

[Letter to the Editor, The Fresno Bee, Aug. 11, 2003:](#)

Better buses, air

Werner J. Lipton's demands for better transit bus service don't square with reality (letter July 24). He desires more and better bus service and shelters, but for some reason wants all of the city's diesel buses to be replaced with expensive compressed natural gas (CNG) buses.

Transit agencies have difficult choices, but their primary mission is to provide the kind of service at an affordable cost that gets people out of their cars. Clean diesel buses are more reliable and 20% to 25% less expensive than CNG buses and do not require a separate fueling infrastructure as do CNG buses.

As for cleaner air, by 2007, clean diesel and natural gas will be certified to the same emissions standards. The California Air Resources Board released a study showing that a "clean diesel" bus equipped with the latest technology outperformed a natural gas bus in eight of 11 emissions tests.

Clean diesel buses allow transit agencies to afford the kind of other route and service improvements that Mr. Lipton desires, along with low-emission cost-effective operation. In other words, you can have your bus stop shelter and clean air, too.

By Allen Schaeffer

Executive Director, Diesel Technology Forum

Frederick, MD

[Commentary, The Fresno Bee, Aug. 9, 2003:](#)

Our conscience needs to guide us in the future

By Thomas C. Mester

Biology instructor at The Madera Center

Bonadelle Ranchos

We moved to the Bonadelle Ranchos in June of 1996. We chose the Ranchos for the openness of the countryside and the prospect of a new school district with a new high school for our daughter. Shortly after we moved in, a developer started work on a 40-acre housing project. The open land was scraped clean, blacktop roads with curbs were built, a well was drilled and utilities installed.

This was the first major building project in the Ranchos during the economic boom of the late '90s. The U.S. economy is based on growth and development, as exemplified by this new housing project. The addition of the project adds to the tax base and helps increase the home values for the entire area and thus has a tremendous effect on the tax base for the entire area. As the area's tax base increases, the Golden Valley School District will be able to satisfy the dream to build a middle school. Overall, we perceive development as a good thing.

Historically, growth and development occurred with little regard for long-term consequences. When long-term consequences started to exert themselves with the loss of wild lands and increased water and air pollution, the county slowly developed a conscience and started to regulate development. National parks and wilderness areas were established, the Clean Water Act was passed and air pollution standards were implemented. The nation's conscience is still being developed. We can read about our conscience daily: Do we drill for more oil or do we preserve the environment? Can we do both and still make money? Such debates are good for the country. We need development to prosper, and we need to protect our environment as a legacy for our children.

To maximize profit from development, we try to minimize the development costs. Usually this means that the total cost of development is not paid up front but postponed for as long as possible, with the hopes that somebody else will pay the price.

A good example is the air pollution of the Valley. We allowed development that polluted the air, and now we are paying the price with increased health costs.

Another example is the groundwater of the Ranchos, which has fallen about 100 feet since the Ranchos were developed. Since 1996, as a homeowner, I have participated in the overdraft of the aquifer. Collectively, we are delaying the payment of the water costs for developing the Ranchos. We all hope that somebody else will be able to pay the cost for us.

When we develop the open land in the Ranchos, we convert the dry grassland into homes with varying amounts of green grass, trees and shrubs by using the groundwater. This conversion in habitat is an acceptable cost of development. As I walk the roads of the Ranchos for exercise, I notice more song birds near the "developed" areas, as opposed to the areas that are still dry grasslands. I am sure the habitat conversion has increased the song-bird population, but have we paid all the development costs? How about the cost of the depleted aquifer?

The housing project has progressed, and only seven empty lots remain. I typically walk through the project as part of my exercise program. This spring, I had the tremendous opportunity to observe burrowing owls raise a brood of young on one of the empty house sites. The developer had allowed California ground squirrels to become established on the site while building houses in other areas of the project. The burrowing owls use the abandoned ground-squirrel burrows to build nests, lay eggs and raise young.

Walking into nature

Each morning or late afternoon, I was able to walk within 20 feet of the burrow without disturbing the adult standing as sentinel. Later, I was amazed to see an adult and five newly fledged owlets. Initially, the owlets would scamper down the burrow as I approached. Later, they would just hunker down in the entrance of the burrow until I passed. One day, to my horror, I noticed that the developer had leveled the tiny mounds by the burrows, effectively burying the baby owls in their burrows.

The developer could have prevented their deaths by waiting a couple of weeks until the owlets were old enough to leave the burrow and then ensure that the burrows were empty prior to releveling the lot. I could better understand the callousness of the act if construction had immediately started on the lot.

I am sure the developer has complied with all requirements for developing the subdivision and deserves to make a profit from his activities. However, nothing has been done to the lot in over a month. Therefore, the developer needlessly buried baby owls in their burrow. Better yet, the developer should have maintained the empty lots properly by preventing the establishment of the ground squirrels, which created the habitat for the burrowing owls. But we are all aware that such maintenance would increase costs to the developer and thereby reduce his anticipated profit. The developer was unwilling to pay all the costs of development up front by properly maintaining the empty lots.

We all need to learn a lesson from this example. We all need to be prepared to pay the cost of development upfront and not pass it on to the next generation. We do not want the next generation to consider us to be developers who bury baby owls in their burrow.

Letter to the Editor, The Fresno Bee, Aug. 9, 2003:

We all need to have our keys taken away

An 86-year-old man behind the wheel of a red Buick LeSabre plows through a Santa Monica Farmers Market, killing nine people. In the home-version of a bad Hollywood chase scene -- with fruits, vegetables and human bodies flying everywhere -- driver George Russell Weller is supposed to have hit speeds between 60 and 80 miles per hour as he barreled through the marketplace.

Was it just a tragic accident, in which an elderly person "hit the gas instead of the brake," as Weller told police? Or did this kind, religious man (as neighbors described him) go into road rage at seeing the market blocking his path? Did he hit the gas intentionally, becoming a "kamikaze" in a "numb" and "trance-like" state, as early reports indicated?

At this point, no one seems to know -- maybe not even Weller himself. Still on the road at 86, Weller has apparently been reluctant to give up driving. In this, however, he is all too much like the rest of America.

Addicted to mobility

As a nation, we too are addicted to the mobility and convenience of the personal automobile. We, too, are reluctant to give up the privilege of being able to hop in the car and drive anywhere, anytime. The freedom to drive is not part of the Bill of Rights, yet we daily behave as if it were.

Voices are clamoring now that the state should take away Mr. Weller's keys, in response to the damage that has resulted from his driving addiction.

Yet I hear no similar clamor that America should turn over its keys, despite the damage our addiction to driving has done. Let no one mention the civilian bystanders mowed down in our wars for oil. Let no one speak of supertanker catastrophes at sea.

[Let no one whisper a word about respiratory diseases in Los Angeles or the Valley.](#) Hey, the Valley is just a big farmers market to be barreled through anyway, right?

We live in an empire that runs on fossil fuels -- and being an empire means never having to say you're sorry. Risks and expenses internationally and domestically are just the cost of doing the business that keeps the empire running.

For all of us who would take away Mr. Weller's keys because he's been auto-addicted too long, we might do well to recall that America's dependency on the automobile is also a bit long in the tooth.

The first person to drive across the United States did so a century ago -- 14 years before Mr. Weller was born.

So let's have a little sympathy for the driver. [We reject higher mileage and alternative energy vehicles, preferring to drive our gas-guzzling urban assault vehicles.](#)

We've taken the ramp onto the imperial highway and seem determined to race headlong down it, no matter what the costs.

Pretending surprise

Will we pretend surprise when we discover, all too soon, that this road is a dead end? Will we continue to deny that our addiction to the black gold of oil is in its way as pernicious and ultimately doomed as was our earlier addiction to the black gold of human slaves snatched from Africa?

An empire dependent on oil is as destined for fossil status as the fuel on which it runs. Until we face that fact, we should not be so self-righteous about taking away George Russell Weller's keys.

Tranced out and gripping the steering wheel, impelled by whatever unknown intent or tragic mistake, he is just like the rest of us -- only more so.

By Howard Hendrix

Science fiction novelist

Fresno

As the clean-air campaign builds, farmers work on...

Growing Green

Growers take new weapons into the Valley's air pollution battle.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

Aug. 10, 2003

On his 500-acre farm east of Fresno, Keith Nilmeier battles air pollution with peach pits. Out on his 8,000-acre west Fresno County farm, Ted Sheely's pollution-fighting arsenal features satellite technology.

Simple or complex, big or small, the air pollution battle is on.

Growers are discovering ways to combat the inevitable cloud of dust following their tractors and the many other air pollutants floating in farm country.

Nilmeier's peach pits hold down the dust on his dirt roads. Sheely's technology guides his tractors to fewer and more precise passes on his fields, reducing diesel and dust pollution in the process.

Growers such as Nilmeier and Sheely stand on the front lines in agriculture's newest war. Call it Operation Farm Air Cleanup, a campaign that would have seemed surreal five years ago in the central San Joaquin Valley.

Back then, it was widely believed that air pollution came from cities and freeways, not fields and orchards in a bucolic Valley. Air pollution continues to come mainly from cars, diesel trucks, power plants, construction and other city-related sources, but air officials and research suggest farming plays a significant role.

"OK, we're willing to do our part to clean up the air," Nilmeier says. "I just don't want to see controls forced into a short time frame that pushes people into financial chaos. I'm dealing with the dust on my avenues, but I need time for other things."

And there are many other things.

Diesel exhaust, emissions coming from livestock waste, soot from open-field burning, fumes from pesticides -- whatever wafts into the air from a farm is getting attention from environmentalists, who started pushing for the farm cleanup two years ago.

State estimates show farm tractors, well pumps and other equipment are responsible for about 25% of the smog-making gases in the Valley. Farms contribute about half of the particle pollution coming from dust.

Valley dairies, which have multiplied and grown in the last decade, are an unexpected source of tiny wintertime particles. Ammonia from animal waste combines with oxides of nitrogen from combustion sources, such as cars, to form ammonium nitrate particles.

Two years ago, environmentalists placed the farm-related statistics alongside the Valley's ranking as one of the country's dirtiest air basins. And they learned that health experts connect air pollution to the Valley's mounting respiratory problems. Fresno County has the highest rate of childhood asthma in the state.

Environmentalists soon filed lawsuits attacking agriculture's historic state exemption from air operating permits, and they won. Farmers had to file applications for the permit in May.

Several thousand out of the more than 25,000 Valley farms applied for the permit because their annual air pollution totals 25 tons or more. Those farmers must account for all the pollution and pay a fee that could run thousands of dollars.

Some might be able to avoid the permit program by changing from diesel pumps and coming up with other ideas to bring their annual pollution total below 25 tons.

The federal government does not normally administer this permit program, so it has required the state to take it over. To do that, the state will have to lift its permit exemption for farmers by November.

SB 700, introduced by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, appears poised to repeal the exemption late this year. Another Florez measure would phase out open-field burning of crop wastes.

The whole scenario has rankled farmers. They say they see the Valley's 3.3 million population swiftly growing and cities expanding over agricultural land. As the population grows, more cars are covering more miles and adding more pollution.

Many believe that the public does not give them credit for the agriculture industry's positive contributions in the air fight.

For instance, more than half of the 4,000 dirty diesel engines on farm water wells have been upgraded in the past few years, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Many farmers routinely spread water on their unpaved roads to minimize dust, mainly because it keeps insect pests off their crops.

But Sierra Club member Kevin Hall, who helped launch clean-air lawsuits against farming, says it's important to remember that most of these innovations are motivated by the bottom line.

"They're cutting down on the use of pesticides or diesel to save money," he says. "I'm all for commending them for voluntary efforts. But I think they're setting a standard that should be legally required of all comparably sized farms."

But, in an enterprise that has slim profit margins compared to those of many other industries, farming also has positive effects on the environment, growers argue.

Says Nilmeier, "Think of all the greenery we have and all the dust and carbon dioxide that it filters."

Industry representatives add that they do not trust government pollution estimates and that science has not adequately defined emissions from farms. Still, they are working with local air officials to compile a list of cleanup ideas that farmers can use soon.

Nilmeier already has made his move with peach pits from his own trees. His peach pits mash down into the dirt roads and hold down dust.

In addition, he wants to spend \$10,000 on a portable chipper to dispose of his farm waste rather than burning it.

He also has replaced the diesel engines on two older harvesters. State money from the Carl Moyer engine upgrade program paid for 75% of the replacements.

Near Huron, Chris Woolf, a partner in the Los Gatos Tomato Products plant, has cut 250,000 diesel truck miles since November when a rebuilt rail line nearby began carrying his tomato paste.

"You don't see the diesel trucks hauling around here anymore," Woolf says. "We were able to get state, local and federal help to rebuild 44 miles of track between Huron and Visalia. We can fit three truckloads of tomato paste into one train car."

Woolf's family has farmed on the west side near Huron for decades. He says his family's wells are all powered by natural gas, considered a cleaner technology than diesel.

"We're near a natural gas pipeline, so we're able to take advantage of it," Woolf says.

Other Valley farmers are switching to propane-powered pumps.

Sheely, who uses electricity to power his pumps on water wells, has decided "precision farming" is the way to better efficiency -- with a byproduct of cleaner air. He has enlisted global positioning systems and computers.

Here's how it works:

As one of Sheely's 450-horsepower tractors drags a ripper weighing several tons across a bare field, a \$35,000 guidance unit, hooked to satellite technology, steers. The ripper digs immense teeth deep into the soil to loosen it for the next crop to spread roots.

With no one touching the steering wheel, the tractor miraculously runs straight for hundreds of yards, less than an inch from the path of the ripper's previous pass. No overlap.

"Yes, there is dust," Sheely says. "You can't help it. With precision farming, you make fewer passes, and there's less dust."

All the driver does is turn the tractor around when it gets to the end of a row. The guidance system does the rest.

With fewer passes, Sheely burns less diesel, reducing air pollution. The global positioning technology works at night and in the fog, so he can keep his five tractors running when he needs them.

More importantly to Sheely, he saves money on fuel, tractor maintenance and labor. He spent more than \$100,000 on the technology, which paid for itself in increased efficiency within months, he says.

Sheely also tested the soil in his fields to determine which areas need more fertilizer or insecticide.

He hired a consultant and installed computers on his tractors to control seed, fertilizer and chemical applicators. The computer varies the rate of application.

"I use less fertilizer and insecticide, yet I've increased yields," he says. "I don't do it to reduce air pollution. I'm doing it to become more efficient, but you reduce pollution because you use less chemicals."

Though the precision farming technologies might be too expensive for growers with less land, Sheely says he believes consulting businesses could provide the service for a fee.

These ideas for reducing pollution-creating activities help the air, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. District planning manager Dave Mitchell says global positioning systems would be included in the list of ideas being developed by the district and farm representatives.

The list is part of the Valley's particle cleanup plan approved this summer. Farmers can choose cleanup options in several categories. Farmers also may opt out of the plan if they can prove that the measures are too expensive or impractical for their operations.

The ideas have not yet been made public, but Mitchell says one of the leading concepts is combining jobs. For instance, the farmer would simultaneously plow a field and tow a planting tool to get the next crop in the ground, thus saving another tractor pass on the field.

"It's a trend," Mitchell says. "And it's a good one."

Other practical ideas include plowing at night when the soil is more moist, so less dust flies. Also, new grinders make smaller waste chips for almond growers, allowing them to incorporate the chips into the soil rather than burning them.

The cleanup options, which the district will present to the agriculture community in the next several months, will be divided into 16 crop categories, such as almond-walnuts, citrus, grapes, grains, cotton and others. The categories will allow farmers to select which strategies work best for their operations.

Such controls are used in two other areas in the West -- Arizona and the Los Angeles-area South Coast Basin. But the Valley's control options will go beyond anything in existence, reflecting the 250 commodities grown here.

Environmentalists are critical. Sierra Club member Hall says the list can be interpreted as voluntary because farmers could provide economic or technical reasons for not using some of the new practices.

"I think we should treat agriculture just like any other business," he says. "We should determine how much pollution is coming from agriculture and require controls."

Should farmers be required to make changes, or should their air cleanup be voluntary?

"I think you could do some of each," Nilmeier says. "A lot of this can be done in a voluntary fashion. But some will need to be required."

The reporter can be reached at mgrossi@fresnobee.com or 441-6316.

[Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, Aug. 8, 2003:](#)

Yosemite Plan is amazingly flawed

Editor: Hooray for Congressman George Radanovich. His bill, HR-2715, should be supported in order to maintain public access to Yosemite National Park. This is like David and Goliath; David has thrown the stone back to Goliath and its army, the environmental groups, more specifically the Sierra Club. And everyone needs to support him in this battle.

I don't profess to know all the issues of the Yosemite Plan but being a native of this area, I do know there are some major flaws. I'm not a member of any group, political or otherwise but do know many people who are amazed by the Yosemite Plan. It seems, to many, that writing a letter of their concerns to the plan is basically ignored. That is unless it reflects the view of the Sierra Club on "what's best for us."

To take out the present parking of approximately 1,600 spaces for autos and reducing it to around 600 is one of the most ridiculous items on the park's agenda. As most know, in the summer you had to drive around many times just to find a spot. Now they want to reduce that so we can have even more cars driving around in a circle. Is that not crazy to you? Wouldn't that create more auto pollution? Besides, cars are becoming more pollution-free as the years go by. They are not going to succeed in reducing the cars - unless of course radicalism bans car. Even with buses or rail the car will still be the main transportation. Let's face it, the population will grow and we need to be rational about such issues.

When I was a kid and to this day, I always wondered why the public didn't have more access to the rivers in California, like camping and general recreation. Not that there aren't any but not in proportion to the amount of people and miles of river. Now the forces of change want to eliminate camping on the upper and lower Merced River. Isn't that very short vision?

Basically if you don't make reservations in a fancy motel, you are out of luck. For sure it will be a great loss for the California folks, especially people in the surrounding counties that use these places the most.

Before you start sending hate mail, this is not about bashing the environmentalist - heck, I consider myself an environmentalist. I think the Park Service, Forest Service and Mariposa County are good environmentalists. They seem to have done a great job of maintaining all the campgrounds that were there in the past. With the new entrance fee of \$20, it seems some of that money could go toward even better camping spots. If the Sierra Club really wants to help the environment they should put that kind of time into the transportation issues, electric cars and bikes, buses and especially trains.

This is a very important issue and that's only two of the flaws in the plan. This is not a partisan issue either so I would encourage folks writing to their respective representatives to support Radanovich with this bill, especially Dennis Cardoza, who now represents Merced and several cities north of Merced. Happy camping!

Ted Hogan

Merced

Report envisions a bright farm future

Visalia Times-Delta

Aug. 11, 2003

For those tied closely to Central California's predominant farm economy, a comprehensive report issued recently by the Great Valley Center in Modesto is sure to serve as an exhilarating tonic.

The report by the Modesto-based nonprofit study center envisions California's 19-county great Valley as a compact, well-coordinated engine for the utilization of renewable resources that will be required for tomorrow's expanded population in the great Valley and beyond, with farmers as a major component.

Rather than presenting a hand-wringing scenario of an overcrowded and contentious population with conflicting interests, the report outlines the potential for a vital and harmonious existence that makes the most of the area's inherent assets, and that includes a thriving agriculture.

But it doesn't take a Pollyanna approach. Rather, it suggests that significant planning, substantial investment, a spirit of cooperation and acceptance of change will be required. And it doesn't expect the changes it foresees to take place overnight.

It sees an agriculture that can become even more productive while using the resources of soil, water and climate more judiciously than it does now. It envisions powerful methane generating facilities fueled by cow manure from more than just larger dairy farms, and alternative fuel production utilizing other agricultural by-products.

Orchard and vineyard prunings will be consumed in CO-generation facilities that will generate power for use on and off the farm. Solar and wind power will occupy vastly expanded slices of the energy producing puzzle.

The report assumes that plans already underway to clear the Valley's air will continue, but that attainment of a cleaner, clearer and healthier atmosphere can be accomplished without undue and chafing regulation.

For those who believe restrictions and regulations are the only way to achieve a livable future, the report will be a disappointment. It takes a much more positive approach, emphasizing possibilities rather than specifying the actions and activities leading to impossibilities.

The overview presented by the report concerns the area from Mount Shasta to the Tehachapis between the Coast Range and the Sierra, 40 to 60 miles wide, 450 miles in length. It's an area that has been growing in population faster than anyplace else in the Golden State, an area that needs serious attention if the growth is to be handled positively and productively.

The Great Valley Center's report: "Renewable Energy: Strategic Opportunities for the Great Central Valley" is only one of several economic and population studies issued by the organization since its founding in 1997.

The disparity of political influence between California's major population centers and the growing numbers inland need to be balanced.

For farmers, the report offers hope that they can continue to produce their vital products in a friendly if somewhat different arena, while gaining even more appreciation from a nonfarming public. For them, the report should be a gigantic shot in the arm.

[Letters to the Editor, The Visalia Times-Delta, Aug. 11, 2003:](#)

Wal-Mart: No sprawl-mart here

As a concerned resident of Linwood Ranch, I attended the community meeting, sponsored by Wal-Mart, at which they presented, their plans for a new Wal-Mart Superstore at Caldwell Avenue and Demaree Street.

Of the 100 or so people who did attend, the opposition was overwhelming. They also showed plans for a 149,549 square-foot store, when actually the plan is for a store that is 217,088 square feet.. Once the smaller plan is approved, very few obstacles would remain for the bigger project.

A project of this size would not only create visual blight, air and noise pollution 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it would create a traffic flow nightmare all along Demaree and Caldwell. It is estimated that 14,000 to 17,000 more vehicle-trips per day would be generated.

As the plan was presented it forces all northwest or northbound traffic to go out on Chinowth Street, or to drive through the residential area of Linwood Ranch to Linwood and Caldwell.

All of the huge, diesel-spewing trucks needed to keep the shelves stocked in this monstrosity would be streaming down Caldwell, down Demaree, to the loading docks, and out Chinowth back to Caldwell, all day and all night long.

Because of Wal-Mart's history of low wages, no health benefits, and "crush all competition" business practices, Visalia will end up with lower wages, public-subsidized health costs, reduced shopping alternatives, and several studies have shown that for every two Wal-Mart jobs created, three jobs are lost as other businesses downsize or close.

Money will simply move from cash registers on Main Street into Wal-Mart's, to be shipped off by the trainload to headquarters in Arkansas.

As an example of Wal-Mart's arrogance, at the meeting, I was talking to Wal-Mart's community affairs manager, Peter Kanelos. I was very vocal in my opposing the project.

I also quoted Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, who wrote in his autobiography, "If some community, for whatever reason, doesn't want us in there, we aren't interested in going in and creating a fuss."

To which Mr.Kanelos replied, "Hey pal, times change."

He then kept pressing me as to whom I worked for, assuming I was opposed to the project only because I worked for a company that they would force out of business.

I'm retired. He then sarcastically ended the conversation, saying I don't have to shop at Wal-Mart if I don't want to.

Does Visalia need another Wal-Mart?

I say no.

David Semorile

Visalia

Proposed second Visalia Wal-Mart: Too many questions

Three years ago we moved to Visalia because we wanted a quiet, clean and safe community to raise our family. Now, Wal-Mart is proposing to destroy our neighborhood.

When we purchased our home, the developer told us that the vacant property on the corner of Demaree and Caldwell was zoned for small business. The Demaree/Caldwell Site Specific Plan was drawn for buildings no more than 60,000 square feet.

Wal-Mart proposes to build a 149,000 square feet "big box" store. Their real estate agent said they would expand to a 217,000 square-foot superstore within a few years.

Think about the increased traffic, noise, [air, and light pollution](#) we will have to endure each day.

A study done by Barnstable, Mass., showed that a 150,000-square-foot store would cost a city \$70,000 a year in increased police, fire, sewage, and road maintenance. Talk to a policeman in your community, they will tell you how crime increases at these stores.

According to Sprawl-busters.com a 150,000 square-foot store would increase traffic by more than 13,000 vehicles a day. One of the exit routes is right past the front yards where our children play.

This doesn't even address the fact that Wal-Mart is the biggest importer of manufactured goods from China. What about the 2 million U.S. manufacturing jobs lost because of Wal-Mart imports?

Can somebody explain what Wal-Mart was doing trading with Cuba (the Bush Administration fined Wal-Mart April 14)?

Or why the average wage for a full time, single mother with a child is below poverty level (Slam-Dunking Wal-Mart)?

Or why 55 percent of Wal-Mart employees are uninsured (according to the USA Today)?

Or why nearly 1.5 million women are suing Wal-Mart for sex discrimination (San Francisco Chronicle)?

Or why the residents in 30 states have protested against Wal-Mart stores and won, keeping Wal-Mart from putting up one of their "superstores"?

Why? Because Wal-Mart is the wrong company for their community and ours.

Bruce Brenna

Kellie Brenna

Visalia

Railroads asked to cap valley emissions

By Vic Pollard, Californian Sacramento Bureau

The Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday August 06, 2003, 09:25:12 PM

SACRAMENTO -- U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer and State Sen. Dean Florez Wednesday stepped up their campaign to get railroads to reduce the air pollution emitted by locomotives pulling trains through the San Joaquin Valley.

Boxer personally appeared at a legislative hearing held by Florez here to discuss the issue with clean-air officials and railroad representatives.

She hailed a 1998 agreement under which major railroads vowed to speed up use of lower-polluting new locomotive engines in the Los Angeles, or South Coast, air basin.

"This agreement is helping the South Coast clean up its air," Boxer said. "The people in the Central Valley deserve no less."

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials say railroads are responsible for about 5 percent of the emissions of a key ingredient of smog.

Railroad officials said their companies want to help clean California's air, but explained there is a long list of costly difficulties involved.

New locomotives are cleaner, but there are thousands of older engines still being used because they have useful lives of 35 years or more, said Mark Stehly, assistant vice president for environmental and hazardous materials of Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway.

"California is part of a rail network," Stehly said. "Trains flow in from all over the United States, which makes it very difficult to do a captive fleet" of clean-burning locomotives for California only.

But Florez said later he was encouraged by the railroads' response.

Florez said the railroads are "doing quite a bit with engine switching" in the Los Angeles Basin and believes they can do more to reduce pollution in the valley.

"After kind of hemming and hawing, I think I heard them say they want to work with us to clean up the air," Florez said.

Project prompts yet another lawsuit

By James Burger, staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday August 06, 2003, 09:25:12 PM

A lawyer for the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club filed a lawsuit in Kern County Superior Court last week against a third new home development on the Kern River bluffs.

The most recent lawsuit target is a Lucas Development Corp. project near the intersection of Alfred Harrell Highway and Highway 178.

Sierra Club lawyer Babak Naficy said the lawsuit is "very much the same" as suits filed against projects to the northwest and the south of the Lucas land.

He said the city doesn't sufficiently consider the cumulative impact that air pollution from the developments would have on the environment.

The lawsuits have come as fast as the developments themselves.

Developers for four new projects have proposed building more than 1,000 homes along Alfred Harrell Highway and Highway 178 in northeast Bakersfield.

And the Sierra Club has responded to each of them with duplicate concerns -- that all the new homes and businesses will bring terrible air pollution and traffic congestion to the area.

Sierra Club officials have said building in the area will threaten protected animal species like the blunt-nosed leopard lizard and the burrowing owl.

So, as development projects have been approved by the city, the Sierra Club has filed lawsuits trying to stop or soften those impacts.

But Naficy said the lawsuits aren't a sign that developers, the city and the Sierra Club aren't getting along.

City officials and developers are becoming more sensitive to the concerns of the Sierra Club, he said, and the lawsuits were only filed to make sure the club had room to encourage that sensitivity legally.

"The process the city is following has become more detailed and, in some ways, better because they are watching this more closely," Naficy said.

And the Sierra Club and representatives for Lucas Development have already started talking about ways to settle the group's concerns without going to court, Naficy said.

"So far we've had pretty good response from the development community," he said.

Dave Dmohowski, a land use consultant who represents Lucas Development, was not available for comment Wednesday night.

But Dmohowski, who also represents developer Sage Community Group, has previously said that builders need to move their projects forward quickly to capture a segment of Bakersfield's red-hot housing market.

Most can't afford to wait several years for a lawsuit to make it through the court system.

Sage Community Group has also been sued by the Sierra Club over a 500-plus home project at the corner of Highway 178 and Miramonte Drive.

Naficy has said settlement talks on that lawsuit have not yet begun.

But the first northeast project sued by the Sierra Club, a square mile planned by local businessmen Tom Carosella and Craig Carver, has made it out from under the lawsuit through a settlement.

Naficy said the settlement included conditions that he hopes the city of Bakersfield will adopt as citywide policy. The most notable of those is a \$1,200 fee on every new home that would be used to pay for projects that will improve the valley's air.

That fee concept is currently being studied by a Bakersfield City Council committee.

River bluffs project in limbo

By James Burger, staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday August 06, 2003, 09:25:12 PM

Nearly three years ago more than a square mile of northeast Bakersfield along Highway 178 was mapped for homes, apartments, shops and restaurants.

It was called City in the Hills.

City officials and developers heralded it as a gateway project that signaled the hilly, scenic section of Bakersfield was ripe for growth.

Now the project is a big question mark in the center of a high-profile area of potential city growth.

In 2000, community activists saw plans for City in the Hills as a signal to leap into action.

They have spent two years pressing for preservation of sections of the Kern River bluffs for trails, parks and natural open space.

Other developers followed the massive project into the northeast with projects of their own.

And Sierra Club environmentalists started worrying about the impact of thousands of homes on the air, traffic and wildlife.

Now five other sizable developments are poised to move forward. The Sierra Club has sued three of them over air pollution and traffic congestion.

And the city is polishing up a park plan that will create a system of trails, parks and open space along the Kern River bluffs.

Through all this, City in the Hills developer Mountain View Bravo, LLC, has stayed silent.

"I haven't heard from them once," said city planner Marc Gauthier, who handles projects like City in the Hills.

But in mid-June representatives for Mountain View Bravo asked the city to allow them to convert 27 acres of apartments into stores and homes.

City planners said they had been talking to the corporation's engineers about the zone change until last week. Much of the disagreement centered around parks, said city planner Jim Movius.

The City in the Hills zone change showed only six acres of parks in the whole square mile -- well short of the 28 acres city rules require for the 11,500 people who are expected to live in the project.

Then, on Friday, the city received a brief letter from Mountain View Bravo representatives asking that the process of reviewing the zone change be suspended.

On Monday engineers for the City in the Hills developers submitted new plans asking to cut up the square mile into several large parcels.

The parks space shown in previous plans was shrunk to five acres and engineers proposed a system of 25-foot-wide walkways along parcel lines as a substitute for the required park property.

City planners said that is not acceptable.

And Gauthier said he believes he knows the reason for Mountain View Bravo's abrupt change of plans.

He thinks the Petaluma company is preparing to chop up City in the Hills and sell chunks of it.

"I think we're safe to assume that he's in the selling mode," Gauthier said.

John Cicerone, a local representative for Mountain View Bravo, said Wednesday that he wasn't able to comment about the company's plans or about Gauthier's interpretation of them.

The parcel map will be reviewed by city staff and could be considered for approval at a future meeting of the Bakersfield Planning Commission.

But two years of delay on the project and the possibility of a sale could have a significant impact on plans to develop northeast Bakersfield.

"They started before all these other guys and now they're behind them," Gauthier said. "You'd really like to see it get under way."

And whoever builds the City in the Hills plan will be required to improve a critical piece of Highway 178 -- widening it from two to four lanes, said Assistant Public Works Director Jacques LaRochelle.

Any delay to that could cause traffic troubles that are dreaded by area residents who fear their road will become as clogged as Rosedale Highway to the west.

City in the Hills would be responsible for improving and widening Highway 178 between Morning Drive and Masterson Street near Mesa Marin Raceway.

LaRochelle said it will be critical, as the parcel map moves through the city approval process, to make sure that breaking up the property doesn't delay Highway 178 improvements.

"We are going to be very concerned with orderly development," he said. "When the people start living there that's when the need for improvement will happen."

But now, 32 months after the high-profile project ushered in a new era in northeast Bakersfield's development, it is still uncertain when those people will begin to populate the City in the Hills.

Viewpoint / Joel Schwartz and Wendell Cox: Smart Growth leads to more road congestion, increases community's pollution woes

The Bakersfield Californian

Saturday August 09, 2003, 10:05:07 PM

A recent special report in *The Californian* argued that urban sprawl represents the greatest threat to the valley's air quality, and that "Smart Growth" urban planning would reduce the road congestion and air pollution caused by suburban development.

But that's misdiagnosing the problem and prescribing dangerous medicine. Technology is improving air quality more rapidly, effectively, and cheaply than can urban planning. Misnamed smart growth would actually increase gridlock and smog, while putting home ownership out of reach for more Kern County residents.

Smart growth packs more cars and more emissions into a given land area, increasing both congestion and air pollution. Average work commute times are actually highest in the densest cities.

Fortunately, technology is breaking the link between air pollution and driving. Vehicles built to current Air Resources Board requirements will be more than 90 percent cleaner over their lifetimes when compared with the average car now on the road. Thus, even if the valley's population doubles during the next 25 years, total automobile emissions will decline at least 80 percent as the fleet turns over to these 21st century vehicles.

While technology rapidly reduces valley emissions, smart growth plans will be busy raising home prices. People across the state move to the valley because it

is one of the last bastions of affordable housing in California. But research shows that urban growth limits and similar smart growth measures drive up housing prices. In the Bay area, San Jose's smart growth policies helped drive up home prices an astronomical 936 percent from 1976 to 2001. And Portland, Ore., a smart growth pioneer, quickly went from being one of the most affordable to one of the least affordable cities.

Smart growth plans pack people into high-density neighborhoods. But is that what consumers and home buyers want? Developers don't force consumers to choose "sprawl" against their will. In a dynamic and competitive housing market, developers have a tremendous incentive to find out what combination of amenities will most appeal to home buyers. If people were clamoring to live in high-rise apartments or condos, developers would build them. Right now, most people, especially those in Bakersfield and the valley, want single-family homes with a bit of land in the front and back yard.

We use to call this the American Dream. Now wanting to own a home with a yard is called sprawl and is bad for us?

People should be free to choose the lifestyles they desire -- whether sprawling suburbs or high-density "mixed-use" neighborhoods and should bear the costs for their decisions. And they do. New-home buyers generally pay in the sale price for all of the road, sewer and water infrastructure for direct service to their property.

Smart growth is a dumb choice unless we want higher housing prices. Bakersfield's air quality is going to be improved by technology and getting high-polluting cars off the road, not by building high-density housing projects.

Joel Schwartz is a senior fellow at the Reason Foundation and works in Sacramento. Wendell Cox is a transportation and demographics consultant and spent three terms on the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission.

Time to stop sprawl

Letters to the editor for Aug. 11
The Bakersfield Californian

The county's proposed changes to updating its general plan "adds" guidelines for preserving agricultural land, protecting air quality, retaining business and adding smart growth principles. Twenty years ago, the last general plan included much of the same.

If these principles had been followed 20 years ago, we would still be farming some of the finest farmland in the world and we would not be winning all the awards for sprawl and poor air quality.

Local citizens have been begging for these principles to be adhered to for many years, as witnessed by reader's letters in *The Californian* and the wishes of the thousands of local residents who participated in Vision 2020.

The excellent articles published in July on smog by staff writer Matt Weiser began with: "In the battle against smog, sprawl is the only polluter awarded taboo status."

How about an "original" idea that most counties follow: through a revenue sharing agreement, the cities are in charge of urban development and the counties protect the business that agriculture provides?

TERRIE STOLLER, Bakersfield

Sound Off for Aug. 10

The Bakersfield Californian

Reader: Thank you for your complete response to my question regarding the air pollution indices published by *The Californian*. Several comments to which no response is asked or expected:

If Arvin routinely has the highest pollution index in the southern San Joaquin, and if its index were to be used to trigger no fireplace burning days, then fireplace burning in Bakersfield could be curtailed more often than necessary. I believe that Matt Weiser came to the wrong conclusion -- unless Arvin's air is purer in the winter than Bakersfield.

In my experience, it seems that government and newspaper forecasts of damage or disaster deaths and impacts of existing conditions (such as air pollution) are often inflated to make a point. Thus, it doesn't come as too much of a surprise that the forecast air quality indices for Bakersfield have been inflated (so to speak) by the APCD. No reflection on *The Californian* intended.

I hope that, when the APCD better details its air quality index forecasting to individual towns and cities, *The Californian* will be able to indicate these forecasts on your weather map in some sort of color code -- similar to the *L.A. Times'* air quality forecast.

Again thanks for your response.

-- *Jon Crawford*

Jenner: You're welcome, Jon. Thanks for your comments.

I asked Matt to clarify his reply about how the Bakersfield forecast (rather than Arvin's) would be used to regulate the burning of wood in fireplaces this winter.

Matt says that according to the air district, the pollution created by burning wood in fireplaces would be a much bigger problem in urban areas like Bakersfield. For that reason they plan to use the Bakersfield numbers from their new forecasting system.

Also, I like your suggestion that we color-code the pollution forecast for area towns on our Weather page, which we are redesigning. I don't know if we can find a service to provide that information in a cost-effective way, but we will look for one.

Air Pollution Violations

The Bakersfield Californian

Wednesday August 06, 2003, 09:25:11 PM

Larry Salyards in Delano was cited June 6 for an illegal burn of leaves, bottles, cans and foil.

LDS Ranch in Madera was cited June 5 for burning on a no-burn day.

Louis Sweet Jr. in Richgrove was cited June 4 for an illegal debris fire.

Madera Power, LLC in Madera was cited June 30 for excessive visible emissions from stack and multiclone housing.

Marcello Silva in Fresno was cited June 1 for an illegal burn of long boards and doors.

Matilde Mendez in Reedley was cited June 11 for an illegal burn of household trash.

McCaffrey Roses in Wasco was cited June 3 for burning weeds at an unauthorized location on a no-burn day.

Mike Marple in Fresno was cited June 17 for an open burn consisting of illegal materials on a no-burn day.

The National Weather Service in Hanford was cited June 2 for an engine not being equipped with a PCV crankcase emissions control device. No documentation to prove engine operated with timing retarded three degrees.

Newby Rubber in Bakersfield was cited June 17 for use of a non-HVLP coating application equipment. Operated equipment without a permit to operate.

NW Fresnans Investment in Fresno was cited June 10 for an open burn of illegal materials.

Pacifica Enterprises in Bakersfield was cited June 2 for failure to thoroughly inspect facility where renovation operations will occur. Presence of asbestos in entire building. Public nuisance.

Page Environmental in Bakersfield was cited June 24 for operating a metal parts coating operation without a permit to operate.

Paul Richardson in Stockton was cited June 20 for failing to maintain coating records.

Quinn Co. in Selma was cited for failing to affix registration ID label on portable engine.

RO's Precise Painting Inc. in Sanger was cited June 1 for installing and operating a Bayco Burn Off oven without a valid authority to construct or permit to operate.

Robert Mann in Bakersfield was cited June 4 for an illegal burn of tumbleweed and wood without a permit on a no-burn day. Had only a county Fire Department permit.

Sam Chimienti in Fresno was cited June 23 for an escaped burn that led to combustion of illegal materials. Original burn piles also contained illegal materials.

South Bay Construction in Stockton was cited June 19 for failure to adequately wet material and keep wet until disposal.

Steve Laird in Fresno was cited June 20 for an illegal burn of construction lumber and citrus tree prunings.

Sun Gro Commodities in McFarland was cited June 3 for operating without a permit to operate.

Surjit Atwal in Merced was cited June 8 for an illegal burn of construction on a no-burn day.

Tilton Pacific Construction in Porterville was cited June 19 for failure to use effective applications of water during construction activities.

TRC Operating Co. Inc. in Kern County was cited June 17 for an observed vapor leak in excess of 50,000 ppm at the gauge hatch. Facility failed to notify district of tank demolition and inspect for asbestos.

Trimmer of Fresno was cited June 6 for a gun cleaner not being used to clean HLVP spray gun. Use of volatile organic compound solvents, paints exceed volatile organic compound limits.

Troy's Body Shop in Fresno was cited June 5 for use of a non-HLVP spray equipment, failure to properly store new spent coatings, adhesives, etc.

Tulare City Wastewater Plant in Tulare was cited June 16 for visible emissions in excess.

United Rentals in Buttonwillow was cited June 18 for an engine not being registered prior to use.

Viking Ready Mix in Visalia was cited June 23 for an air compressor adding to equipment without an authority to construct permit.

West Coast Waste in Fresno was cited June 9 for causing an odor nuisance.

[Editorial, The Modesto Bee, Aug. 11, 2003:](#)

If you smell the tallow, make a stink about it no matter where you live

While all of us had to endure last month's prolonged stretch of heat, residents of south Modesto also had to put up with the gut-wrenching stench from the Modesto Tallow Co. plant. Again.

That reek has been there for years, and while promises from the company, Stanislaus County officials and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District have resulted in improvements, the stink continues.

Government officials, few of whom live in that area, gauge the seriousness of the problem and check on compliance based on official complaints to the air district phone line. Too often, we suspect, south Modesto residents don't bother anymore, figuring it won't do any good. People driving through just want to get away from the smell and don't even think to call.

We propose that more public noise about this nasty smell may help bring the powers that be to their senses on this issue.

Anyone, resident or visitor to the neighborhood, who is bothered by the odor needs to call. If the smell continues the next day, call again.

The most important number to call is the official hot line, whose number is noted in the box we've printed here. But we're also aware that it's not a particularly friendly process. For example, the district's Modesto office was closed on Friday during what most of us consider normal business hours, and callers were directed to follow a set of directions for registering a complaint.

As well as notifying the air pollution control district, therefore, we'd suggest people register their comments with Supervisor Paul Caruso, who in turn can keep the issue before his colleagues on the county Board of Supervisors.

The tallow plant has no business taking on another company's load or adding processes, such as feathers, when it hasn't proven itself capable of meeting the standards already established.

We'll say publicly what many say privately -- this stench problem would have been solved by now if it were a wealthy neighborhood, rather than a poor one, that was suffering.

To complain about tallow plant odors, call 557-6400 during business hours or (800) 281-7003 after hours.

To keep the Board of Supervisors up to date and to urge action on the problem, call Supervisor Paul Caruso at 525-4470, e-mail him at carusop@mail.stanislaus.ca.us.

ca.us, or write him in care of Stanislaus County, 1010 Tenth St., Suite 6500, Modesto 95354.

[Editorial, The Modesto Bee, Aug. 8, 2003:](#)

Proposal to split air quality district deserves a look

Should Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties become a separate planning area within the air pollution control district?

We're not convinced that a break from the current eight-county setup would help achieve the larger objective of cleaner air throughout the great San Joaquin Valley. But we do believe it makes sense to proceed with a comprehensive look at the proposal.

Pollution in the northern counties is bad, but not as bad as it is in the five counties to the south. That is the reasoning behind the push for a separate planning designation to give the north counties -- and especially small businesses in them -- relief from the onerous restrictions as the valley gets the dubious label of "extreme" nonattainment with federal pollution standards.

Stanislaus this week joined San Joaquin in asking for a study of the issue; the Merced County Board of Supervisors will consider the matter Tuesday.

The supervisors' approvals, however, are baby steps on a long and pitted path. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Board has to agree to the idea, followed by the state Air Resources Board and the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Any one of them could knock the life out of the idea.

San Joaquin initiated this idea, after backing off an earlier proposal to be declared a separate district. The problem is it would be impossible, as well as dishonest, to claim that the San Joaquin Valley is not one bathtub-shaped basin as far as air quality is concerned.

But as a separate planning area with less serious pollution problems, the northern counties could avoid some of the strictest rules. Proponents also say it would allow the north counties to focus on strategies specific to our problems. The south has pollution from oil wells, for example, while the north deals with more commuting drivers.

While a separate plan for the north sounds as simple as another paperwork task for the district staff, there are other ramifications.

Valley leaders need to cooperate more, not less, on a range of natural resource issues -- land, water and air. And we wouldn't want this separate designation to be interpreted as an escape from the hard decisions and lifestyle adjustments needed to reduce pollution.

Having improved air quality is not the same thing as having good quality.

If the study suggests an alternative route to clean air, great. But if it's only a shortcut to avoid discomfort, forget it. We must not lose sight of the goal -- cleaner air in the entire valley.

Railroads: Difficult to clean the air

The Modesto Bee

Aug. 10. 2003

SACRAMENTO (AP) -- Representatives from major railroad companies that run trains through Central California say they are willing to help clean the San Joaquin Valley's air, but there are costly steps along the way.

New locomotives are cleaner, but there are thousands of older ones still being used because of their durability, said Mark Stehly of Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway at a hearing Wednesday by state Sen. Dean Florez and U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer.

The Democratic lawmakers had asked the companies to implement an agreement in the valley similar to a program in Southern California in which the

railroads agreed in 1998 to buy cleaner locomotives for the South Coast Air Basin.

But officials from Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway and Union Pacific Railroad warned Florez the valley is vastly different from the south coast. They said it would be difficult to establish a separate group of locomotives for the valley.

"The south coast is an origin-destination type of place," Stehly said. "The San Joaquin is a flow corridor. It has fewer stops and few places to switch. It's just not the same situation."

Locomotives produce about 28 tons of smog-making pollutants per day in the valley, according to state estimates.