in order to maximize the funds that can be used for important community needs. This wise use of county dollars, in addition to other funding sources, has helped him to secure funding to accomplish important projects in each community in his district -- projects that enhance the health, safety and quality of life for his constituents.

Ray's leadership has been essential to ensuring that crosstown transportation projects in metro Bakersfield are completed in the earliest possible time frame. He has worked with Congressman Kevin McCarthy, Caltrans and the City of Bakersfield to move that critical effort forward.

Ray is also a proven leader at the regional level in two areas of great concern to Kern County. Ray has developed expertise in essential [air quality](#) and water supply, quality and reliability issues.

All of Kern County will benefit when 4th District residents vote to retain Ray Watson as their supervisor. He indeed exemplifies the experience, integrity and values needed to remain in the position.

BARBARA PATRICK, Bakersfield

[OC Register blog, Thursday, May 29, 2008:](#)

O.C. carbon footprint among smallest in U.S.

Residents of the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana area emits less carbon into the atmosphere than all but one other metropolitan region – Honolulu, according to a controversial new report by the Brookings Institution.

The report says that the average resident in this area emits 1.413 tons of carbon annually, a figure largely based on emissions from residential energy consumption and highway transportation.

Purdue University researchers reached the opposite conclusion earlier this year, reporting that Orange County was among the nation's biggest emitters of carbon.

The Brookings' report doesn't take into account that much of Southern California's energy comes from coal-fired plants outside the region, or measure the pollution that comes from traffic on surface streets. The emissions of some types of businesses also aren't included the report, which Brookings says is the first to look at the carbon footprint of the nation's largest 100 metro areas.

"The carbon footprint sizes vary due to development patterns, rail transit, fuels used to generate electricity, energy prices, and weather," the institution says in a statement.

The report says: "The average resident in metropolitan Los Angeles emitted 1.413 tons of carbon from highway transportation and residential energy in 2005. This compares with 2.24 tons of carbon emitted by the average 100-metro resident and 2.60."

Gary Robbins