

Tracy following road to become 'emerald city'

By Alex Breitler, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009

TRACY - Emerald. It's the new green.

This city is measuring its carbon footprint and working on a broad sustainability plan in the hope of becoming the second "emerald city" under a state pilot program.

Other cities have examined their impact on the environment and prepared plans to go green.

But officials said the "Emerald Tracy" project is unique for its far reach, its emphasis on community outreach, and its public and private partnerships.

"We're really excited, and we're hoping for a lot of involvement from the community," said Tracy assistant planner Kimberly Matlock, who has spoken with architects and high school students about how they can participate.

The effort will involve more than counting carbon emissions. Officials will consider improving transportation, land use, building practices, water conservation, agriculture and more. They will consider the economic impact of taking action as well as the impact of taking no action at all.

"The old model for communities has been economic sustainability by physical growth. We recognize now that that's not sustainable, and we need to look for other ways to increase economic health," said Stephen Coyle of Oakland-based planning firm Town-Green, which has partnered with Tracy.

Also of note is that organizers are seeking large-scale solutions. Take Tracy's many commuters as an example. While you could start a carpool program to reduce their vehicle emissions, a longer-term fix would be to bring higher-paying jobs to the city so residents don't have to commute at all.

The Tracy City Council identified sustainability as a priority in April 2008, and the city is calculating its carbon footprint.

City Manager Leon Churchill Jr. said on the city's Web site that the new plan would cost about \$180,000. That does not include implementing the plan, but Matlock said the city hopes to partner with nonprofit organizations and has grant money that can be used for energy efficiency projects.

Get involved

A public workshop this fall will give the public a chance to suggest strategies for the "Emerald Tracy" sustainability plan. The workshop date has not yet been announced.

Visit www.emeraldtracy.org for more information, including "sustainable stories" from members of the community.

PG&E inks contract to buy 'biomass' energy

By John Cox, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009

A Bakersfield company has signed a 15-year contract with Pacific Gas and Electric Co. to sell "biomass" energy produced by burning local tree trimmings and other waste wood, the utility announced Monday.

PG&E said the project will produce 327,624 megawatt hours of electricity annually, enough to power 47,000 average homes.

A partner at Mt. Poso Cogeneration Co. said the deal would not take effect until the company completes a \$50 million conversion from using mostly coal and petroleum coke to running on 100 percent biomass fuel. He said the project is expected to be finished in 2011.

Mt. Poso, which also produces oil, has sold mainly coal-based power to PG&E since 1989; it uses the byproduct steam to enhance its oil production operations in a commonly used process called steam injection.

PG&E, spurred by the state's recent emphasis on non-petroleum-based energy, has signed contracts to purchase more than 20 percent of its future electric power from biomass and other renewable energy sources.

The utility would pay Mt. Poso more for the biomass energy than it pays now for the electricity created from coal and petcoke. PG&E declined to state how much more.

The partner at Mt. Poso, Michael Hawkins, said wood biomass burns more cleanly than coal or petcoke, and that if left to decompose, it produces methane, which is more noxious than carbon dioxide.

Obama addresses U.N. climate summit, warns of 'irreversible catastrophe'
He says the U.S. shares part of the blame for global warming but is committed to the cause. He urges work toward an agreement at the Copenhagen summit, though European officials warn of a deadlock.

By Christi Parsons, staff writer

L.A. Times, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009

Reporting from New York City - President Obama this morning issued an appeal to world leaders to help avert "an irreversible catastrophe" in the Earth's climate, accepting a portion of blame for global warming on behalf of the United States but also urging the world's biggest polluters to change their ways.

Speaking before a United Nations summit on climate change, the president's first address to the world body, Obama touted steps the U.S. has taken to slow global warming and attempted to reassure the world that Americans are committed to the cause.

"We understand the gravity of the climate threat," Obama said. "We are determined to act. And we will meet our responsibility to future generations."

The president also urged world leaders to work toward an international agreement on global warming as they draw closer to a U.N. summit in Copenhagen the end of this year.

The remarks come at a time of rising concern about progress in those talks. Aides to Obama say things aren't proceeding as quickly as they would like, and are leaving open the possibility that talks will extend into next year.

While there are dire predictions coming from other quarters -- European officials say the talks are close to deadlock -- administration officials think there still is cause for hope.

This morning, Obama tried to make the case for it. He ticked off a list of steps the U.S. has taken, including investing economic stimulus money in clean energy projects and raising its vehicle emission standards.

Notably, he did not call for the Senate to pass a bill before the Copenhagen meeting in December, or even to get one out of committee by then.

But the president laid down a personal marker on the issue, speaking in starker terms than he has used in months to describe the risk of not acting.

"The security and stability of each nation and all peoples -- our prosperity, our health, our safety -- are in jeopardy," Obama said. "And the time we have to reverse this tide is running out."

Obama also offered a case for every nation to rise to the challenge, asserting that individual countries can still pursue economic prosperity while doing their part to protect the planet.

"Each of us must do what we can when we can to grow our economies without endangering our planet, and we must all do it together," Obama said. "We must seize the opportunity to make Copenhagen a significant step forward in the global fight against climate change."

The poorest nations have more to gain by correcting course, Obama suggested, arguing that they suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change.

"For these are the nations that are already living with the unfolding effects of a warming planet - famine and drought, disappearing coastal villages and the conflict that arises from scarce resources," Obama said.

"Their future is no longer a choice between a growing economy and a cleaner planet, because their survival depends on both."

Chinese President Hu Jintao is also addressing the climate change summit today, in addition to meeting with Obama privately this afternoon.

U.N. Climate Conference Opens With Call for Unity

By Neil McFarquhar, staff writer
N.Y. Times, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009

UNITED NATIONS — Some 100 heads of state gathered at the United Nations on Tuesday for an unprecedented daylong conference on combating climate change, with key leaders like presidents Hu Jintao of China and Barack Obama acknowledging that agreement is an important goal, but also stressing their own needs.

Negotiators trying to hammer out a deal to cut global emissions by December in Copenhagen have largely stalled, and the United Nations organizers are hoping that gathering the leaders will give the talks new political momentum.

Mr. Hu said that while China had made great strides in development, it still lagged relatively in terms of its wealth per individual, and that had to be taken into account in fighting emissions.

"Due to their low development level and shortage of capital and technology, developing countries have limited capability and climate change," he said. "Developing countries need to strike a balance between economic growth, social development and environmental protection."

Mr. Hu also said his country would take four steps toward greener development, although he did give any specific numerical targets. He said China will cut carbon dioxide emissions by a "notable margin" by 2020 compared to 2005 levels; massively increase the size of forests; boost nuclear or non-fossil fuels to 15 percent of power by 2020 and work to develop a green economy.

He did not say China would consider the cuts mandatory, and also tied the emissions cuts to the growth in the country's gross domestic product, meaning the overall number could go up even if it was less per person.

Mr. Obama also repeated his commitment to green growth while acknowledging the domestic battles that many countries will face. The world "cannot allow the old divisions that have characterized the climate debate for so many years to block our progress," Mr. Obama, adding that forging any kind of consensus will come slowly. "And so all of us will face doubts and difficulties in our own capitals as we try to reach a lasting solution to the climate challenge."

He noted that the United States and others had tried to downplay the crisis before but now recognized its gravity.

China followed by the United States are the largest emitters, accounting for about 40 percent split evenly between them. The United States has said that its willingness to accept mandatory emissions requirements is hinged to domestic law and a new law, stalled by the health care debate, is awaiting Senate action.

Mr. Obama said he was committed to the United States making the largest-ever investment in renewable energy, new standards for reducing pollution from vehicles and making clean energy profitable, among other initiatives. He said developed nations must also provide financial and technical assistance to help the rest adapt to the impact of climate change and pursue low-carbon development.

Rajendra K. Pachauri, the chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provided the scientific context, and warned that current emissions trajectories were propelling the world toward the panel's worst-case scenarios.

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Science leaves us no space for inaction now,” he said.

Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations secretary general, appealed to the leaders to set aside their national interests and think about the future of the globe.

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Instead of demanding concessions from others, let us ask how we can contribute to the greater good,” he said in prepared remarks to the leaders gathered in the General Assembly hall, describing the talks as moving at “glacial” speed. “The world’s glaciers are now melting faster than human progress to protect them—and us.”

The conference today, which is not a negotiating session but designed to push toward a strategy, is focused on four outstanding hurdles.

Industrialized nations, while agreeing on cutting emissions in the long term — by 2050 — have failed to agree on a crucial midterm target for carbon emissions cuts by 2020. They have pledged to go roughly halfway toward meeting the ambitious target set by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — a 25 percent to 40 percent reduction from 1990 levels by 2020 — which environmental advocates say is not enough.

Developing powerhouses like China and India have agreed on the need to trim emissions, but they reject mandatory limits and demand financial and technical support in exchange

Efforts to reach any kind of consensus around the issue of aid for the poorest countries to adapt to the impact of climate change are faltering. Finally, there is no agreement on what institutions would verify that targets are being met and supervise the financial and emissions targets.

The main hurdle is coming up with a plan over the next decade that will keep the temperature rise to about 2 degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, above pre-industrial levels. Even countries like India, which largely blames the developed world for the problem, but has announced a package of cuts, admit that looking ahead to 2050 is not good enough.

“It is the height of dishonesty to have a target for 2050 because none of us will be around to be held accountable,” Jairam Ramesh, the environment minister of India, told a news conference late Monday.

Some blocs of nations have their own targets. The small island states of the Pacific and the Caribbean want to limit the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees because they fear being inundated by the sea rise that climate change could bring. Those states, along with many in Africa, are demanding billions of dollars in aid to assuage the damage they are already suffering.

The French environment minister, Jean- Louis Borloo, told reporters that developed countries would probably support direct aid for projects that counter the affects of global warming, but he rejected the idea of "damages."

"They have to show what it will pay for," he said.

During the speeches on Tuesday, the change in language coming from America was stark. Gone was the Bush administration's questioning about whether global warming is caused by mankind. Mr. Obama was quick to take responsibility on behalf of said mankind.

"John F. Kennedy once observed that 'our problems are man-made, therefore they may be solved by man,'" Mr. Obama said. "It is true that for too many years mankind has been slow to respond to or even recognize the magnitude of the climate threat. It is true of my own country as well; we recognize that."

He said he was committed to the United States making its largest-ever investment in renewable energy, new standards for reducing pollution from vehicles and making clean energy profitable, among other initiatives. He said developing nations must also provide financial and technical assistance to help the rest adapt to the impact of climate change and pursue low-carbon development.

"We understand the gravity of the climate threat," Mr. Obama said, but he noted that the push for change comes in the midst of a global recession. "And so all of us will face doubts and difficulties in our own capitals as we try to reach a lasting solution to the climate challenge."

Various ministers and other officials said that if major powers like China, Brazil, Indonesia all make conciliatory noises today at the United Nations, that would likely help Mr. Obama overcome domestic opposition.

Obama: US `determined to act' on climate change

By Jennifer Loven - AP White House Correspondent
In the Modesto Bee, Tuesday, September 22, 2009

UNITED NATIONS -- President Barack Obama on Tuesday declared that the United States is a serious partner in combating global warming, telling world peers "we are determined to act."

"The journey is hard. And we don't have much time left to make it," Obama said in brief remarks at a high-level climate summit convened by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Obama sought to show U.S. resolve ahead of crucial talks in Copenhagen in December, when nations will try to reach a new global treaty to address climate change. He spoke at the start of a busy day of diplomacy at the United Nations that also was to include a three-way meeting with Israeli and Palestinian leaders in an effort to nudge forward the Mideast peace process.

"We understand the gravity of the climate threat. We are determined to act," Obama said. "And we will meet our responsibility to future generations."

He spoke after Ban admonished leaders to put aside differences and move more quickly on global warming.

Obama is under pressure to put political capital behind getting a serious clean-energy law at home and show that the U.S., an economic giant, will do its part to cut heat-trapping emissions. The U.S. House passed a bill this summer that would set the first mandatory limits on greenhouse gases, but a Senate version appears increasingly unlikely this year.

In his first presidential visit to the United Nations, Obama also sought to show a clear break from former President George W. Bush without referring to his predecessor by name. Bush's critics said he didn't take climate change seriously enough.

"It is true that for too many years, mankind has been slow to respond to or even recognize the magnitude of the climate threat. It is true of my own country as well," Obama said. "We recognize that."

Environmental experts warn of catastrophic changes, from rising sea levels to more drought, if industrial and developing nations cannot collectively address a warming planet.

"Our generation's response to this challenge will be judged by history," Obama said.

Obama said his administration has made the "largest-ever" American investment in renewable energy. And he called on other nations - the rich and the developing countries alike - to rise to the challenge. He said undertaking costly environmental clean up work is difficult at a time when the world is trying to recover from a recession, but that it has to be done.

"All of us will face doubts and difficulties in our own capitals as we try to reach a lasting solution to the climate challenge," Obama said. "But difficulty is no excuse for complacency."

Tuesday's U.N. summit and the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh later this week seek to put added pressure on rich nations to commit to greenhouse gas cuts and to pay for poorer nations to burn less coal and preserve their forests.

Obama sought repeatedly to hold everyone accountable. He said developed nations such as the United States have a "responsibility to lead" but rapidly-growing nations must do their part.

As for Obama's Mideast diplomacy efforts, there were no expectations of a breakthrough from Tuesday's three-way meeting. But it was seen as a crucial step for the president nonetheless.

After seeing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas separately, Obama was bringing the two together for the first Israeli-Palestinian meeting since Netanyahu took office in March.

Even if little more than a photo opportunity, it will probably be the most-watched portion of a marathon day of international diplomacy for Obama, a 12-hour sprint through many high-profile global problems and disputes.

The Israeli-Palestinian sit-down wasn't announced until Saturday and comes with the two sides still far apart on what it would take to resume peace talks that broke off in 2008.

U.S. envoy George Mitchell failed last week to bridge the gap between the two sides on the issue of Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory, putting the long hoped-for three-way meeting in doubt. Obama has asked Israel to freeze all settlement construction, a condition for Abbas to resume negotiations. But Israel has only committed to a partial halt.

Still, the sides decided to go ahead, even though Obama is considered unlikely to resolve the settlement showdown and announce a relaunching of peace talks.

"We have no grand expectations out of one meeting," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said.

One reason to have the meeting is the need to get momentum going.

"The U.S. wants to and the U.S. needs to negotiate in public," said Jon Alterman, a senior fellow in Middle East policy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a former State Department official in President George W. Bush's first term. "There's a perceived need for the U.S. to visibly be involved in making progress on Arab-Israeli issues."

Obama's agenda on Tuesday also included meeting Chinese President Hu Jintao at a fraught time in the Washington-Beijing relationship; playing luncheon host, as America's first black president, to sub-Saharan African leaders for talks on boosting opportunities for young people in their poverty-stricken nations; delivering key speeches to former President Bill Clinton's Global Initiative and to a U.N. heads-of-state session on the stalled issue of climate change; and ending the day with a U.N.-sponsored leaders dinner.

Pollution lawsuit against power companies revived

The Associated Press

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Tuesday, September 22, 2009

NEW YORK -- An appeals court has restored a lawsuit brought by eight states that want to hold power companies responsible for some of the nation's carbon dioxide emissions.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan issued the ruling Monday.

Several years ago, a lower court judge had tossed out the lawsuit that would have brought judicial oversight to pollution issues that affect global warming.

The states bringing the lawsuit are California, Connecticut, Iowa, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin. New York City and three nonprofit land trusts also are part of the lawsuit.

The lawsuit seeks to force a reduction of carbon dioxide emissions by several power companies. The companies have said the issue is best left up to the government.

Greenbelt Federal Court

NASA Scientist Charged With Aiding Wife's Firm

By Maria Glod and Meg Smith, Washington Post Staff Writers

Washington Post Tuesday, September 22, 2009

A prominent NASA scientist from Silver Spring has been charged in federal court in Maryland with using his position for the financial benefit of his wife, who owns a company that develops science exhibits and educational tools.

Mark R. Schoeberl, an atmospheric scientist who has worked at the Goddard Space Flight Center since the 1980s, is charged in U.S. District Court in Greenbelt with one felony count of acts affecting a personal interest.

Schoeberl, who specializes in ozone depletion and wave dynamics, is chief scientist for NASA's Earth Sciences Division, which does climate research. He also is project scientist for the Aura Project, a mission to study ozone, air quality and climate.

Schoeberl's attorney, Jacob S. Frenkel, said his client has made "incredible contributions to the NASA program over three decades."

"This charge reflects a balance between the government's obligation to enforce vigorously conflict-of-interest laws and Dr. Schoeberl's belief in this valuable state-of-the-art educational software," Frenkel said.

A NASA spokesman said Schoeberl has been placed on administrative leave with pay pending the outcome of the case.

Authorities have released few details about the charge against Schoeberl, but in a one-paragraph charging document, prosecutors allege that as a government worker, he participated in a "matter to which, to his knowledge, his spouse had a financial interest."

Schoeberl's wife, Barbara, owns Animated Earth LLC, which develops and distributes "Earth Today," a museum exhibit that allows people to access data on rainfall, earthquakes and other events displayed on a rotating globe.

From 2006 to 2009, NASA authorized purchase orders worth up to \$190,727 for Animated Earth's products and services, according to federal procurement data. It is unclear whether the charge is connected to those purchases.

This month, as part of an investigation run through the NASA inspector general's office, authorities searched the couple's home and seized computer equipment and several cellphones and digital cameras. Authorities also seized documents linked to Animated Earth, including bank records and e-mails that mention the company.

According to a biography posted on NASA's Web site, Mark Schoeberl is an accomplished scientist whose work often appears in journals. He is a past member of the National Academy's Board of Atmospheric Sciences and was awarded NASA's Outstanding Leadership Medal in 1996 and Distinguished Service Award in 2000.

List of 21 must-do transportation projects unveiled

Daily News, Tuesday, September 22, 2009

Mobility 21's list of transit projects designed to alleviate congestion on the nation's most-crowded freeways. A "positive train control" system to prevent railway collisions and projects to relieve congestion along the Santa Monica (10) and San Diego (405) freeways were identified by transportation experts on Monday as critical to improving mobility throughout Southern California.

The projects were included on Mobility 21's "IMBY" -- or "In My Back Yard" -- list that was released during the group's eighth annual regional summit at the Westin Bonaventure hotel.

"Not only will these projects reduce traffic and improve [air quality](#), the Westside subway extension and the other projects will create thousands of good jobs for local people and catapult the region to economic recovery once they are fully funded and break ground," Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said.

More than 600 government, business and civic leaders attended the Mobility 21 summit, working to focus regional strategies for planning and securing funds for vital Southern California transportation projects.

"When it comes to transportation and other critical infrastructure, speaking with one voice helps everyone understand that investment in Southern California pays dividends to the people of this region and the state and national economies," said Dale Bonner, California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency secretary.

Art Leahy, chief executive officer of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, said high-speed rail will be critical to improving the region's overall transportation picture.

"High-speed rail will not only be a tremendous boost to mobility in our region, it will also create needed jobs," Leahy said. "We are proud that the link between downtown Los Angeles and Anaheim is one of the first legs of the proposed statewide project."

Other projects included on the list are carpool lanes on Interstate 5 in southern Los Angeles County; improvements on the southbound Long Beach (710) Freeway; railroad grade-separations in the San Gabriel Valley, northern Orange County, Riverside and San Bernardino counties; expansion of the Golden State (5) Freeway in the Santa Clarita Valley; and the Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center.

States Can Sue Utilities Over Emissions

By Matthew L. Wald, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Monday, Sept. 21, 2009

A two-judge panel of a federal appeals court has ruled that big power companies can be sued by states and land trusts for emitting carbon dioxide. The decision, issued Monday, overturns a 2005 District Court decision that the question was political, not judicial.

A panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, in New York, ruled that eight states — California, Connecticut, Iowa, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont and

Wisconsin — as well as New York City and three land trusts could proceed with a suit against American Electric Power, Southern Corporation, the Tennessee Valley Authority, Xcel Energy and Cinergy Corporation, all large coal-burning utilities.

The case, brought in 2004, said the defendants were creating a “public nuisance” and sought reductions in emissions that scientists say are changing the climate. The states cited studies from the

United Nations and the National Academy of Sciences that predicted damage and said in fact that their environments had already been damaged. The land trusts said that an increase in sea level would inundate their properties, among other problems.

The power companies said that the federal courts had never recognized an argument in common law that greenhouse gas emissions contribute to global warming, and that if action were to be taken, Congress would have to do it.

The lower court agreed that the issues demonstrated the “transcendently legislative nature of this litigation,” and that if they found in favor of the states and the land trusts, the courts would have to figure out how to cap emissions, set reduction goals and a schedule for achieving them, and take other steps that would seem to require legislation.

The appeal was heard by a three-judge panel, but one of the judges, Sonia Sotomayor, was elevated to the Supreme Court in August. The case was decided by Joseph M. McLaughlin, who was appointed to the court in 1990 by the first President George Bush, and Peter W. Hall, nominated in 2003 by the second President Bush.

Matt Pawa, the lead lawyer for the Open Space Institute and the Audubon Society of New Hampshire, both plaintiffs, said in a statement that “for hundreds of years, courts have been there to protect citizens from harm,” and could do so again now.

At the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group that was not a plaintiff, David Doniger, a senior lawyer, said the best way to fight global warming was to have Congress act. But he added, “The court’s decision guarantees that if the Congress fails to do its job, or blocks the E.P. A. from doing its job, the biggest power companies will still be held accountable in the federal courts.”

At American Electric Power, Pat D. Hemlepp, a spokesman, said the company’s lawyers had not decided whether to appeal. But he added: “We don’t feel that litigation is a proper avenue to address climate concerns. In our view, it’s a policy issue.”

“Legislation would be the best approach, and that’s happening now,” Mr. Hemlepp said, referring to a bill that has passed the House and that the Senate may take up this year.

Many participants in the global warming debate appear to prefer a decision by the Congress, because it could balance competing interests, between and among regions and industries, to cut emissions of global warming gases.

But Monday’s decision means that all three branches of the federal government could have a role. In addition to the possibility that Congress will act, the Supreme Court held in April 2007, that global warming gases were a pollutant under the Clean Air Act, and thus could be regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency.

[O.C. Register blog, Monday, September 21, 2009:](#)

Gas-powered blenders? Yes — and some are illegal

posted by Pat Brennan, green living, environment editor

They run on a smog-belching mix of gasoline and oil, and they're growing more popular with the tailgate party set.

But gas-powered blenders sold by On the Edge Marketing in Lake Forest also run on engines that failed to meet state emissions standards. So the company, along with CSK Auto Inc. of Phoenix, has been fined \$240,000 by the California Air Resources Board.

The unauthorized blenders were sold in 2007; the two companies also were ordered to stop selling them in a settlement announced last week.

Tailgaters needn't despair, however, says Karen Caesar of the state Air Resources Board: there are legal gasoline-powered blenders on the market. Those emit 10 times less pollution than the illegal versions.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2009:](#)

Clarifying Fresno air fine

The city of Fresno was recently in the news as the result of a fine imposed by the California Air Resources Board for technical violations of the agency's diesel emission test requirements. While this news item may have given the impression the city has acted negligently in addressing air quality issues, nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, the city has been a champion in the development of a clean air municipal fleet for many years. Our commitment to clean air is demonstrated by the fact that the city operates one of the largest clean air fleets in California, utilizing a mix of hybrid, compressed natural gas and liquid natural gas alternative fuel and low emission vehicles.

The widespread use of these alternative fuel vehicles is making a significant contribution to improving air quality in our region every day.

The city's efforts have been recognized through awards received from the U.S. Department of Energy and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as well as the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District. For more on the city's commitment to air quality and clean-fuel technology, please visit www.fresno.gov/fleet.

Ken Nerland, General services director, city of Fresno

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Tuesday, September 22, 2009](#)

Editorial: Invest now, save energy tomorrow

While economically distressed local governments are mostly enmeshed in the grim task of cutting budgets these days, at least one innovative idea is under serious consideration locally. Next week both the Sacramento City Council and the county Board of Supervisors are expected to give conceptual approval to an exciting new program designed to help residents finance energy efficiency upgrades to their homes and businesses.

Known as the AB 811 program, after the bill signed into law last year that made it possible, the program gives cities and counties the authority to create special financing districts. Using startup funds generated initially by federal stimulus money and California Energy Commission grants and possibly the Sacramento Municipal Utility District, residents will be able to tap into the fund to finance energy efficiency improvements to their properties – new, more efficient heating and air conditioning systems, for example, or better insulation, weatherization, whole-house fans or even rooftop solar panels. If the financing scheme works, private investors may be approached in the future.

The loan payment is attached to the borrower's property tax bill. That is what makes the program truly innovative. Unlike a conventional loan, AB 811 debt stays with the property, not the borrower. So when borrowers sell their homes or businesses, the benefit of the energy efficiency

improvement stays with the property and passes to the new property owner, and so does the debt.

The Sacramento AB 811 program, dubbed SAVES for Sacramento Area Voluntary Energy Savings, gives residents one more option for financing energy-efficient upgrades. It lowers demand for energy, helps reduce pollution and greenhouse gases, increases property values and saves money on utility bills, among other things. It also boosts investment in energy-saving industries and green jobs.

Sacramento County officials estimate the program here would generate 725 new jobs and \$170 million in new spending locally.

But it's not risk-free. It increases debt at a time when many homeowners and businesses are struggling. Property owners who buy in to the program have to be creditworthy and able to pay the new, higher costs. Depending on the cost of the improvement financed, even with the anticipated utility bill savings, in some cases, it could take years before the borrower recoups the cost of the initial investment.

Next week's votes at the Sacramento City Council and the Board of Supervisors would approve merely a notice of intent. The hard work of designing a specific ordinance that would detail the kinds of energy improvements eligible and the terms of the loans and identify a third-party administrator to manage the program will take more time.

Eventually, Sacramento officials hope to expand their program across the region, into Placer County and beyond. A regional approach will help make the program both more cost-effective and more competitive when local officials apply for state and federal grants.

Other jurisdictions have already moved forward with AB 811 programs. Sacramento is right to consider it. If it works for energy efficiency, similar financing schemes might make sense for water conservation as well.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses environmentalist in Chicago encourage residents to leave their vehicles at home for one day. The long term goal of Active Transportation Alliance is that vehicles stop circulating for one day and instead people use alternative means of transportation including using their bikes and walking to work. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Ambientalistas de Chicago instan a residentes a dejar por un día sus vehículos en casa

Irma López

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, September 21, 2009

La meta a largo plazo de la Alianza Activa de Transporte (Active Transportation Alliance) de Chicago es que un día todo lo que circule por las calles de la ciudad sean peatones, bicicletas y medios de transporte público.

Este martes 22 de septiembre será el primer día de la iniciativa sin coches en la ciudad. Adolfo Hernández, director de esa organización, dijo que cientos o miles de personas harán un compromiso de dejar el auto en casa y harán sus viajes a la escuela o al trabajo usando la bicicleta, caminando o tomando el transporte público.

Se trata de una iniciativa mundial que busca que la gente tome consciencia sobre la necesidad de caminar o usar medios de transporte que no dañen el medio ambiente.

Según Hernández, si por lo menos mil personas participan este martes, la iniciativa será considerada un éxito.