

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Tuesday, March 20, 2007](#)

Plan would pay \$5,000 each to get the worst 'gross polluters' off the roads

The valley air district has announced an ambitious effort to rid the roads of some of the biggest pollution offenders. It's good news, and the state and federal governments should find the funds that will be needed.

The new plan calls for pulling 30,000 so-called gross polluters off valley roads. That's five times more than the previous goal. It won't be cheap: The idea is for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to offer the owners of such cars \$5,000 for them, then destroy the cars after the purchase.

That addresses one problem with such efforts: Most of the gross polluters are older vehicles operated by people who cannot afford newer cars or the maintenance of their older ones. Paying them for the old cars eases that difficulty.

Of course, that adds up to a lot of money, considering that the state estimates there are about 200,000 such vehicles in operation in California.

But the payoff in cleaner air would be significant. While gross polluters are fewer than 10 percent of the total of vehicles on California's roads, they produce more than half of the smog-causing emissions from light gasoline engines. A smoking car's emissions can be 75 times as toxic as those from a well-maintained car.

Removing 30,000 of the pollution spewing cars would cut 2 tons of pollution in the valley each day.

The district plans to use data from the state's Smog Check program to identify the gross polluters. That's fine so far as it goes, but such an approach won't reach those who've given up on trying to get their older vehicles past the smog test. Many do so because there are few consequences.

It may be time to raise an idea that surfaced a few years ago. Technology exists to allow roadside monitors to sniff the exhaust of passing vehicles. That could be used in conjunction with Smog Check results to identify even more of the offending polluters. At least four states already employ such technology.

There has been resistance in California, though. Bureaucrats and regulators say the system isn't proven, or isn't effective enough - despite a study from the state's own Air Resources Board that concluded the devices could accurately pinpoint the 2percent "worst of the worst."

Others object to the Big Brother nature of such devices. But that's a bogus argument. Safeguards against abuse can be built into any system.

The air district has made a good pitch. Now our representatives in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., must go to work to get the money, and the public needs to encourage them.

Smog violations come early this year

Heat, high pressure spur ozone to unhealthy levels

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley recorded its first smog violations of the year Friday and Saturday, marking an early start to the smog season.

Violations occur when the concentration of pollution in the air exceeds healthy levels set by the federal government.

The violations on both days were recorded in Arvin, which is plagued with some of the valley's worst air. Edison also recorded a violation on Saturday.

The exceedances mark an early start to the smog season, which is known to be a summertime problem. Ozone generally doesn't become a problem in the valley until April or May, state air quality data shows.

The bad air was caused by a combination of unseasonably warm temperatures and a ridge of high pressure that caused air to remain stagnant most of the week, according to Shawn Ferreria, an atmospheric scientist with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"It gave an opportunity for things to really bake," said Ferreria, describing the means by which sunlight and heat react with fumes from cars and factories to form ozone, the main ingredient in smog.

The invisible gas can damage lung tissue and aggravate breathing problems.

Early smog violations don't necessarily mean a bad prediction for the summer months, according to Ferreria.

However, long-range forecasts are showing above-normal temperatures for the summer months.

"That typically spells more of a chance of having pollution problems," Ferreria said. "How much? Unfortunately, we haven't gotten that far in our research to say exactly."

The Los Angeles area also recorded its first smog violations of the year on Friday and Saturday.

Too early for air standard extension?

State request to EPA irks Florez, local air regulators

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

State air regulators came under heavy criticism Monday for looking into a possible delay in meeting the deadline for a federal clean air standard that comes due in 2015.

Under federal requirements, the state has until 2015 to clean up fine particulate matter pollution in areas including the San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles air basins. In a March 12 letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the California Air Resources Board said it must "pursue the option of additional time" to meet that standard and suggested pushing back the deadline to 2020.

The letter comes on the heels of news last month from San Joaquin Valley air regulators that the region will not meet the deadline for another federal pollution standard for smog. The air district has requested a 10-year extension for that deadline, which would push it out to 2023.

The letter from the Air Resources Board states that the scope of California's particulate matter problem is unique in the nation. It goes on to say that federal regulations to phase in cleaner diesel engines take effect too late and won't have the needed impact for the region to meet the standard.

Diesel engines are one of the main contributors to fine particulate matter pollution.

The move was criticized by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, local air regulators and clean air advocates.

"Who loses if there's a five-year delay?" asked Tim Carmichael, president of the Coalition for Clean Air. "The impact is on people who breathe air in California and that's millions of people."

Carmichael said the state acted prematurely because no formal plans have been put forth yet by local air districts to tackle particulate matter pollution and because the state didn't consult with air districts or the public about the extension.

Particulate matter lodges in the lungs and can aggravate asthma, lung disorders and heart disease.

In a letter to state air officials, Florez said: "To many, it appears that the ARB staff ... has decided to throw in the towel on (particulate matter) attainment."

Gennet Paauwe, a spokeswoman for the Air Resources Board, said the letter was not a formal request for an extension.

"The letter is really just exploring the option of getting an extension," she said. "The Air Resources Board is just kind of feeling out EPA to see if they would do that."

Paauwe added that state regulators believe the San Joaquin Valley can meet the particulate matter standard by the current deadline of 2015. The extension is geared toward the Los Angeles area, which faces a bigger problem with particulate matter pollution than the valley, she said.

But Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said he's concerned about the implications an extension would have on the valley.

The valley's attempts to cut smog and particulate matter pollution rely heavily on the state and federal government passing regulations that mandate cleaner vehicles. Sadredin believes an extension to the deadline may cause the state to take more time implementing those regulations.

"The bottom line is we think it's premature to request an extension at this time," he said. "We think if it is granted it will take the pressure off of them."

Air board seeks later deadline to cut soot

The agency says the state can't meet 2015 target and needs five more years. Critics say it is giving up too easily.

By Janet Wilson, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

Declaring that California cannot meet federal soot reduction standards by a 2015 deadline, the state air board has asked for a five-year extension that critics say will cut short lives and aggravate asthma and other health problems.

"California's problem is unique in the nation," with greater Los Angeles facing "the biggest challenge" in meeting the deadline with annual average measurements for soot exceeding national limits by 50%, Katherine Witherspoon, executive director of the state Air Resources Board, wrote in a March 12 letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

In her letter, Witherspoon blamed the timing of the EPA's new diesel engine standards, which were announced in draft form on March 3 after years of delay. She said the phase-in period for the rules between 2010 and 2017 "comes too late" to meet the 2015 soot-reduction deadline.

Diesel soot, also known as fine particulate matter, lodges deep in the lungs when inhaled, and has been linked to heart and respiratory disease, cancer, asthma and other illnesses. It spews from trucks, ships, trains, construction equipment and anything else that uses a combustion engine.

Witherspoon could not be reached for comment. But air board spokeswoman Gennet Paauwe said the state was simply trying to "give another option" to the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which oversees greater Los Angeles, because it was so far away from attainment.

She said Witherspoon and San Joaquin Valley air officials thought that they would meet the deadline, but that the AQMD would require at least an additional three years.

"We really don't feel that South Coast at this point with that 50% hanging out there can meet that deadline," Paauwe said, "so that additional five years will give them a chance."

Thanks but no thanks, said AQMD Executive Director Barry Wallerstein, adding that he had not been consulted before the letter was sent and did not agree.

"This is not being done on our behalf.... This letter completely undercuts the public process," Wallerstein said. "This means higher pollution emissions from cars, trucks, ships, locomotives, [construction] engines and other mobile sources for an additional five-year period or more. It takes the pressure off the U.S. EPA and state Air Resources Board to do their fair share of pollution cleanup in Southern California."

Although air quality in Southern California has improved dramatically in the last three decades, the region still experiences 5,400 premature deaths a year because of air pollution, the state estimates.

Others said Witherspoon was "jumping the gun" because the deadline for air districts to submit cleanup plans is April 2008.

"It's shortsighted and defeatist.... They're throwing in the towel too soon," said state Sen. Dean Florez (D-Shafter), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Air Quality in the Central Valley. He said he would order state air officials to appear before the committee to discuss the extension request.

Tim Carmichael, president of the Coalition for Clean Air, said, "Any delay will negatively impact the health of millions of Californians ... from difficulty breathing to premature death."

If the state does not meet the deadlines or an extension is not granted, federal transportation funds could be at risk. Last year, California received about \$4 billion in such funds.

In an e-mail, EPA spokesman John Millett said the agency "will review and consider the request."

He added that "federal funding has only rarely been in jeopardy - only one or two instances in the history of the program. Funding is linked to state planning, not the air quality status of an individual jurisdiction."

He also defended the diesel engine proposals, saying that when fully implemented they would cut particulate emissions by 90%.

Carmichael and others said they feared that Witherspoon and the governor's office were bowing to pressure from the powerful construction, trucking and rail industries.

But Adam Mendelsohn, Gov. Schwarzenegger's communications director, said the state air board's action was taken "without consultation of Cal EPA or the governor's office.... We believe staff acted prematurely and are reviewing options in terms of additional steps to rectify the situation."

State air board staff are finalizing separate rules that would limit diesel soot emissions from construction equipment. Industry officials have protested loudly and are calling for a delay, saying that air officials lack accurate information about heavy-duty equipment.

Witherspoon has drawn the wrath of Southern California air officials and environmentalists in the past by signing voluntary agreements with railroads to reduce pollution without holding public hearings or seeking input from affected districts first.

California air board explores delay to meet pollution deadline

By SAMANTHA YOUNG, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Bakersfield Californian, Sacramento Bee & other papers, Mon., March 19, 2007

SACRAMENTO, (AP) -- State regulators are exploring whether to ask the federal government for a waiver that would allow California more time to meet air quality standards in heavily polluted areas.

At issue is a federal requirement that the California Air Resources Board reduce tiny particles of pollution by the year 2015. The microscopic specs, known as PM 2.5, come primarily from diesel engine exhaust and can lodge in the lungs. Studies have linked the particles to lung disease and heart problems.

In a March 12 letter that was made public Monday, board executive director Catherine Witherspoon suggested that the San Joaquin Valley and the South Coast Air Quality Management District receive more time to meet the requirement.

She would like an extension to 2020 because state and federal strategies to reduce the particulate matter won't take effect until after the deadline.

For example, federal rules governing new diesel engine standards that emit less nitrogen dioxide will be phased in between 2010 and 2017. That is too late for the air districts to meet their 2015 deadlines, Witherspoon said.

The possibility of an extension drew sharp criticism from environmental groups and one Sacramento lawmaker.

"If the U.S. EPA agrees with this request, the practical effect may be that millions of people in my district and other parts of the state will continue to breathe air that is dangerous to their health for years to come," state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, wrote in a letter Monday to Robert Sawyer, chairman of the Air Resources Board.

Spokeswoman Gennet Paauwe said the air board will hold a public hearing if it decides to formally seek the extension from the EPA.

"This letter is not a formal request," she said. "It's an exploratory letter to see if EPA is open to it.

The San Joaquin Valley likely would meet the 2015 deadline, Paauwe said. But the South Coast district, which includes Orange County and portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, has met only half its target.

PM 2.5 forms primarily from vehicle exhaust emitted by old diesel engines on locomotives, trucks, ships, construction and farm equipment. Fireplace soot, smoke from wildfires and agricultural dust also contribute.

Rising gas prices fuel consumer resentment

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

Have you been cringing lately when your gas gauge creeps toward E? Yet another nightmare run to the service station and its rising prices. Does it seem as if the numbers grow whenever you stop to get gasoline? Unfortunately, you are not imagining things.

Bay Area gas prices have once again gone above \$3 a gallon, but you haven't seen anything yet. Some predictions have prices in California rising another 20 to 25 cents in the next month. Prices could reach record highs in the East Bay, San Mateo and other parts of the region. Over the past month, gasoline has increased 45 cents per gallon in California. What you feel is your wallet growing thinner by the gallon.

So what's the deal, you ask? AAA's monthly gas report says it's that time of year again when refiners switch to produce the summer blend aimed at reducing air pollution. But Joe Sparano,

president of the Western States Petroleum Association, said in a recent letter that, "some refiners have had difficulties returning to full production after transitioning from winter to summer blend gasoline." So that's our fault?

AAA cites other reasons for this gas-price crisis, such as raw material costs and California's demand for petrol. Yet the report also admits that oil companies have a thirst for profits, so they pump-up the numbers. Say it ain't so.

We understand there's such a thing as free enterprise, even for oil companies, some of the richest firms in the world. But consumers feel helpless, with no way to protest and no viable fuel alternative for their gas tanks. Maybe lawmakers can help.

Here's how. Treat oil companies like utilities, form a state commission and force these firms to justify dramatic increases in their rates. We need a better way to understand and determine why prices are rising and protect consumers.

Oil companies are a different animal. They produce the energy necessary for modern transportation. Without transportation, employment would tumble, retail shopping would plunge and our economy would stagnate. The reality is that oil companies have a bigger impact on our lives than many other companies.

True, California needs more refineries, which are expensive and unwanted in many neighborhoods. It's a give-and-take situation. Maybe lawmakers can give oil companies some incentives to expand - or build new - refineries.

But we also need to accelerate our search for alternative fuels. Vehicles should have higher mileage standards and it wouldn't hurt to expand public transportation, use of which appears to be growing. But such projects take a long period of time to complete.

Right now, \$4 a gallon is within reach and prices could accelerate beyond that. It's amazing how tolerant consumers have been up to this point, but how long will they begrudgingly carry this ever-growing financial burden? Lawmakers need to find innovative ways to cut consumers a break.

World's largest passenger plane makes West Coast debut

By JOHN ANTCZAK - Associated Press Writer
Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

Los Angeles International Airport is expected to be the nation's leader in flights of the giant new Airbus A380, a company official said as the world's largest airliner made its West Coast debut.

The mammoth double-decker A380, bigger than a Boeing 747, touched down Monday in Los Angeles about 15 minutes after a separate A380 landed in New York for the first time.

"L.A. is projected to have more concentration of A380 operations than any other airport in the United States, and really only second to London-Heathrow," Airbus North America Chairman Allan McArtor told an arrival ceremony, citing the city's location on the Pacific Rim, which he said is where the industry's high growth comes from.

The A380's large passenger capacity and other attributes were touted as ideal for a city with concerns ranging from noise and smog to crowded skies and little room for airport expansion.

"It makes better use of restricted airport capacity, of air-traffic-control congestion," McArtor said. "It has far less emissions than other airplanes. It burns less fuel and it's substantially quieter on both landing and approach, as I'm sure the neighbors will let you know."

The A380 is 239 feet long, has a wingspan of more than 261 feet, seats 555 passengers in a typical three-class configuration or 853 in a one-class economy setup, and can fly some 8,000 nautical miles. By comparison, the largest passenger plane now in service, the Boeing 747-400, seats about 415 people.

Airbus has 166 orders from 15 airlines for the new plane, which already has made test flights in Europe and to Asia. Each A380 costs about \$319 million.

Los Angeles International, the fifth-busiest airport worldwide, is expected to be the first U.S. destination for the A380 when it enters commercial service. Officials said the Australian airline Qantas will be first to fly in and out of Los Angeles early next year.

The inaugural Los Angeles flight, with only 23 people aboard, originated in Toulouse, France. An Airbus crew flew the plane for airport "compatibility" tests on behalf of Qantas.

"This airplane is very easy to fly thanks to the fly-by-wire controls," said Claude Lelaie, the Airbus experimental test pilot. "What is unique is the size, the ease of flight and most probably what is important is the silence of the airplane inside and also outside."

Noise is a major issue for people living near LAX, an issue repeatedly addressed in post-landing ceremonies.

"This aircraft is going to be able to fly more passengers, more quietly ... with fewer takeoffs and fewer landings," said Wally R. Mariani, senior executive vice president of Qantas. "In other words, there's benefits of an economic nature for Qantas, but it's also important there are benefits for the community. It's a very environmentally friendly aircraft."

The Los Angeles airports agency has completed \$49 million worth of work and plans to spend another \$72 million on projects to prepare Los Angeles International and Ontario (Calif.) International Airport for the big new jets.

State funds target warming

CalPERS, CalSTRS back move for tough curbs on greenhouse gases.

By Gilbert Chan - Bee Staff Writer
Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

California's two giant public pension funds joined a coalition of institutional investors and corporate executives Monday to urge the White House and Congress to enact tough national curbs on greenhouse gas emissions.

The group, asserting that global warming threatens the financial health of the U.S. economy and companies, called for legislation aimed at reducing greenhouse emissions by 60 to 90 percent below 1990 levels over the next five decades.

Officials also urged the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission to require that publicly traded companies disclose the potential financial threats and their strategies to reduce emissions.

"Environmental risk is a tremendous business and investment risk. Without national policies the competitiveness of American business will be threatened," said Fred Buenrostro, chief executive officer of the California Public Employees' Retirement System, the nation's largest public fund with more than \$230 billion in assets.

The campaign comes as major institutional investors gather in Washington, D.C., this week, and as House Democrats map out strategy for this summer's debate on climate change legislation.

Last week, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, gathered key committee leaders to start hammering out a plan likely to focus on improving energy efficiency in cars and buildings and promoting construction of the next generation of coal-fired power plants.

The White House has favored spending \$3 billion a year on energy-related research and development programs instead of imposing mandatory pollution controls such as those spelled out in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, an international plan requiring industrialized nations to cut carbon dioxide emissions, widely considered a key cause of global warming.

The Bush Administration has rejected the accord, siding with powerful business groups that say the pact would cost the United States nearly 5 million jobs. The White House also complains that fast-growing countries such as China and India are not required to cut emissions under the protocol.

"Even if you shut down the United States, China is going to continue with CO2 emissions. It's not going to make a difference until you get the world involved," said William Kovacs, a vice president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Undeterred, CalPERS, the \$157 billion California State Teachers' Retirement System and other institutional investors that manage a combined \$4 trillion in funds are uniting for the first time to lobby for a national climate change policy.

The 65 backers include California Treasurer Bill Lockyer and Controller John Chiang, union pension funds, financial service companies such as Merrill Lynch and Allianz and major corporations such as Sun Microsystems, Alcoa Inc. and PG&E Corp.

The group urges lawmakers to adopt policies to boost new technology and establish a global carbon trading plan that would cap greenhouse gas emissions and allow companies to trade emission credits.

Increasingly, Wall Street analysts and major investors are using climate change to evaluate companies. They are looking at the financial costs of complying with new emissions rules and investment opportunities.

CalPERS and CalSTRS are looking at future investments, earmarking nearly \$1 billion for clean technology ventures.

Jack Ehnes, CalSTRS chief executive, said efforts in California and other states could press Congress to act. California passed a landmark measure to cut greenhouse gases by 25 percent by 2020. Last month, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a regional emissions reduction pact with Oregon, Washington, Arizona and New Mexico.

"The federal government has the power to do more," Ehnes said. "The lack of a national climate policy is hindering the business community's ability to respond to the economic realities of global warming."

Utility and Sierra Club Deal Aims to Cut Carbon Dioxide

By MATTHEW L. WALD

N.Y. Times, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

WASHINGTON, March 19 - A Midwest electric company and the Sierra Club announced a deal on Monday under which the environmental group will drop its complaints against a coal plant, and the utility, Kansas City Power and Light, will take steps to cut carbon dioxide output by the amount that a new plant will produce.

The utility promised to buy hundreds of windmills and undertake a major conservation program, among other steps.

The Sierra Club said it was the first time a utility had agreed to "fully offset" a new power plant, which would produce six million tons a year of carbon dioxide. Such offsets have become popular as companies, groups and individuals pledge small steps to reduce carbon emissions by planting trees or investing in windmills or other alternative energy sources to make up for their own "carbon footprint."

Also Monday, a group of 65 large companies and investors, including Du Pont, BP America, the treasurers of nine states and Calpers, the pension fund for California state employees, called on

Congress to establish a carbon policy to limit climate-change risk and to clarify for businesses what requirements are likely to emerge.

The group was organized by the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies, known as Ceres, a corporate responsibility group, and the Investor Network on Climate Risk, a network of institutional investors and financial institutions focused on the financial risks and opportunities of climate change.

Their statement called for "leadership by the U.S. government to achieve sizable, sensible long-term reductions of greenhouse gas emissions," reaching 60 percent to 90 percent below the levels of 1990 by the year 2050. It also asked for the Securities and Exchange Commission to clarify "what companies should disclose to investors on climate change" in their required reports.

The statement said that a program to cut carbon output could create "vast economic opportunities."

Mindy S. Lubber, the president of Ceres, said, "They're all persuaded by the science." But she added: "Not only is it a scientific imperative and a moral imperative to deal with, but an economic imperative. The companies and their portfolios will be stronger if we get on with the business of putting mandatory caps on carbon."

In the utility agreement, the Sierra Club will withdraw its opposition to an 850-megawatt coal plant under construction in Weston, Mo., called Iatan 2, and will no longer argue that an existing plant there violates Clean Air Act rules.

The power company plans to save huge amounts of electricity by helping commercial landlords and homeowners replace air-conditioning and lighting with newer equipment that does the same work with less power.

Kansas City Power and Light, based in Kansas City, Mo., plans to ask regulators and state legislatures to let it invest in higher-efficiency equipment and earn a rate of return on the money it spends, just as it would earn a rate of return on a new power plant. In some cases customers will see bigger bills; others would see their bills go down because of lower consumption, but they would have to help pay the cost of any new equipment. The utility would subsidize the cost of new equipment.

"We believe there's a lot of low-hanging fruit there, energy efficiency that can be invested in that costs less than building a baseload plant," said Mike Chesser, the chairman and chief executive of the utility. "The trick is to get the business model in place," Mr. Chesser said.

He said that, as part of the agreement, the Sierra Club would help the company persuade regulators that costs and pollution would be lower if the money could be invested in conservation instead of in new construction. The effort might involve buying central air-conditioners in bulk, going into residential neighborhoods and replacing equipment house after house, he said.

The agreement comes soon after the Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmentalists negotiated with investors buying a Texas utility, TXU, in an agreement to drop eight proposed coal-fired plants.

Observatory **Lightning and Climate Change**

By HENRY FOUNTAIN

N.Y. Times, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

Nitrogen oxides, the reactive gases that contribute to smog near the ground and help regulate ozone far above it, are not made by cars and industry alone. A lot of NO_x, as the various gases are collectively known, is made by lightning.

Atmospheric scientists would like to know how much, to better understand processes related to pollution and climate change. But only indirect measurements have been made, by taking air samples from storm clouds.

It took lightning researchers to make the first direct measurements - touching off lightning by sending a small rocket into an electrically charged thundercloud at the International Center for Lightning Research and Testing in Camp Blanding, Fla.

"We put that lightning through a bottle," said Martin A. Uman, a University of Florida professor and co-director of the center, describing the experimental process. "Then we sucked the air out and measured the nitrogen oxides."

When the rocket is launched, it travels about 1,000 feet into the air, trailing a thin copper wire that is attached to the test chamber. The rocket sets off a discharge in the cloud, acting, as Dr. Uman put it, "like the top of the Empire State Building," which frequently induces lightning.

There is a wave of what is called continuous-current lightning through the cloud, and lightning travels down the wire to the test chamber, where it jumps a one-inch gap between two electrodes. The intense heat of the arc ionizes nitrogen and oxygen, which recombine in various forms as the air cools. By knowing the length of the arc, and precisely measuring the NO_x produced, the researchers came up with a number.

For the record, lightning produces 2 to 3 times 10²⁰ molecules of NO_x per meter of lightning per coulomb (a unit of charge), Dr. Uman, M. Mahbubur Rahman of Uppsala University in Sweden and others report in *Geophysical Research Letters*.

Atmospheric scientists had long assumed that most of the NO_x was created by powerful "return" strokes, what most people think of as lightning. But the research shows that discharges within clouds, which are much less dramatic, play a greater role.

"It's not the bright, impulsive thing you see" that's creating all the NO_x, Dr. Uman said. "It's the tail end of what you see."

'Seaport' to move inland?

Big rigs would clog fewer urban routes

BY SUE DOYLE, Staff Writer, LA Daily News

March 20, 2007

Seeking a solution to L.A.'s congested freeways, a county official has proposed creating an "inland port" in the Antelope Valley where big rigs would pick up goods transported there by rail instead of driving to seaside ports.

The idea by Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich is aimed at shifting a significant chunk of the 22,000 daily truck trips to and from the seaports of Long Beach and Los Angeles to the county's rural outskirts on the 5, 14 and 15 freeways.

Goods would be hauled on existing train tracks from the seaports to an Antelope Valley "inland port" transfer station, where they would be loaded onto trucks bound for markets nationwide.

"An 'inland port' would reduce truck-related congestion and pollution throughout the county," Antonovich said.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority board - on which Antonovich has a seat - is exploring the inland transfer-station idea along with other plans to move products through the county's

highways, railways and ports as part of a statewide program to increase commerce while creating as little pollution as possible.

The money for the ambitious plan could come from a \$20 billion transportation-bond measure approved by voters

last year. Of that, about \$2 billion is up for grabs for projects such as the inland port. The plan might also be eligible for some of an additional \$1 billion set aside for air-quality programs.

The California Transportation Commission will divvy up the money this year after state lawmakers decide what kinds of projects qualify.

Site still tentative

The inland port is also under consideration for the eastern edge of the San Gabriel Valley, but the wide-open spaces of the Antelope Valley make that region a more attractive prospect, said Michael Cano, Antonovich's transportation deputy. An exact spot for the facility hasn't been determined.

Willie Cook, who hauls truckloads of produce and meat between Nebraska and L.A., said a port in the Antelope Valley would provide tremendous relief from his long trip to the oceanside ports, where there's little room to park his rig or stay safely overnight.

"It would be so nice if we didn't have to drive to L.A.," Cook, 61, said as he walked his dog at a truck stop in Castaic.

The inland port could spark economic growth for the region by creating a new industry and jobs for residents, Palmdale Mayor Jim Ledford said. The proposal includes connecting the 14 and 15 freeways via a high-speed route that could link airports in Victorville and Palmdale, making the facilities bigger players in the movement of goods.

"We certainly have lots of room," Ledford said. "This could make us more competitive."

About half the goods coming into the L.A. and Long Beach seaports stay in Southern California, said Theresa Adams Lopez, spokeswoman for the Port of Los Angeles.

The rest is hauled back to stores and warehouses across the country - leaving the state to pick up the tab for the wear and tear from 18-wheelers on roadways and leaving commuters to sit in gridlock.

And with activity at both ports expected to increase as overseas trade keeps growing, the highway traffic will only get worse without a project such as the transfer station.

With money from the 2006 bond measure still hanging in the balance, Antonovich will also look for financial support from state and congressional leaders. He's also considering other techniques to pay for the freeway connections - from truck tolls to public-private partnerships.

In addition, Antonovich wants to establish a federal freight trust fund that could be generated by money coming into the ports and going directly to roadway improvements and expansion, Cano said.

Road funds dwindle

Currently, money to build roadways comes from the federal Highway Trust Fund, financed by a gasoline tax. Officials say the fund is dwindling because Americans are driving more fuel-efficient cars and filling up less often at the pump.

Still, to truck driver Patrick Zurakowski, driving in L.A. traffic is simply part of the job, although he admits having a new "port" in northern Los Angeles County would make the trip smoother.

"It would be easier not to drive to the ports in L.A.," he said. "But somebody is going to still have to do it."

Canada's Conservatives Avoid Election

By ROB GILLIES, The Associated Press
The Washington Post, March 20, 2007

TORONTO -- Canada's Conservative government on Monday avoided a forced early election after an opposition party agreed to support a budget that pledges billions for the provinces.

In unveiling its 2007 federal budget, Conservative Finance Minister John Flaherty announced nearly \$16.9 billion in spending, with more than \$11.8 billion going to the provinces.

The possibility that Canada could face a spring election was reduced after the separatist Bloc Quebecois from the French-speaking province of Quebec voiced support for the minority government's budget.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government has 125 of the 308 seats in Parliament and must rely on the opposition parties to get legislation passed. A vote against the budget by the majority in Parliament is a vote of no-confidence and would topple the government.

The opposition Liberal and New Democratic parties said they would vote against it, but the Bloc Quebecois ensured its passage by saying they would support it. The Bloc asked for almost \$3.4 billion for Quebec, but Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe said he was happy with getting 80 percent of that amount.

The extra funding to the provinces will be used for health care, infrastructure and post-secondary education.

Among other highlights of the budget is a new levy penalizing auto manufacturers up to \$3,397 for inefficient vehicles. Fuel-efficient cars will get a rebate worth up to \$1,698.

The new tax treatment for cars is among \$3.8 billion worth of environment-related measures in the budget, including \$1.27 billion for projects to cut [air pollution](#) and greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change was not a priority for Conservatives when they were elected in January 2006, but polls and pundits say it is one of the most important issues in Canada now.

Harper's government has gained in recent polls, but not enough to ensure he'd win the majority of the seats in Parliament in a new election.

Planners' denial not the end

Some affected land owners, developers to meet today to develop their plan of attack

BY JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, March 20, 2007

Developers are "crushed." Sierra Club officials are happy. Politicians are being careful with their words.

Last week's decision by Kern County planners to withdraw their support for 13 proposed northwest Bakersfield developments is sending ripples through the community.

The planners said Bakersfield's transportation system is incomplete, underfunded and unable to handle the traffic from the 6,500 new homes the developments would bring.

Dave Packer, a local developer tied to two of the projects, said many of the land owners and developers affected will meet today to talk over their plan of attack.

"This came as a real shock and was real unexpected," Packer said.

The traffic problems the county cited, he said, "have been here forever. This is not a problem that just occurred."

But Kern County Roads Director Craig Pope said it is becoming clear that planned transportation solutions can't be built fast enough -- if at all.

Pope said the city and county approved a plan called "Alternative 15" that was supposed to solve most of the metropolitan area's transportation problems.

"The problem is we can't afford it," Pope said. "To the people who say we can, I say, 'Show me the plan for how we can afford it.'"

Pope said both the city and county need to seriously investigate the traffic impacts of any development project proposed west of Highway 99.

Harry Love of the Sierra Club said the county's move is only a first step toward taking a hard look at how Bakersfield has been allowed to sprawl beyond the roads needed to serve the city.

"How many years have we been going to the City Council and the Board of Supervisors saying that we have to look at the cumulative issues?" he asked. "The two of them have to get together and decide how were going to deal with this."

County officials told the developers last week they can proceed with their projects but they won't get county planners' support. They would therefore have to convince county planning commissioners and supervisors to overrule their own staff.

Developers hit by the new ruling are a mix of big national companies, out-of-town groups and locals. Together they have around 6,500 homes planned west of Santa Fe Way in Rosedale.

"I'm a small guy. This really crushes me. I've got money into this," said Don Younger, who wants to build 55 lots. "I don't know where I go at all. I keep going along with the EIR (environmental impact report) at this point, I guess."

Steven Ness of Beech Street Development in Huntington Beach said he was surprised, but willing to work with the county.

"We understand there are certain project restrictions the county is experiencing -- specifically because the voters didn't pass the half-cent (transportation) sales tax," he said. "What we plan to do is work with the county to come up with a solution."

The decision by county staff puts pressure on politicians in both the city and the county.

Bakersfield Vice Mayor Harold Hanson said he knows the county believes road problems in Bakersfield are bad. But he thinks that view might be a bit pessimistic.

"Progress is progress. People, if they want to come to this area, they are going to demand housing," Hanson said.

But he said the county move does require the city to take a close look at how well its transportation plans are working.

"If we're going to put houses in we better be ready to put in the roads," he said.

Councilwoman Irma Carson said the city is doing a fine job of making development pay for roads.

"I think the city tries to be very cautious with new development," she said. "We will (continue to) require developers to have traffic mitigation plans and pay traffic impact fees."

County Supervisor Mike Maggard said the city and county have to talk and get the hard facts about how bad the transportation situation is.

"Do we really have a problem we can't fix or not?" he said. "If we have a problem that is of the magnitude that has been suggested, the only thing that will happen if we ignore it is that it will get worse."

Developer Matt Wade said he thinks it's unfair for the county to drop the whole metropolitan area's traffic troubles on the heads of 13 developers on the far western edge of town.

"It just does not make sense," he said. "They've been aware of the traffic issues for who knows how long."

He thinks most of the developers will ignore the advice of county planning officials.

"I think most of the developers involved are going to go forward to the Board of Supervisors and see if they will overturn the denial," he said.

Opinion in the Orange County Register, March 18, 2007

Global warming to front burner?

DENA BUNIS

One thing you learn early around here is that being impatient when it comes to getting legislation passed, particularly on a controversial topic, is a recipe for heartburn.

Take global warming.

For years, the environment has been one of those under-the-radar issues. There has always been a dedicated group of advocates and lawmakers, including Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., out there pushing for cleaner air and water. Boxer, for example, has made environmental issues a cornerstone in each of her re-election campaigns.

In the overall scheme of things, this issue hasn't gotten much traction and surely hasn't captured the imagination of the majority of senators and members of Congress.

But - no pun intended - there seems to be a change in the air.

Some signposts:

- Democrats win control of Congress. Boxer takes over chairmanship of the Environment and Public Works committee from Sen. James Inhofe, the Oklahoma Republican who doesn't believe humans are causing global warming. In the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, has done an end run around two chairmen who are not known as the greenest Democrats and created a special committee to look over those chairmen's shoulders and nudge the issue along. The two recalcitrant chairmen are Energy and Commerce chief Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich. - aka automaker country - and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rep. Nick Rahall, D-W.Va. - aka coal country.
- Scientific evidence increases. The buildup of scientific reports documenting human causes of global warming is overwhelming. It seems like every day another group of scientists is adding to the evidence.
- More influential lawmakers getting involved. At least a half-dozen comprehensive global warming bills have been introduced in each chamber. And some pretty high-profile politicians, including such presidential hopefuls as Sens. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., Barack Obama, D-Ill., and John McCain, R-Ariz., have been consistently outspoken on this.
- States are starting to move. California became the nation's first state to set limits on carbon emissions, but there are 29 states with some kind of climate change action plan. And local lawmakers recently testified before Boxer's committee that in the absence of federal and state action they are moving. An estimated 409 cities have taken some climate change-related action.
- Former Vice President Al Gore. Gore's documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," not only won the Oscar but - probably more important for the issue - the movie is the third-highest grossing documentary in U.S. history. Gore will be at a Boxer committee hearing on Wednesday and I'd expect he'll get rock star treatment in terms of the number of press folks who'll show up.
- The public seems to be demanding action. I say seems to be because when you look at public opinion polling, for example, energy now ranks fourth among the issues the public wants Congress to deal with. But according to Gallup's analysts, the public's inclusion of energy in the top tier of issues generally moves based on the price of gasoline. Gallup says energy ranked lower last fall when gasoline prices abated, but now with prices rising, it's right up there with Iraq, terrorism and the economy.

But the poll also shows that the percentage of people favoring drilling in the Alaskan Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has increased over the past three years and that what the public seems to want most is for the government to somehow control the oil industry.

Now the poll does show that large majorities of Americans favor more stringent emissions standards for cars, businesses and industry, and for setting greenhouse gas emission limits and developing alternative sources of fuels for cars.

The question as this debate unfolds will be how much pressure voters put on their lawmakers to act.

Boxer has been both an advocate and realist as this debate has started to unfold. She has signed on to the most aggressive bill when it comes to lowering greenhouse gas emissions. But as chairwoman of the committee, she has acknowledged that she might not be able to get that gold standard enacted into law.

The real question is what will happen this year.

As with many things in this town, it's not clear.

Gore's appearance before the House and Senate panels will certainly give the issue another bit of wide media exposure. His testimony before Boxer's committee will be the culmination of a series of hearings she has held building a record and gathering evidence to help persuade her colleagues to move on this issue this year.

Increasingly, though, other things are likely to get in the way.

There's Iraq. There's the latest preoccupation with the scandal surrounding the fired U.S. attorneys. And who knows that the next crisis will be?

Some believe Boxer and other environmentalists want to bring the issue to a crescendo to ensure that it gets a prominent position in the 2008 presidential election. Others believe there is a chance that some incremental bill that controls emissions will at least pass one of the chambers, maybe both.

As with many such large and complicated issues - Medicare, civil rights, health care - if the past is any guide, it could well take more than just this one Congress to get this matter dealt with.

We'll be watching.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Guest Commentary, Tuesday, March 20, 2007](#)

Let's not gamble on the fate of our planet

Fluctuations in the Earth's surface temperature are nothing new. The climate history of our planet includes periods of both extreme heat and cold, as well as more temperate periods such as the one we are living in now.

But here is a troubling fact to consider: According to a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 11 of the last 12 years rank among the 12 hottest since 1850.

Are humans to blame for this warming trend? Or is it simply attributable to random fluctuations of the kind the Earth has experienced since its inception? As the old saying goes, "there is no such thing as a sure thing."

Einstein's theory of relativity, which established that the gravitational forces we encounter are caused by warped space, is still referred to as a theory, and rightfully so. There may one day be an alternative explanation for gravity that trumps Einstein's, just as Einstein's theory improved upon Isaac Newton's.

Still, you would be foolish to drop a bowling ball held above your toes because there exists "no verifiable causal link" between gravity and warped space, to borrow the verbiage of global warming's naysayers.

Establishing causality is no easy task; and establishing causality with 100 percent certainty is impossible, as the example above illustrates. But what if I told you there was a 90 percent chance that the warming of the Earth's surface temperature is due to human activity - specifically, the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere? That is the IPCC report's conclusion.

You might gamble a dollar or \$2 on the remote odds of winning the lottery, but would you gamble the fate of our planet on a 10 percent chance that global warming is simply a random phenomena? I wouldn't. Those aren't very good odds, and the cost of inaction is too great. That's why I'm determined to do something about climate change.

As a recent appointee to the California Air Resources Board, I am part of a board responsible for implementing AB 32, the landmark law that mandates a cap on greenhouse gas emissions. As supervisor, I recently challenged all the Bay Area counties to participate in the Silicon Valley Leadership Group's "Cool Commutes Challenge to Reduce Greenhouse Gases." I am also vice-chair of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the founder of the Utilities & Sustainability Task Force.

As a member of each of these organizations, I encounter the same argument over and over again from those opposed to environmental regulation: Protecting the environment will hamper economic growth.

The argument that environmental regulation comes at a steep economic cost is not a new one. Indeed, it brings to memory a similar environmental battle held right here in our own backyard more than 40 years ago.

Believe it or not, there was once a time when the San Francisco Bay seemed destined to serve as a giant landfill. Before 1965, an average of 2,300 acres of the bay were being filled each year.

In response to the efforts of a few dedicated activists to raise awareness of this calamity, the State of California established the Bay Conservation and Development Commission. The BCDC drafted the San Francisco Bay Plan, which incorporated planning guidelines for industrial and commercial purposes, while preserving the bay's natural beauty and saving it from destruction. The policies of the Bay Plan were adopted into state law in 1969. I am proud to be a current alternate member of the BCDC.

Much the same as emissions caps are today, the San Francisco Bay Plan was attacked by opponents as harmful to the economy. But nothing could have been further from the truth. The Bay Area economy had not yet begun to tap its full potential. Today, I am confident that California's - and the nation's - economy will continue to grow in the wake of legislation aimed at curbing greenhouse gases.

As history has taught us, protecting our environment and growing our economy are not mutually exclusive alternatives.

Jerry Hill is a member of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Tuesday, March 20, 2007](#)

Editorial: Detroit shuffle

Trials of warming lawsuits must be public

Turn on a television or flip through a magazine, and you are likely to see ads for Toyota, Ford and other automobile manufacturers extolling their commitment to a cleaner, greener planet.

In federal courtrooms, their actions tell a much different story. For the last three years, trade groups that represent major automobile manufacturers have been suing California and other states to prevent them from regulating automobile emissions that cause global warming.

If that weren't egregious enough, the automakers are now effectively attempting to pursue these lawsuits in closed courtrooms. Federal judges must not let that happen.

At stake is nothing less than vanguard efforts by California and other states to fight global warming. California passed a law last year to reduce its greenhouse gases by 25 percent by 2020. The effectiveness of that mandate hinges on one passed in 2003 (known as the Pavley Law, after its sponsor, former Assemblywoman Fran Pavley), which targets emissions from cars

and trucks. If the Pavley law were to be terminated, it would undermine California's overall effort, since 41 percent of the state's greenhouse gases come from motor vehicles.

The automakers want this law terminated. Here in California, they have sued to block the Pavley law regulations in U.S. District Court. In January, Judge Anthony Ishii postponed the trial, pending an upcoming U.S. Supreme Court decision on whether carbon dioxide can be regulated as a pollutant.

The automakers have also sued Rhode Island and Vermont for passing similar laws, and in the Vermont case, a federal judge decided not to stay the proceedings. Ever since, the automakers have been pressing the court to hold much of the proceedings "in camera," or in closed chambers. The automakers claim it is impossible to achieve the emission reductions required by the Pavley-type laws, and to support this claim, they have filed tens of thousands of pages of documents that they say contain "highly confidential information."

While this trial might delve into some legitimate trade secrets, lawyers for Vermont and the Burlington Free Press say the automakers are exaggerating the extent of these secrets -- in all likelihood to avoid public scrutiny.

U.S. District Judge William Sessions III, who is overseeing the Vermont case, held a hearing yesterday on the automakers' request and says he will rule shortly. He should look skeptically on requests to close this trial, as should Judge Ishii if a similar motion is made in the California case.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, March 20, 2007](#)

Auto dealers care for profit, not society

In response to "Car seller battling state over air rules" (March 11, Page B-1), John Gardner, president of Central Valley Motors, and his fellow dealers are obviously putting greedy profits over the immediate and long-term health of valley residents. In my opinion they are being seen as hindering all attempts to advance better fuel and emission standards.

It will take sacrifices from regular citizens to business leaders to improve our air quality. He says that his family-owned business will suffer if manufacturers are forced to meet stricter and better fuel efficiency standards, yet millions are spent each year treating thousands of people due to high levels of air pollution that include unacceptable levels of particulate matter.

Central Valley Motors and others in the auto industry that are fighting much needed and overdue emissions standards are actually letting all of us know that they are not interested in running a socially conscious business. Their only interest is their bottom line. It's ironic that what Gardner sees as a negative - higher fuel standards - has actually been a shot in the arm for companies such as Toyota and Honda.

VICTOR CERQUEIRA, Modesto

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Tuesday, March 20, 2007:](#)

Making things worse

The importance of the mining project on Jesse Morrow Mountain falls upon medical and teaching professionals. They will have to deal with all the problems of children who will develop more asthma and other related diseases from breathing the polluted air we will have if the mining project is approved. The Cemex company will be blasting daily, with particulates floating in the already bad air we breathe.

The "Friends of Jesse Morrow Mountain" need the professionals to do some research on this to realize what is at stake here. We ask them to go to our Web site www.jessemorrowmountain.org and begin to ask questions and do their own research. We have a film presentation we can show at any meetings.

They may contact me at 638-2771 in Reedley, or Dr. Gene and Debbie Otto at 787-2335.
Georgia Linscheid, Reedley

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Baja California's Environmental Protection Secretariat taking control of 13 air monitoring stations in their region. For more information, contact Maricela at (559) 230-5849.

Noroeste de México monitoreará su contaminación del aire en coordinación con California

La EPA anunció que dejará gradualmente su vigilancia en Baja para redirigir recursos a California, mientras que el gobierno bajacaliforniano aumentará personal y presupuesto en las estaciones

Noticiero Latino, Fresno, CA

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, March 19, 2007

El gobierno del estado mexicano de Baja California, en la frontera con California, inicia esta primavera un proceso en que vigilará la contaminación del aire en su región para completar el trabajo de la Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental, la EPA, en inglés, en el sur de California, la zona estadounidense más contaminada.

Luego de años en que la EPA se encargó de atender 13 estaciones de monitoreo a la contaminación en Baja California, el estado mexicano hará ese trabajo por sí mismo.

La EPA anunció que dejará gradualmente su vigilancia en Baja para redirigir recursos a California, mientras que el gobierno bajacaliforniano aumentará personal y presupuesto en las estaciones.