

Building an S.J. for the future County looking ahead to a blueprint for 2030

By Zachary K. Johnson, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Sunday, Aug. 10, 2009

STOCKTON - From the growth of cities to the challenges of job creation to the struggle against high unemployment, the issues facing San Joaquin County today are expected to be the same issues facing the county tomorrow.

To plan for that future, the county is updating its General Plan and creating a blueprint for 2030.

A recently released draft report contains hundreds of pages that will form a basis for a road map. A second, smaller draft report boils things down to an "issues and opportunities" document.

Much research and discussion is ahead before either report becomes policy.

"This is kind of the cream that's rising to the top," said Ted Holzem, project manager for Mintier Harnish, the consulting firm hired by the county to help update the General Plan.

The aptly named Issues and Opportunity Report incorporates staff research and the views displayed during a series of focus group meetings covering such topics as agriculture, transportation, land use and public safety.

A series of public meetings that begin this week will launch the county's "issues and opportunities" dialogue.

Cities have their own general plans, but municipal issues often overlap with the county. The two reports include areas of interest that cross agency boundaries.

Having this information helps plan policy and look at alternatives, said Kerry Sullivan, director of the county Community Development Department. "This helps identify what the issues are in the community." Here's a sampling of the conversation ahead:

People and jobs

* The countywide population is expected to grow from about 685,000 to about 1.3 million by 2030. Most of that growth will occur in cities, so only 67,000 of the new residents are expected to live in unincorporated areas.

* The population will get older. The percentage of county's total population over the age of 60 is expected to rise from 13 percent to 18 percent. Older residents generally have more health problems and demand different services and amenities.

* The county faces significant challenges in retaining a skilled workforce. San Joaquin County has a lower percentage of college graduates than the state average and more educated residents leave the county than move into it.

* Compared to the rest of the state, local wages are lower and the unemployment rate is higher.

* The Stockton-San Joaquin Enterprise Zone needs to provide incentives for bringing more companies to the area.

* Stockton Metropolitan Airport, the Port of Stockton, agriculture and technical manufacturing are existing assets that could expand.

* Agri-tourism and so-called "green jobs" connected to renewable energy technology could provide opportunities for economic expansion.

Land use

* How and where growth occurs is a major issue in the county.

* Since 1992, the number of acres in cities has grown from 28,000 to 90,000 - or roughly 10 percent of the county's total acreage of 922,000. An additional 56,000 acres of land are inside municipal spheres of influence.

* Demand for rural homes can lead to diminished flexibility and profitability for farmers.

* Conflicts arising from new residential growth near Stockton Metro could impede the role it plays contributing to economic expansion.

* Careful strategies can ensure open space buffers are maintained between urban areas.

* Opportunities exist for non-residential development in Mountain House, Patterson Pass, at reclaimed mining sites near Tracy and areas around freeway interchanges.

* As growth brings homes in closer contact with farms, conflicts between farmers and their new neighbors over dust, noise, odors and chemical use are likely to increase.

* Farmland preservation opportunities exist, including Williamson Act contracts and city mitigation ordinances.

Environment and natural resources

* Future planning must adhere to strict mandates to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

* Agricultural lands could be used to sequester carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas.

* Water supplies will continue to decrease as demand increases.

* The reliability of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is increasingly threatened by its deteriorating ecosystem, drought and levee stability.

* Groundwater levels are decreasing and the water has become saltier. Efforts to "recharge" groundwater basins can be effective.

* Agricultural use and urban development pose threats to native plants and animals.

* Protection of mineral-rich areas can ensure resources available for future extraction.

* The county provides 4.3 acres of regional parkland per 1,000 residents.

* Public access to waterways is limited and public facilities inadequate to meet demand.

Services

* The need for more efficient and expanded public transit is expected to increase.

* Bikeways lack continuity, resulting in a fragmented and inconvenient system.

* Rural traffic congestion has increased and is expected to worsen.

* Foster care, public health, libraries, law enforcement, courts, jails, elections and other county functions depend on dwindling sources of funding.

* Water, wastewater, drainage and other public infrastructure systems in unincorporated county lack funding to meet existing and future demands.

Safety

* Flood control infrastructure, including levees, require improvements to protect residents from heightened flood risk.

* Law-enforcement response time is a concern.

* [Air quality](#) in the county is among the worst in the state.

* Violent crime increased in the county by 32.3 percent from 2000 to 2006, at a time when the rate of violent crime decreased statewide.

Obama's EPA Plans Fewer Toxic Cleanups

By Associated Press

In the N.Y. Times, Aug. 10, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- For years, the Bush administration was criticized for not cleaning up enough of the nation's most contaminated waste sites. The Obama administration plans to do even less.

Environmental groups and some Democratic lawmakers railed against President George W. Bush's cleanup record. But this time, they're shying away from speaking out against a popular president who's considered an ally in the fight to clean up the environment.

In Obama's first two years in office, the Environmental Protection Agency expects to begin the final phase of cleanup at fewer Superfund sites than in any administration since 1991, according to budget documents and agency records. The EPA estimates it will finish construction to remove the last traces of pollution at 20 sites in 2009 and 22 sites in 2010.

During the eight years of the Bush administration, the agency finished construction at 38 sites on average a year.

"Certainly, we are very disappointed that we can't get our ... numbers up," said Elizabeth Southerland, the acting deputy of the EPA's hazardous waste cleanup program, known as Superfund.

The explanation by the Obama team is the same one put forward time and time again by Bush officials: The sites on the list have become increasingly complicated, contaminated and costly. That means it takes years for sites to reach the final cleanup stage, and as a result fewer are getting there.

Of the 527 contaminated properties still needing cleanup on the Superfund list, 40 have progressed to the point where all that's left is removing the last piles of contaminated soil, building a treatment plant to strip the groundwater of toxic pollutants, or capping a landfill so contamination does not enter the drinking water or air in surrounding neighborhoods.

At the other 1,060 hazardous waste sites still on the list, construction is finished and the last stages of the cleanup are under way -- a process begun before Obama took office.

When EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson explained this trend to a Senate committee this year, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., replied: "That's the same answer the Bush administration gave us and I don't buy it."

Later, in an interview with The Associated Press, Boxer elaborated. "It doesn't matter to me who the president is. What matters to me is these sites get cleaned up," she said.

But not everyone is so critical of Obama's Superfund numbers.

Environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and some Democratic lawmakers who highlighted how little the Bush administration did on hazardous waste cleanups are now silent. They say it's because Obama, unlike Bush, wants to address the problem that has plagued Superfund for years - a lack of money.

A tax on petroleum, chemicals and large companies once helped EPA pay for the multimillion dollar cleanups. It expired in 1995 and Superfund has been on financial life support since.

The pool of money ran dry in 2004, when Superfund cleanups that did not have a company to foot the bill ceased to be subsidized by the tax on polluters and started being paid by taxpayers.

Obama, unlike Bush, has called for the reinstatement of the tax in 2011. That will require action by Congress. It will also be up to Congress to set aside more money for cleanups if the tax is reinstated. In the past, when Superfund was flush in cash from the tax, Congress did not always provide more money for cleanups.

The Bush administration "didn't make an investment. They weren't willing to increase the tax and they weren't willing to shift general funds. They were just willing to limp along," said Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., who is sponsoring legislation to restore the tax.

"This administration is not willing to limp along. That's a profound difference," he said.

Supporters also point out that the Obama administration has asked for slightly more money in its budget for Superfund -- \$1.31 billion compared with the \$1.29 billion in Bush's last year. There's also an extra \$600 million from the economic stimulus plan for cleanups at 50 sites across the country.

But neither has helped boost the number of sites ready for the final stage of cleanup, although they could down the road.

Since October, the EPA has installed the equipment necessary to complete cleanups at five sites in New York, Kansas, Missouri and New Jersey. At one of those sites, a former metal-plating facility in Franklin, N.J., it will take 30 more years for the treatment plant installed in June to remove the heavy metals and organic compounds in the water beneath the property so that it meets water quality standards.

The site was one of the first to be placed on the Superfund list in 1983.

Forty other sites in 19 states are ready for their last construction project, according to the EPA. While the Obama administration is working to address all of them this year or next, it can't guarantee it.

Cleanups come with surprises. Workers can discover contamination they didn't know existed, leading to a new series of delays.

Southerland, the Superfund manager, says that has happened more often in recent years as money has been more targeted on the cleanup, rather than studies to map out the contamination.

"The problems are the same," said Katherine Probst, an expert on Superfund at the Washington, D.C.-based think tank Resources for the Future. "The point is they need more money, whether it is under Bush or Obama."

In the meantime, EPA officials say they are looking to find a new way to measure Superfund progress.

Climate talks resume with new emissions pledges

By Arthur Max - Associated Press Writer

In the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, Aug. 10, 2009

AMSTERDAM -- Wealthy countries are not going far enough to control greenhouse gas emissions, activists said Monday as delegates from 180 nations resumed talks on a global climate change pact.

Beginning a five-day meeting in Bonn, Germany, negotiators began trying to whittle down a 200-page draft into a workable treaty that will bring the world's carbon emissions under control over the next decade.

The talks have been deadlocked for months over demands by poor countries that a block of wealthy nations commit to deep cuts in emissions of heat-trapping gases by 2020, while rich countries demand that every nation share the burden.

The U.N. negotiations aim to forge a successor to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which set mandatory caps on emissions by 2012 in 37 rich countries but made no demands on other nations.

The next set of targets for 2020 is scheduled to be adopted at a major conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December. The pact is likely to include funding for poor countries to adapt to climate change and help them slow their own emissions while their economies grow.

On Monday, New Zealand became the latest country to announce a 2020 target, pledging to cut greenhouse gases by 10 to 20 percent from 1990 levels.

The WWF environmental group criticized the goal as too weak, and slammed the government for caving in to industrial lobbies that presented "apocalyptic visions of a crippled New Zealand economy" if it tried to cut emissions from fossil fuels any further.

"Industrialized countries are failing on targets and need to go back to the drawing board," said Kim Carstensen, head of the WWF Global Climate Initiative.

In Wellington, New Zealand's minister for climate change, Nick Smith, said the announced target would be tough to reach because gross emissions were already 24 percent above 1990 levels.

"This target means we're going to have to both catch up that 24 percent increase as well as reduce emissions by 10 or potentially 20 percent," he said.

The Bonn meeting is the latest in six rounds of talks scheduled this year, in addition to several summit meetings among major emitters. U.N. organizers described it as informal, meaning that more time will be spent in small negotiating groups and private sessions than in large plenary meetings.

Last week, South Korea said it will set an emissions target for 2020, the first country outside the 37 nations included in the Kyoto pact to set a national cap. The Seoul government said it would announce the target later this year, and it could range from 4 percent below 2005 levels to 8 percent above.

Although the target appeared modest, it was important since South Korea's economy had doubled between 1990 and 2005 and was continuing to grow, said Jake Schmidt of the Washington-based National Resources Defense Council.

Whichever number the Koreans chose, "the target would represent a serious cut from where they would be if the government took no action," Schmidt said on his blog. "Given the past and projected trajectory of emissions, this is a significant reversal."

Scientists say the world's most advanced countries should cut emissions by 25 to 40 percent from 1990 levels if there is any hope of keeping the earth from warming by more than 2 degrees Centigrade (3.6 Fahrenheit).

Only the European Union has submitted a pledge approaching the limits recommended by U.N. scientists in a landmark report two years ago.

The United States, which rejected the Kyoto Protocol because it exempted countries like India and China from any obligations, has pledged to take the lead in negotiating a new accord. A bill that passed the House of Representatives would reduce emissions by 17 percent from 2005 levels - about 4 percent below 1990 - and the Senate is considering its own bill.

New Zealand sets greenhouse gas emissions target

The Associated Press

in the Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Sunday, Aug. 10, 2009

WELLINGTON, New Zealand -- New Zealand announced on Monday that it will cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 10 to 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2020, the country's climate change minister said.

The target, confirmed by the Cabinet, will be presented later Monday at an international climate change meeting in Bonn, Germany, Nick Smith said.

The target was "a big ask" for New Zealand because gross emissions were already 24 percent above 1990 levels, Smith warned.

"This target means we're going to have to both catch up that 24 percent increase as well as reduce emissions by 10 or potentially 20 percent," he told reporters.

"On top of this, half our emissions come from agriculture ... and we already have one of the highest proportions of renewable electricity" in the world, he said.

The target would be met through a mix of domestic emission reductions, storage of carbon in forests with new plantings and the purchase of carbon credits from other nations that have not exceeded their emissions targets.

New Zealand's proposed emissions trading scheme "will be the primary policy instrument" for delivering the targeted reductions in emissions, Smith said, by buying carbon credits to offset the country's excess greenhouse gas outputs. Details would be decided before the Copenhagen climate change negotiations in December, he added.

Prime Minister John Key said the target was similar to Australia's and "much bigger" than the United States.

Climate Change Negotiations Minister Tim Groser said he expected "very tough" negotiations will not be resolved in Copenhagen, but he expects "solid points" to emerge that will be built

Alaska considering action on Fairbanks pollution

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, Aug. 9, 2009

FAIRBANKS, Alaska—The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation said it will take action to reduce air pollution in Fairbanks if local officials don't.

Alice Edwards, the state's air-quality director, said pollution-prevention measures will come from one government or the other.

"I want to make it clear the failure to address the (pollution) problem and associated Clean Air Act requirements is not an option for DEC," Edwards wrote in a letter to borough Mayor Jim Whitaker.

She added that environmental regulators are "required to step in if the local government fails to meet its obligations."

The state and the Fairbanks North Star Borough have a plan for the borough to be in a lead role to cut pollution, the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported.

But that agreement stalled in the Borough Assembly, and public officials are considering asking voters this fall whether the local government or state should run an air quality program.

The borough has tentative plans to fight pollution with tax breaks, a registration process and replacing older or inefficient wood- and coal-fed heating systems.

Edwards said her agency hasn't developed specific options to lead a program in Fairbanks. But it would work to make sure "a federally approvable plan is developed and implemented, both to protect public health and so neither highway funds nor industrial development is put at risk."

Last month, residents at an assembly meeting pushed local leaders to resist mandates from environmental regulators.

Particulate pollution consists of airborne particles such as dust and soot. The pollution is generated by inefficient combustion. The pollution peaks during cold winter days in Fairbanks.

Pittsburgh reinvents itself through green economy

By Ramit Plushnick-Masti, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald, Sunday, Aug. 9, 2009

PITTSBURGH—Imagine this: At a meeting, you pull out your solar-powered, flexible plastic laptop—fueled by an organic "ink" solution—and roll it out on the desk. Within two weeks, you dump this piece of cheap technology and buy a new one.

This is the vision of Plextronics, one of more than 2,600 environmentally friendly companies that have settled in Pittsburgh and revitalized the local economy through good-paying jobs.

Yes, the city whose sprawling steel mills and smoky skies once symbolized America's industrial might has gone "green." Pittsburgh's emphasis on green recovery was one reason it was able to land the Group of 20 global economic summit next month.

"Pittsburgh was a city that had some real dire necessity there because of the loss of old industrial jobs, and they were forced to reinvent themselves," said Glenn Croston, author of "75 Green Businesses." "We need a future, and this is something that will be around not just for tomorrow, but for many decades."

Workers in the seven-county region earned an average of \$53,000 a year at more than 183,000 technology jobs in 2005, the most recent numbers available. Of those jobs, nearly one-third are in green industries, with the average wage surpassing \$55,300 a year, according to the Pittsburgh Technology Council.

The city is home to the country's largest green-certified building—the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, where the G-20 leaders will meet Sept. 24-25. Pittsburgh ranks seventh nationally for green construction, with 33 such buildings, and the city offers incentives to build environmentally friendly facilities.

The region's move from heavy to green industry was partly a natural evolution, said Kathryn Klaber, a vice president of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. Because of pollution caused by the steel industry, Pittsburgh took steps in the 1950s—well before it was trendy—to clean its air and water, passing regulations that later became a model for federal rules, she said.

Councilman Bill Peduto, a sponsor of two bills meant to encourage green construction and several eco-friendly programs, agreed that Pittsburgh was a "trailblazer" in the 1940s and 50s, but said it lags today.

"I think deep down in our psyche, we still believe that pollution means progress," he said.

To attract more clean industries, Peduto said the city has to do more to combat water and air pollution, a legacy of more than a century of steelmaking.

"Pittsburgh could become a model not just for the Rust Belt, but for post-industrial cities throughout the world," said Peduto.

A National Energy Technology Laboratory built in the Pittsburgh suburbs nearly 100 years ago to research coal mining now invests in learning how to burn coal cleanly and finding economical ways to capture carbon from coal-burning power plants.

Even the steelworkers of yesteryear are collaborating with the Sierra Club through the Blue Green Alliance, which is aimed at creating environmentally friendly jobs.

The Pittsburgh region is one of a few nationwide boasting more than 25,000 job openings during the recession—with wages ranging from \$20,000 annually to more than \$100,000.

The green industry and companies linked to it account for only some of the area jobs replacing those lost to manufacturing. Regional officials note that in 2008, there were more jobs in the area—at least 1.1 million—than at steel's peak in 1979, when there were just over 1 million jobs.

Yet green jobs may also help reverse Pittsburgh's massive population decline. Plextronics, the company whose carbon-based "ink" produces solar energy, had just three employees when it was founded in 2002; today, it has about 70—with plans to hire 10 to 15 more in the next year-and-a-half.

The company's average age is 30, and 43 percent have young children. More than half are college educated.

The low cost of living makes it easy to recruit workers, said chief financial officer Sean Rollman. He also noted there are large companies in the area, such as Alcoa and Bayer, to partner with, and that colleges including Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh provide a natural talent pool.

Jim Dietz, vice president of business development and a transplant from New York, conceded many are surprised by the company's location in Pittsburgh.

"But when they get here," said Dietz, "they're pleasantly surprised."

Turning waste into energy discussed at Fresno expo

By Sanford Nax

Modesto Bee, Saturday, Aug. 8, 2009

FRESNO -- When Jack Oslan looks at the future, he sees garlic skins as energy sources and remnants of landfills providing construction materials and soil conditioners.

"Trash is being collected everywhere, and we reuse much of it," he said. "But some becomes residual in landfills. That is what we're interested in."

Oslan operates TerGeo Ventures Inc., which is based in the Bay Area. His company converts agricultural, municipal, coal and toxic waste into electricity, biofuel and fuel cells.

Oslan was in Fresno on Friday to participate in a panel discussion on the future of energy in the Central Valley. The panel was part of the Central California Hispanic Business Chamber of Commerce annual business expo. The event was expected to draw about 1,000 people.

Oslan said the nation's landfills are closing at the rate of one a day, and the remaining 3,000 are reaching capacity. "Pretty soon, we will run out of places to put our trash," he said.

His company, he said, can convert much of the garbage into synthetic gas that is then sold as energy. What's left becomes inert ash and sold as soil conditioner or used in construction, he said.

TerGeo is hooking up with a farmer to process garlic skins into energy.

"It will take the overflow, and instead of paying to haul it away, we can use it to create power to run back into the farming operation," he said.

Such partnerships will become more likely and more cost-effective as technology advances, experts say. The University of California at Merced plans to be a leader in developing renewable energy technology.

"Renewable energy has to be profitable," said Ron Durbin, director of development at UC Merced's School of Engineering.

UC Merced as energy model

The university, which will have 3,200 students this school year, is positioning itself to be a leader in environmental studies and research.

It wants to be a model for sustainability, producing as much energy as it uses. The goals are zero landfill waste, zero energy consumption and zero [greenhouse emissions](#) by 2020.

It has developed a program that studies hydrology and ecology in the Sierra Nevada, and it is pushing ahead on the Merced Energy Research Institute, which faculty members created to pursue research and grants.

The university is building a 7-acre solar farm. "We have scientists who wake up every day with the mission of making solar more affordable," Durbin said.

University officials are considering a School of Sustainable Design, which would meld architecture, urban and regional planning and environmental sciences to accommodate population growth.

John Hernandez, executive director of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, said the business expo focused on energy because it is a "big-picture issue."

[Letters to the N.Y. Times, Monday, Aug. 10, 2009:](#)

Bringing America's Trains Up to Speed

Re: "America's Not So Fast Trains" (editorial, Aug. 1):

Development of a high-speed passenger rail system should be a national priority and is long overdue. In the midst of our nation's worst economic malaise since the Great Depression, is there any better time for the federal government to undertake a plan that would lessen congestion on our highways and at our airports, reduce our reliance on foreign oil and create plenty of jobs?

Yes, there will be eminent domain debates and opposition from "not in my backyard" property owners, but these issues could be minimized through effective planning and management.

The tougher battles may be with the auto and aviation industries, whose businesses are already under duress and who have historically lobbied against expansion of high-speed train systems.

They should be made part of a government-private enterprise partnership to build the railcars and operate the network. Their expertise in manufacturing and high-speed travel might just come in handy.

Michael N. Chernick, Montclair, N.J.

You are right to note in your editorial that railroads reduce highway congestion and decrease air pollution. But if this country is to build an environmentally sound 21st-century transportation system, then high-speed rail is only part of the solution.

We can ease the congestion that chokes our highways by moving more freight by rail. If just 10 percent of freight currently moved by highway switched to rail, national fuel savings would exceed one billion gallons a year, and greenhouse gas emissions would fall by 12 million tons.

Senators John D. Rockefeller IV and Frank R. Lautenberg understand how much railroads relieve congestion and reduce pollution. Their bill, the Federal Surface Transportation Policy and Planning Act of 2009, calls for a 10 percent shift in freight traffic from trucks to nonhighway modes, like railroads, by 2020. Good public policy will deliver the 21st-century transportation system America needs.

*Edward R. Hamberger, President and Chief Executive
Association of American Railroads, Washington*

The policies that have favored highways and air travel over rail for decades have put us in a real bind as a country. It's time we woke up to the fact that we can and must do better.

It's not just about high-speed rail; it's about more local service and mass transit. It's about tying together the systems we have so they can support one another rather than competing — rail links to airports, combined rail and bus stations and so on.

It's about adding better connections between cities and adding more local stations so there are more entry points into rail passenger service. It's about providing enough service on a frequent-enough schedule to build ridership.

And it's about fixing aging infrastructure threatening freight as well as passenger rail service. It's about adding more tracks and routes around choke points to reduce congestion on freight rail lines — the better to get truck traffic off the highways and reduce our energy consumption.

High-speed rail is a good thing, but it's not the only thing. Not by bullet trains alone will we find the "magic bullet" to get America moving again.

Larry Roth, Ravena, N.Y.

High-speed rail has been studied and planned to death in this country. The only way to make it happen is to build a system. Pick one of the 278 plans submitted to the Department of Transportation and build that system.

Once Americans see their fellow citizens zipping from place to place at 180 miles an hour, all doubts will evaporate, and a nationwide high-speed rail system will soon be a reality.

Michael Paluszek, Plainsboro, N.J.

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One of the problems in getting a high-speed rail network for the nation is the support it requires from individual state representatives. When I suggested to a local representative that he talk to legislators in states that would be the links in a high-speed rail line connecting Chicago to Miami with dedicated tracks, it was treated more or less as pie in the sky.

Just imagine being able to travel from Louisville to downtown Chicago in two hours by rail — without the hassle of going through airport security and the frequent airline delays because of weather or mechanical problems. It wouldn't just be a boon to the environment, but would actually shorten travel time in some cases.

Our representatives should start taking the long view, rather than regarding rail travel in the country's interior as something only for rail aficionados.

Stanley Collyer, Louisville, Ky.

The writer is the editor of Competitions magazine, which covers urban planning as well as architecture and landscape architecture.

A major investment in high-speed rail in New York would most likely focus first on the Hudson River shore from Manhattan to Albany. This would ruin the lovely Hudson River Valley, in terms of lifestyle and environment.

A modern high-speed rail line would allow a commute from mid-Hudson towns like Poughkeepsie to Midtown Manhattan in less time than it takes by subway from the Bronx, perhaps under a half hour.

The curse of urban sprawl would spread all the way to Saratoga. Say goodbye to lovely landscapes and nice communities. Say hello to the next Nassau County, Queens or Yonkers. I say, not so fast.

Josh Koenig, Cropseyville, N.Y.

[Stockton Record, Sunday, Aug. 10, 2009](#)

Spanos plan is more sprawl

I had to laugh when I read last week's story about Spanos' plan for a "green" development.

How many times in the past have developers announced grand plans for planned communities that will include housing for people with low incomes, open spaces and parks? And then after they get approval plans change and we get the same old urban sprawl.

Look at all the wonderful things sprawl has brought to Stockton: cleaner air, less traffic, lower crime, higher employment, better schools and community pride. Urban sprawl has made Stockton what it is today, one of the most liveable cities in the country.

Spanos officials also say this new development will provide as many as "12,000" permanent new jobs. New jobs for who? The residents of Stockton? Will they have to move from central Stockton to

this new middle class ghetto? Or will they commute to work daily, thus adding more pollution to the air?

More likely the high paying jobs will go to people coming in from the Bay Area, and the minimum wage jobs going to people who have to drive to work.

If the city allows the sprawl to continue, I can see a future where we will have Grupeville to the west, Spanosville to the north, and Stockton will just be the wrong side of the tracks.

John Lechner, Stockton

[Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Sunday, Aug. 9, 2009](#)

Dana Milbank: A relaxed air permeates EPA event in D.C.'s August doldrums

It's August in the capital, which means that pretty much everybody who lives or works here has fled the place.

Members of the House have returned to their districts, senators will soon follow, and the president will be off to Martha's Vineyard.

But the bureaucrats of the Environmental Protection Agency, God bless 'em, continue to do the people's business. On Monday, they held a public hearing on an EPA proposal to improve air-quality standards; it was the federal government's equivalent of a tree falling in the woods.

In a conference room in suburban Arlington, Va., four EPA officials agreed to sit and listen for nine hours, allotting five-minute speaking slots for as many as 108 citizens who wished to get something off their chests about nitrogen dioxide. But only 24 people signed up for their five minutes of fame.

"I'm really just a middle-aged, bicycle-riding accountant," testified one of them, Paul d'Eustachio, from Takoma Park, Md. "But I do possess a remarkably sensitive instrument for testing air quality, and that's my lungs." He gave a sample reading from this instrument: "I can't tell you how many parts per billion that I'm actually breathing, but my lungs will tell you that whatever it is, it's way, way, way, way, way too much."

The moderator asked her EPA colleagues: "Do you have any questions for Mr. D'Eustachio?" The three of them answered with a polite "no."

"I'm also a bicyclist," testified Kenton Pattie, of Falls Church, Va. "I've been racing for many, many years." Pattie presented some surprising evidence to the officials: "Studies that show the IQ score has gone down as a result of – by four points for children who were exposed to nitrogen dioxide."

"Do you have a reference for that?" asked the moderator, Rosalina Rodriguez.

"I may have to look it up," Pattie answered.

"Was it specifically NO₂, or was it all traffic pollution?" asked David Orlin, an EPA lawyer.

"I can't answer that, not for sure," the witness replied. "I found this off the Internet." The officials took notes.

Participation would have been even lighter if the American Lung Association hadn't chosen to flood the zone. Of the 24 speakers, 14 were chapter heads, volunteers, low-level staff members or top officials with the association – and each delivered roughly the same talking points: that the EPA proposal is too lenient.

Janice Nolen, policy director of the ALA, spoke of her late grandmother, who lived close to a highway. The ALA's Heather Grzelka spoke of her stepdaughter. The ALA's Jen Westrate spoke of her not-yet-conceived children. "Next year I'm getting married and I plan to have children," she said. "I don't want to put them at risk for having stunted lung growth."

By 10:30 a.m., there were no more members of the association, or the public, waiting to comment. "I just want to make sure nobody else is registered," Rodriguez said before calling a recess. She got a couple more speakers after the recess, but then had to try to drum up interest.

"Anyone that was not planning to make a statement but would like to do one – you're welcome to register outside," she said, before calling another recess.

Opponents of the EPA proposal had a particularly difficult time mustering energy for the debate. Only four representatives signed up to air objections.

During a later break, another man from the American Lung Association, Kevin Stewart, walked to the sign-in table. "You want to speak now?" asked an EPA official, hurrying him to the witness table. The hearing was returned to order, and the moderator announced that Stewart would be given an extra two minutes at the microphone. She could afford to be generous: It's August.

[Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald guest commentary, Saturday, Aug. 8, 2009:](#)

Readers' Forum: Must settle Chevron issue and get back to work

By Aram Hodess

A RECENT ruling of the Contra Costa Superior Court stopping work on a \$1 billion Chevron refinery project in Richmond threatens to unravel a "blue-green" labor-environment coalition that has been 20 years in the making. The court held that the environmental impact report prepared by the city of Richmond was vague in its failure to analyze the potential that Chevron may refine dirtier crude oil in the future, with possible health impacts.

More than 1,000 members of the Contra Costa Building and Construction Trades Council have already lost their jobs on the project, and are caught in the crossfire, while Chevron and the environmentalists appeal the trial court's ruling to see which side was right.

We urge all parties to accept Attorney General Jerry Brown's offer to mediate a resolution to this dispute that will safeguard the environment, while allowing the project, jobs and community benefits to proceed.

Organized labor has a long history of working with environmentalists in Contra Costa County. When labor has joined forces with environmentalists, they have secured results that neither could have achieved alone.

In the early 1990s, after a string of refinery accidents, labor and environmentalists worked together to enact the first in the nation county industrial safety ordinance to improve safety at area refineries and industrial facilities. Environmentalists joined forces with labor leading to the enactment of an urban growth boundary in the city of Hercules. The coalition jointly pushed for a refinery modernization at the Conoco refinery in Rodeo that reduced pollution while creating over 800 skilled jobs.

Unions and environmentalists worked together to get the Bay Area air district to adopt controls to limit pollution from oil tankers and to reduce refinery flaring.

Contrary to popular belief, union members are significantly more supportive of strong environmental laws than the general public. Working people are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards, such as exposure to toxic chemicals and industrial accidents. Occupational diseases kill 60,000 American workers each year — more than are killed by handguns.

Workplace conditions cause 350,000 new cases of serious illnesses each year. So this blue-green coalition is a natural alliance.

Unfortunately, the court's ruling in the Chevron case threatens to throw this crucial alliance asunder. By stopping work on the Chevron project, more than 1,000 workers have lost their livelihoods in a very challenging economy. It's been suggested that some in the business community are working to see this turn into a rift between the environmental community and labor, pointing to the expedited layoff of workers on the Chevron project.

We have no way of judging whether this is true but be assured we are committed to finding a win-win solution. We urge all parties to work to craft a realistic settlement that will protect the environment and restore local jobs.

Hodess is business manager of Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 159.

[Contra Costa Times and Tri-Valley Herald guest commentary, Saturday, Aug. 8, 2009:](#)

Your Turn: Times didn't tell whole story about Chevron's Richmond project

By Mike Coyle

The Times failed to tell its readers the complete story regarding Chevron's Richmond Refinery Hydrogen and Energy Renewal Project (see editorial [Chevron refinery project should proceed with better EIR](#), July 19).

The project is a significant capital investment by Chevron to prepare the refinery for the future, and replace older equipment with newer, cleaner technology to conserve energy and reduce air emissions — thereby helping improve air quality in Richmond.

The project underwent a thorough environmental examination by environmental experts selected and hired by the city of Richmond. This nearly four-year process included numerous public meetings to hear community concerns, which were then addressed to further assure that the improvements would lower air emissions.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District — the public agency charged with protecting the air quality — reviewed the data and agreed with the environmental findings, and approved construction of the improvements. The BAAQMD currently monitors air quality and will continue to do so after construction to ensure the project's strict emission limits are met.

The concern expressed by some that this project would allow the refinery to process heavier grades of crude oil is simply not true, nor is it supported by any factual information that has been any part of this process.

Perhaps most importantly, in these difficult times this project was providing true economic stimulus for Richmond and Contra Costa County — creating 2,000 jobs and injecting millions of dollars into the economy. Chevron also agreed to \$61 million in community benefits for programs helping people in Richmond and West Contra Costa County.

Chevron has appealed the court's decision to stop this project, but the legal process is likely to be lengthy. In the mean time, a small number of people who claim to represent the interests of the community, have succeeded in their efforts stop a project that would have so many real environmental and economic benefits. That is the real story and one the Times missed.

Coyle is the general manager of Chevron's Richmond Refinery

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Mexico City has a new plan to encourage the use of bicycles. By the end of this year, there will be over 1,000 bicycles available at 84 cycle-stations for anyone to use in hopes that this will reduce the use of automobiles. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

El Distrito Federal, con nuevo plan para alentar el uso de la bicicleta

Mauricio Orozco,

El Periódico de México, Sunday, August 9, 2009

El jefe de Gobierno del Distrito Federal, Marcelo Ebrard, está empeñado en darle a la capital un rostro amable con medidas que ayudan a la convivencia social y que son bien recibidas por la población, pero los temas de fondo perviven y pervierten al tejido social, como la galopante corrupción policial agarrada de la mano de la inseguridad.

Ebrard acaba de anunciar que para diciembre de este año los capitalinos tendrán a su disposición más de mil bicicletas con el fin de reducir el uso de automóvil y dio su respaldo a quienes se monten en dos ruedas y sean avasallados por los conductores de autos.

Las mil 114 bicis estarán disponibles en 84 cicloestaciones, en las salidas del Metro o paraderos de camiones en las colonias Cuauhtémoc, Juárez, Roma Norte e Hipódromo Condesa. A las que podrán acceder aquellos que paguen al año entre 200 y 300 pesos, pero la norma establece que lo harán por media hora, con el fin de que sea utilizada mayormente para transportarse de la casa al trabajo o la escuela y viceversa.

El Gobierno del DF aportará 75 millones de pesos por el programa, al que se espera se inscriban 24,000 usuarios en el primer año de operación, realizando hasta 9,000 viajes diarios en bicicleta.

La secretaria del Medio Ambiente del DF, Martha Delgado, dijo que durante meses se trabajó en el diseño del Sistema de Bicicletas Públicas de la Ciudad de México, que operará la empresa Clear Channel.

Este sistema, señaló, contribuirá a transformar al Distrito Federal “en la ciudad que todos queremos” y tiene por objeto dotar a la población de un transporte público individual, que no es contaminante, que es un complemento al transporte público y una alternativa al uso del automóvil.

“Con este proyecto, lo que buscamos es regresarle a los habitantes de la Ciudad de México su tiempo, su dinero, su salud, un poco de calidad de vida, que poco a poco hemos ido perdiendo al irse fomentando un modelo de transporte que está basado en la movilidad a través de automóviles particulares y que ha ido perdiendo un sentido de recuperación de espacios públicos para las personas”, aseguró Martha Delgado.

La secretaria del Medio Ambiente se animó a decir que con este proyecto el DF se va a “colocar como una ciudad de vanguardia” y será la urbe número 11 del mundo en la implementación de estos sistemas.

La primera fase del sistema comprende el área Sur-Poniente de la delegación Cuauhtémoc, cubre aproximadamente una superficie de 42 kilómetros, los límites del polígono son: al norte, la calle Villalongín; al oriente, la calle Insurgentes; al sur, el Eje 3 Sur Baja California y al poniente, el Circuito Interior.

Esta zona fue elegida estratégicamente porque responde al origen y el destino de viajes alrededor de los corredores Reforma e Insurgentes, que concentran la mayor cantidad de destinos de la ciudad.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses in Mexico City, automobile drivers are the ones who breathe in the most smog when circulating on main avenues throughout the city. Studies have shown that drivers of certain vehicle types are more exposed to breathing in pollutants like carbon monoxide in comparison to individuals who ride in public transportation.](#)

Automovilistas, los que respiran más smog

Edith Martínez

El Universal, Sunday, August 09, 2009

Los automovilistas son los que mayor concentración de contaminantes respiran cuando circulan por las avenidas principales de la ciudad de México y en consecuencia son más propensos a sufrir enfermedades de las vías respiratorias.

Según estudios elaborados por el Instituto Nacional de Ecología (INE), los conductores de vehículos particulares están más expuestos a respirar contaminantes como el monóxido de carbono, en comparación con las personas que viajan en transporte público.

El director del Centro Nacional de Investigación y Capacitación Ambiental (Cenica) del INE, Víctor Gutiérrez Avedoy, explicó que una de las razones es la altura del vehículo, pues el conductor del auto particular está más cerca de las emisiones que arrojan por el escape los automotores.

Además, la ocupación de los vehículos, en mayor medida, es de una persona y al ir solos circulan con una ventanilla abierta o a la mitad, lo que impide la ventilación del auto.

Estos datos fueron arrojados en los estudios de medición de contaminantes que realizó el INE para conocer el estado de avenidas como Insurgentes y el eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas, antes de que se introdujeran transportes como el Metrobús y el Corredor Cero Emisiones. Después de los automovilistas están las personas que esperan el transporte en los parabuses y finalmente los pasajeros de microbuses, camiones y trolebuses.

Análisis comparativo

Los análisis se realizan en dos etapas. La primera, previa a la entrada de nuevos medios de transporte, y la segunda, una vez que están en funcionamiento. En el caso de la línea 1 del Metrobus, según el INE, mejoró la calidad del aire que respira la gente que transita por Insurgentes en cualquier medio de transporte hasta en un 60%. Para el Corredor Cero Emisiones falta la segunda etapa del estudio, misma que aún está en la definición de fechas, ya que el gobierno del Distrito Federal solicitó al Cenica realizarlo en octubre de este año.

Sin embargo, Víctor Gutiérrez Avedoy, quien dirige el proyecto, comentó que perdería su efectividad debido a que científicamente, es necesario realizarlo en las mismas fechas que la primera fase para poder compararlo. Las mediciones iniciales en el eje Central, a cargo del INE, se realizaron entre el 25 de junio y el 25 de julio de 2009, por lo que "lo ideal", sería repetir el experimento en el 2010 para tener las mismas condiciones climatológicas y el estudio tenga mayor confiabilidad.

El INE espera, además, contar con los recursos para la segunda etapa del estudio, que ascienden a 400 mil pesos y al no estar presupuestados necesitan obtener el dinero por otros medios como fundaciones o fideicomisos. Con la entrada en funcionamiento del Cero Emisiones se esperan reducciones en la contaminación de hasta 80% debido a que el transporte de carga saldrá de circulación. El estudio realizado por el INE consistió en la colocación de medidores personales para captar los contaminantes que la gente respira al estar en la calle, el transporte público y en los parabuses.

Sube riesgo en zona de Bellas Artes

La Secretaría de Medio Ambiente del DF (SMA) también realizó un estudio de la calidad del aire, previo al funcionamiento del Cero Emisiones, en la zona de Bellas Artes, en donde encontró que las concentraciones de contaminantes eran mayores que en el resto de la ciudad, sobre todo entre las 08:00 y las 10:00 horas y las 17:00 y las 19:00 horas.

De acuerdo con las estimaciones de esta dependencia, con la salida de microbuses y camiones se reducirán 12 mil 667 toneladas de Gases de Efecto Invernadero, 406 toneladas de precursores de ozono y 7.9 toneladas de partículas menores a 10 y 2.5 micras.

El director de la Gestión de la Calidad del Aire de la SMA, Víctor Hugo Páramo, detalló que estos datos podrían aumentar ya que no se contabilizó la contaminación que dejará de emitir el transporte de carga.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Greenpeace asks for clean energy during the summit where Mexico, United States and Canada are meeting. According to data, the three nations are responsible for 26% of carbon dioxide emissions.](#)

Greenpeace pide energías limpias

La Opinion, Monday, August 10, 2009

GUADALAJARA, Mexico (EFE).- Activistas de la organización ecologista Greenpeace reclamaron hoy a México, Estados Unidos y Canadá el uso de energías limpias, con un acto de protesta en Guadalajara, sede de la quinta Cumbre de Líderes de América del Norte, que se celebra entre mañana y el lunes.

Con una pancarta en la que se leía "Real leaders back clean energy" ("Los líderes de verdad apoyan la energía limpia"), siete activistas permanecieron subidos por cuarenta minutos en un céntrico monumento de esa ciudad del occidente mexicano. Uno de ellos iba disfrazado con un traje de oso polar.

Durante la cumbre de la Alianza para la Seguridad y la Prosperidad de América del Norte (ASPAN), los presidentes mexicano y estadounidense, Felipe Calderón y Barack Obama, y el primer ministro canadiense, Stephen Harper, tratarán temas como la seguridad en la región y los intercambios comerciales, además de sostener encuentros bilaterales.

"Los tres países han hecho cosas que no han permitido que se avance como bloque para disminuir emisiones", dijo a Efe Raúl Estrada, portavoz de Greenpeace México.

De acuerdo con los datos de la organización ecologista, los tres países son responsables del 26% de las emisiones mundiales de dióxido de carbono.

Por ello, el propósito de la protesta es pedir a las naciones norteamericanas que "lleguen a un acuerdo para disminuir las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero", explicó Estrada.

Sobre EE.UU., el activista señaló que, a pesar de que la Administración Obama ha mostrado mayor interés por acercarse a temas como el del cambio climático, "aun tiene un liderazgo retrasado" en materia ecológica.

"México, en el ámbito internacional, ha dicho que se va a comprometer, pero en sus políticas energética y forestal no hay acciones que lleven realmente a pensar esto", denunció.

Al respecto, señaló que el país latinoamericano sigue apostando por los combustibles fósiles en detrimento de las energías renovables y que la deforestación -medio millón de hectáreas de bosque perdidas cada año, según la organización- es otro factor que contribuye a la emisión de gases.

Desde hoy y hasta el lunes, diversas organizaciones sociales, ecologistas y campesinas participarán en una cumbre alternativa a la de la ASPAN.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses new energy from onions. A farm generates electricity from onion wastes. Gill Onions who implemented this innovative system generates 600 kilowatts.](#)

Energía con el poder de la cebolla

Granja genera electricidad con desechos

Univision, Monday, August 10, 2009

LOS ÁNGELES, California - La creatividad ha llevado a una empresa de California a utilizar los residuos del procesamiento de cebollas para generar energía eléctrica, lo que puede resultar una alternativa a los medios tradicionales de obtención de electricidad.

La cebolla genera 600 kilovatios

Gills Onions, la mayor empresa procesadora de cebollas de la nación, implementó recientemente un novedoso sistema que genera 600 kilovatios con el desperdicio del sabroso vegetal, al tiempo que le ahorra cientos de miles en cuentas y manejo de residuos.

Todo comenzó hace unos años, cuando uno de sus fundadores y actual presidente, Steve Gill, buscó la mejor forma de resolver quizás su mayor problema desde los inicios de su empresa: el desperdicio.

"Nuestro proceso es mecánico, cuando se pela la cebolla se desperdicia un 30, a veces hasta un 40 por ciento de ésta", dijo a EFE Fernando Luna, gerente de la planta de Cebollas Gills, que desde su sede de Oxnard, al noreste de Los Angeles, procesa miles de toneladas de cebolla para su distribución minorista y mayorista en todo el país.

Hasta poco antes de la puesta en marcha de las dos celdas generadoras de energía, que utilizan el zumo del desperdicio de la cebolla, se depositaba los residuos de vuelta en el campo, lo que acarrea problemas constantes de contaminación y falta de espacio.

Pero a través de este plan, cuya implementación duró unos ocho años, la empresa cubre un 30 por ciento de sus necesidades energéticas en tareas vitales como la refrigeración, además de crear una instalación que virtualmente elimina el desperdicio.

"El proceso es tomar el desperdicio, que son unas 300 mil libras por día y desmenuzarlo, comprimirlo y extraerle el jugo, que llega a un 75 por ciento del total, para luego convertirlo en gas metano, que es entonces usado por las celdas que generan 600 kilovatios de electricidad para el uso de nuestra planta", explicó Gill, el cerebro detrás de este proyecto.

Un modelo energético a seguir

La planta procesadora comenzó sus labores hace 25 años como una empresa de 16 empleados que picaba cebolla para los fabricantes de salsas La Victoria.

Hoy tiene 400 empleados, la mayoría de los cuales son latinos de origen mexicano, y procesa alrededor de 45 mil toneladas por año.

"Creamos un proceso desde el residuo hasta producir energía, porque la cantidad de desperdicio en cáscara, raíz y tallo nos estaba causando muchos problemas, ahora tenemos una instalación que genera cero desperdicio, traemos cebollas y sus residuos son convertidos en electricidad y comida para ganado", agregó Gill.

El empresario dijo que la inversión para producir gas metano a partir de este novedoso método requirió la considerable suma de \$9.5 millones de dólares, de los cuales \$2.7 millones se obtuvieron a través de un incentivo del estado de California, mediante el cual se busca promover el uso de métodos alternativos en la generación de energía.

Gill afirma que además de ahorrarle unos \$400 mil dólares anuales en costos relacionados con el manejo de los residuos y \$700 mil anuales en cuentas de energía, el programa ha atraído la atención de muchos en California y en todo el mundo, que quieren de alguna manera seguir su ejemplo.

"Somos la primera compañía en tomar el jugo de la cebolla y convertirlo en energía, y la única de su tipo en el mundo", afirmó con orgullo este californiano de 59 años, que luego de haberle dedicado su vida al cultivo y procesamiento de la cebolla, aún llora todos los días debido a los ácidos que se desprenden en los procesos de corte de su planta.

De ahora en adelante, sin embargo, con los ahorros, los beneficios y la atención que ha recibido por su ingeniosa iniciativa ecológica, podrá decir que lo que derrama son lágrimas de alegría.