

City shelves growth plan

BY ALEX CANTATORE - Staff Reporter

Turlock Journal, Wednesday, September 17, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint, a long-term project of the Stanislaus Council of Governments, looks as though it may be forced to become slightly more long-term as the Turlock City Council elected to defer approving the requested "Moderate Change 2050" Conceptual Growth Scenario in the face of potential state government action that may require a change to the plan. Senate Bill 375, currently sitting on the Governor's desk, could make certain demands on the growth plan that would make passing the existing scenarios meaningless.

"I don't profess to be an expert on SB 375," said Vince Harris, Executive Director of StanCOG. "It's a very complicated bill. It's one of the largest bills ever seen in the state legislature, one of longest bills debated and I've lost count how many times it's been revised."

Despite the fact that the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint has been in development for the past year and a half in counties ranging from San Joaquin in the north to Kern in the south, much of the work done so far may require serious reworking should SB 375 pass.

The bill requires regional agencies to incorporate a "sustainable communities strategy" into the Regional Transportation Plan. These plans would be bound to meet required greenhouse gas and air quality improvements, while increasing mobility throughout the county.

Additionally, StanCOG would be required to develop an eight-year projection of housing needs. This information would be used to establish local housing targets by income category for the general plan housing element, according to the staff report issued to council.

The city could also become required by law to conform their general plan and housing elements to the sustainable communities strategy forecast adopted by StanCOG as part of the Regional Transportation Plan. While the bill does not directly call for this, it does call for consistency with the Regional Transportation Plan, which leaves enough vagueness for a potential legal ruling determining this to be the case.

"It does contain a lot of language that says the state has no intention of taking over local land use authority, but there are issues of conformity of our plans with these plans," said Debbie Whitmore, Turlock Planning Director. "We're always a little weary of what they might do."

For all of this additional work that may be passed on to county governments, there is currently no funding to support county efforts. In Harris's words, it amounts to an unfunded mandate.

"It begs the question, how will we even produce the work?" Harris asked.

Councilman Ted Howze, who also serves as Turlock's StanCOG representative, believed that SB 375 amounted to a legitimate concern to the Blueprint process. He believes that the best course of action would be holding off on approving the Moderate Change 2050 scenario until more research could be done.

"The issue is this is an advisory vision statement that may have some very real impacts, most of which may or may not be unintended consequences to local jurisdictions," Howze said.

According to Howze, SB 375 could cause the state to base transportation funding on the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint, which is considered by the Valley counties to be nothing more than a visionary statement. The blueprint contains no specific maps or general plans of partner communities.

Additionally, there are "anti-nimbyism" protections built in to SB 375 which could take control away from local agencies and prevent the city from denying certain projects if they so desired.

Howze asked that a series of meetings be put together for all elected officials in Stanislaus County to review the possible impacts of SB 375. Until this could be done, or at the very least Howze could confer with other COG representatives at the Oct. 8 StanCOG meeting, he moved to defer approving the growth scenario. The council unanimously agreed.

According to Harris, the council's failure to endorse the Moderate Change 2050 plan and desire to hold meetings on SB 375 did not look feasible, as it would affect the schedule. Stanislaus County is just one of seven involved in the blueprint process, and to a certain extent the counties' schedules are forced to be linked.

Harris will convey the city's deferral of the measure back to StanCOG staff, but it seems likely progress will continue in the face of SB 375 and the City Council's concerns.

"We're going to be bringing your comments back to StanCOG Policy Board," Harris said. "Staff will still attempt to make some recommendation to the Policy Board with our understanding of city council's will."

Air quality map shows elevated cancer risk near ports

By Kristopher Hanson, Staff Writer
LA Daily News, Wednesday, September 17, 2008

An online air quality map shows residents in and around San Pedro Bay breathe some of the dirtiest air in America.

Between 2003 and 2007, Southern California air quality regulators gathered a total of 18,000 air samples and analyzed them for 33 of the most harmful airborne carcinogens.

The results showed those facing the greatest cancer risks live primarily in neighborhoods along busy freeways, railyards, near seaports and in areas dominated by factories and oil refineries.

Most of Long Beach, Wilmington, San Pedro and Seal Beach, and portions of Lakewood, Bellflower and Compton, are exposed to higher-than-average cancer risks from toxic air pollution.

The risks diminish greatly outside the general vicinity of the port complex and transportation corridors leading to downtown Los Angeles.

In Huntington Beach, for example, the cancer risk drops to roughly 1/6 the level of downtown Long Beach, and the same is true in Palos Verdes.

Other areas suffering from elevated risks include East Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino.

The report and map were released in January by the South Coast Air Quality Management District, with the map posted online in early September.

Grimmway rethinking composting project

BY JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2008

Saying they have "heard the community loud and clear," officials at carrot-growing giant Grimmway Enterprises said Tuesday they will look for alternatives to building a composting facility on Copus Road east of Interstate 5.

The comments came after Kern County supervisors postponed a decision on the facility until mid-October at the request of Grimmway spokesman Roger McIntosh.

"We have heard the community loud and clear," company attorney Jeff Green said. "We're going to look at sourcing our compost from out of the county." As they have for a while, critics of the project thumped Grimmway at Tuesday's meeting.

Other farmers, who own land in the area of the proposed facility, said it would foul area water and air.

And Arvin residents slammed Grimmway for its continuing use of an existing composting facility near where they live.

"We need them to shut down as soon as possible. Today if possible," said Jaime Berumen.

The Copus Road compost project would handle about 45,000 tons of chicken manure and 100,000 tons of cow manure each year.

Grimmway has said it is trying to move the Arvin composting facility to the Copus Road site.

But the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment, backing a group called Committee for a Better Arvin, has opposed both facilities.

Center lawyer Ingrid Brostrom called Tuesday for the composing facility on Copus Road to be enclosed.

Planning Director Ted James indicated that the county is looking at the possibility the Arvin facility might not meet the conditions of county zoning laws.

He said the county is asking for a new condition of approval on the Copus project that would stop all delivery of manure to the Arvin composting site after Aug. 16, 2009.

Green said the facility has been properly permitted through the Environmental Health Services Department for the seven years Grimmway has operated it and that the company will be looking into any zoning problems with the site.

Madera dealership demos an electric car

By Tami Jo Nix

Madera Tribune Wed., Sept. 17, 2008

If you've ever wondered if environmental concerns and the cost of gasoline are enough to justify investing in an electric car, you're not alone. Local Chrysler dealership, Pistoresi Chrysler Dodge Jeep, has an electric car on loan from a Canadian manufacturer and is thinking about adding it to its line of cars.

"They are built in Canada," said owner Chris Pistoresi. "They are street legal for California."

The ZENN, an acronym for Zero Emission No Noise, is the product of the ZENN Motor Company of Toronto, Canada.

"The zippy, two-seater ZENN is like nothing else on the road with a stand-out European design. Owners will get noticed as the ZENN draws more attention than any sports car. The best part - it's 100 percent electric," said Bill Williams, regional sales director for ZENN.

The price of the ZENN is not the cheapest for a Neighborhood Electric Vehicle. A fully-loaded ZENN with air conditioning, stereo and sun roof is just under \$19,000. A base model is just less than \$16,000.

Merced pays \$45,000 to send Wal-Mart plan back for review

Money will pay for additional traffic studies

By Scott Jason

Merced Sun-Star, Wednesday, September 17, 2008

The Merced City Council agreed Tuesday to pay an additional \$45,000 on the proposed Wal-Mart distribution center's environmental review, because more work needs to be done to make it bulletproof before its release to the public.

The council approved a request from consulting firm EDAW Inc. on Monday to spend more money on the review, bringing its cost to \$447,455. The bill, and all the staff time spent on the project, will be reimbursed by Wal-Mart.

Opponents of the distribution center seized on the funding increase to point out that Wal-Mart was late on paying one of its bills two years ago.

The money will pay for additional traffic studies to account for more intersections and the Mission Avenue interchange. The consultant will also make revisions on the noise analysis and on how the project will affect air quality based on new San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District regulations.

The environmental review is expected to be released to the public in December 2008, launching the public comment period that will pit the pro-Wal-Mart people against those who say the proposed project does more harm than good.

It won't go before the City Council for a vote until next year.

The consultant must answer all questions from residents, which are included in the final environmental review. As a result, EDAW says that even more money may be needed. "We expect an unusually large number of detailed comment letters once the draft (review) goes public," according to a letter to the city.

The environmental report, which addresses how the project will affect roads, air quality, water and land, is the most critical part of the project. It's typically what gets sued, which can stall a project for months or years.

The environmental review, begun in 2006, has taken longer and become more expensive than the consultant expected. Twice EDAW has come back to the city requesting more money.

Merced has made a point to make it defensible in court, ordering a third-party to pore over it, searching for holes or weak parts that could be targeted by attorneys.

Wal-Mart proposed a 1.2 million-square-foot distribution center in 2005, planning to build it on 230 acres between Childs and Gerard Avenues. It would employ about 600 people and run all day and all night. The city expects about 450 trucks to come and go every day, if it operates.

The Merced Stop Wal-Mart Action Team posted a statement on its Web site wondering whether the world's largest retailer would reimburse the city for the additional work.

The group pointed out that Wal-Mart didn't pay a \$114,000 bill on time in October 2006. The city sent a letter threatening to send the matter to collections if the bill -- already 30 days overdue -- wasn't paid within 10 days.

Wal-Mart paid the bill, though city spokesman Mike Conway said no one in the finance department could remember why the payment was late. There are no other outstanding bills.

Allegheny Technologies planning \$1.2B expansion

The Associated Press

Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wednesday, September 17, 2008

PITTSBURGH -- Allegheny Technologies Inc. said Wednesday it is planning a nearly \$1.2 billion expansion in the next four years, including a new hot rolling plant for specialty metals near Pittsburgh.

The company said the new hot rolling plant will be able to produce thinner, wider rolls of flat metals more quickly and cheaply, saving the company \$120 million annually.

Capital expenditures are expected to remain between \$500 million and \$600 million annually for 2009 through 2012.

The Pittsburgh-based specialty metals firm hopes to open the new plant in Brackenridge, about 25 miles northeast of the city along the Allegheny River, subject to state and local approvals.

Allegheny Technologies also plans to merge a steel melt shop in Brackenridge with one in neighboring Natrona. The company says that should result in more efficiency and less air pollution.

Reno researchers use Arctic ice to study pollution

By Ed Vogel, Las Vegas Review-Journal

In the SF Chronicle, Contra Costa Times & other papers Wednesday, September 17, 2008

RENO, Nev.—Reno scientist Joe McConnell was not particularly surprised when he discovered high traces of pollution embedded in ice taken in southern Greenland.

After all, talk about greenhouse gases causing global warming and the hole in the ozone layer has been going on for decades.

But McConnell noticed that the highest traces of pollution in the 115-meter-long section of ice he examined were deposited around 1900, not in recent years or during the peak of industrialization in Europe and North America in the 1960s and '70s.

In fact, McConnell found that pollution levels in the early 1900s were two to five times the levels of today.

In particular, toxic levels of heavy metal pollutants from burning coal—cadmium, thallium and lead—were found in Greenland's ice.

It didn't take McConnell, the lead researcher and director of the Desert Research Institute's Ultra-Trace Chemistry Laboratory, long to figure out why: One hundred years ago was the time when most factories and homes in Europe and the Eastern United States burned coal.

"Things are looking better," McConnell said of today's pollution emissions in North America and Europe. "The Clean Air Act has made a big difference as has the demise of Soviet industry in the Arctic. A lot of people don't believe humans can have had such a large amount of impact. But our data showed they have."

Americans should not take his results as a reason to forge ahead with coal-fired power plants and gas-guzzling cars, McConnell said.

The study he and fellow DRI researcher Ross Edwards completed was published last month by the National Academy of Sciences. The study was funded partially by the National Science Foundation.

In their conclusions, the researchers express concern about the effects that pollution generated in China and India will have around the world because of the "rapid coal-driven growth of Asian economies."

This industrialization may pose a risk to the food chain as toxic heavy metals are carried through the atmosphere and deposited in the polar regions, the study contends.

"But cleaner burning coal technologies, or better yet, reduced reliance on coal burning, may head off the potential problems," McConnell wrote.

Before taking his DRI job 10 years ago, McConnell worked in the oil industry and in China. He believes the world must end its dependence on fossil fuels and develop nonpolluting alternative energy sources.

"The United States ought to lead the charge toward renewable energy," he said. "There is no doubt that coal is a dirty source of power."

Although scrubbers in coal-fired power plants today capture a lot of particulate material, McConnell said, they do not catch all the heavy metals he found in the Greenland ice.

He now wants to study ice core samples from Alaska or Russia to determine the effects of pollutants in the Pacific region.

In analyzing why pollution was so great 100 years ago, McConnell perused history books.

Pittsburgh then was America's dirtiest city. He said the air over the Steel City was so filled with coal emissions that street lights remained on for days at a time because the sky was dark with the "black fog."

Nearly 70 people died in the Pittsburgh suburb of Donora in 1948 when industrial pollutants from steel plants were trapped by an air inversion.

"London fog," McConnell added, originally wasn't the term of a line of clothing but referred to the coal-polluted, smoggy air over London that during air inversions killed hundreds of residents.

The word "smog" was created in London in 1905. Coal smoke from thousands of chimneys combined with natural fog to form smog.

McConnell and Edwards collected their ice core samples during a trip to Greenland in May 2004.

One-inch by one-inch by 2-foot-long sections of ice were removed from the ice pack and taken to the researchers' Reno laboratory, where they were melted and analyzed.

"We can accurately date ice," McConnell said. "It is like tree rings."

They analyzed ice dating to 1772. The effects of industrialization started showing up in the 1860s and peaked about 1905.

The Greenland ice field is two miles thick, and some of the ice was created 4,000 years ago, McConnell said.

McConnell found a nifty use for ice he didn't need to analyze: He held a party, melted the ice and served the water.

"Imagine the feeling of drinking water that was there at the time Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence," he said.

On the Net:

Desert Research Institute: <http://www.dri.edu/>

Court revives NM auto emissions challenge

By Barry Massey, Associated Press Writer

Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald & other papers Wednesday, September 17, 2008

SANTA FE, N.M.—New life has been given to a lawsuit challenging a state board's power to adopt tougher emissions standards for new vehicles in New Mexico.

The state Court of Appeals revived the lawsuit on Tuesday by ruling that a district court in Las Cruces had wrongly dismissed the case last year.

Environment Secretary Ron Curry said Gov. Bill Richardson's administration "will fight this ruling."

"We are clearly within our rights to regulate these types of emissions. It's the right thing to do for the protection of New Mexicans' health and to combat climate change," Curry said in a statement.

The state can ask the New Mexico Supreme Court to review the latest decision.

A group of Democratic legislators, car dealers and a farmer challenged the power of the Environmental Improvement Board to adopt auto emission standards similar to those in California. Their lawsuit contended that the Legislature must change state law before the California standards could be approved.

Last November, the state board and the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board adopted the more stringent emission standards, which mandate cleaner-burning cars and trucks to help fight global warming. The requirements apply starting with 2011 model cars, which become available to consumers in 2010.

Richardson had asked the board to adopt the California emissions standards as part of his administration's efforts to reduce greenhouse gases in New Mexico. The governor appoints board members.

The lawsuit was brought as the board met to consider the emissions proposal. Initially, a judge was asked to block the board from adopting the emissions standards until the legal challenge over the board's power was resolved.

District Judge Robert Robles dismissed the case. He concluded that a lawsuit seeking a declaratory judgment should not be used to challenge an administrative action such as the emissions standards.

However, the Court of Appeals said "the present case does not involve the effect of EIB's adoption of the regulations" but instead the lawsuit focuses on a dispute over the scope of EIB's powers.

Four Democratic lawmakers—Sen. John Arthur Smith of Deming, Sen. Timothy Jennings of Roswell, Rep. George Hanosch of Grants and Rep. Jim Trujillo of Santa Fe—joined in the lawsuit along with four car dealers from Clovis, Alamogordo and Las Cruces and Curry County farmer Scott Pipkin.

The lawsuit contended that a state law prevented the board from adopting air quality regulations more stringent than federal air quality requirements.

The standards will apply to new vehicles sold in New Mexico—not used cars or new cars before the 2011 model year.

Physicist group urges U.S. to maximize energy efficiency

By Renee Schoof

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, September 17, 2008

WASHINGTON – The United States can reduce its dependence on foreign oil and greenhouse-gas emissions by making cars and buildings much more energy-efficient, according to a study released Tuesday by a large national association of physicists.

The 46,000-member American Physical Society argues the need for action is urgent because the energy crisis is the worst in U.S. history. It also says the physics and chemistry behind the human causes of climate change – such as heat-trapping pollution from the burning of fossil fuels – are "well understood and beyond dispute."

The report argues that the country can still go a long way to reduce energy use in cost-effective ways that allow for continued comfort and convenience. Although efficient technologies can save money, the United States has been slow to catch on, the report says. It recommends that the federal government adopt policies and make investments.

"The opportunities are huge and the costs are small," the report said.

"The bottom line is that the quickest way to do something about America's use of energy is through energy efficiency," said Burton Richter, chairman of the study panel and a 1976 Nobel Prize winner in physics. "Energy that you don't use is free. It's not imported, and it doesn't emit any greenhouse gases. Most of the things we recommend don't cost anything to the economy."

The report concludes that the projected growth of energy use in buildings – 30 percent by 2030 – could be cut to zero using existing technology and what's likely to become available in the next decade at the current level of research and development. It argues that the federal government

should encourage states to set standards for residential buildings and make sure they're enforced.

"One of the things we would love to see is all buildings have Energy Star labels," Richter said. "Right now you don't know how much energy a building is going to use that you're interested in moving into. We'd like to see an energy audit required before a building is sold or even built."

Some of the report's suggestions included installing roofs that reflect rather than absorb the sun's energy in hot climates; more efficient heating, cooling, lighting and appliances; and more government investment in developing building technologies.

A key transportation recommendation is to develop cheaper and more reliable batteries for electric cars, which could be the equivalent of cutting oil imports by 6 million barrels a day, Richter said.

[Lodi News Sentinel, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, September 17, 2008](#)
Regarding the Reynolds Ranch changes

I am concerned with poorly planned growth in Lodi, so I recently read through the proposed changes for Reynolds Ranch and attended the Planning Commission meeting last week.

I was appalled that no one on the commission had questions for the developer following his opening comments. The document should have raised many red flags, and yet no one had any questions. Thus, during public comment I voiced my concerns, though it appeared to do little good. The commission voted 5-1 in favor of the project changes.

The 2008 report states that traffic rates are expected to be 79 percent higher than those predicted in the 2006 report. The 2008 revision almost doubles the 2006 estimates to over 50,536 daily trips! The report suggests that traffic lights are sufficient to care for the increase in cars. It doesn't take an expert to see the potential traffic nightmare.

The report of 2006 showed "significant environmental impact" in 10 areas. It also stated that there would be "significant and unavoidable impact related to operational [emissions of ozone precursors](#)." If this was reported in the 2006 EIR report, then what would the environmental impact be with the 2008 proposed changes?

Everyone knows how bad the housing market is. But the changes they propose are huge: eliminating most of the single family homes in exchange for senior housing, dropping the school they agreed to build, and increasing the retail square footage from 350,000 to over 700,000 square feet.

The Lodi News-Sentinel reported Aug. 30 that Pacific Municipal Consultants of Rancho Cordova were hired to assess the effects of the Wal-Mart Supercenter and the cumulative effects of the area's planned growth. They wrote: "The construction of the Lodi shopping center in combination with Reynolds Ranch could lead to an oversupply of retail space in the Lodi area." Should we be taking on such risk? The proposed changes may have serious consequences for existing retailers in Lodi.

Tonight the City Council votes on the Reynolds Ranch project. I hope to see you at 7 p.m.

Denis Silber, Lodi

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses environmental map confirms that air pollution is fatal near ports. For more information on this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Confirma mapa ambiental que contaminación es fatal cerca de los puertos

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino
Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, September 17, 2008

Un mapa que elaboraron autoridades ambientales en el sur de California confirma que la contaminación del aire cercana a los puertos es fatal para los humanos.

El mapa ilustra concentraciones de los principales contaminantes y la cantidad de pacientes de cáncer en la región.

Como ejemplo, en Huntington Beach hay comparativamente una sexta parte de los enfermos de cáncer que hay en Long Beach, pese a que ambos están en la costa y cercanos uno del otro.

Un dato importante en el mapa es que el riesgo de contaminación de los puertos disminuye en las inmediaciones del centro de Los Ángeles.