

Climate change rage a lot of hot air?

Poll finds Californians opinionated, hypocritical on environmental issues

By Steve Geissinger, MEDIANEWS SACRAMENTO BUREAU

Tri-Valley Herald, Monday, July 30, 2007, and Contra Costa Times, Sunday, July 29, 2007

SACRAMENTO - Many Californians' alarmed talk about global warming amounts to a lot of hot air.

Experts say residents are growing more opinionated on the issue - and hypocritical.

A survey by the Public Policy Institute of California shows most residents think dirty air from cars is helping foster disasters such as drought and hurting their health through ailments such as asthma.

They want immediate action from government officials and presidential candidates with strong environmental protection stands. They support current attempts to lower greenhouse gas emissions from autos.

"For the first time, a majority of Californians say global warming poses a very serious threat to the state's future economy and quality of life," said PPIC President Mark Baldassare.

The 54 percent who hold that view mark a 5-point increase since last July and a 15-point increase since July 2005.

"More Californians are associating global warming with a greater variety of environmental threats. It's not just air pollution. It's concern over increased droughts and flooding," Baldassare said.

But the poll released last week also found two-thirds of workers put up with pain at the gasoline pump so they can drive solo to jobs - a fourth in SUVs.

Just 13 percent car pool and 7 percent use public transit.

"You have to wonder about the gap between behavior and opinions," said Jack Pitney, a political science professor at ClaremontMcKenna College.

The survey also indicated 70 percent of Californians are ready to buy more fuel-efficient cars, despite the extra cost.

But analysts say, in another case of saying one thing and doing another, it may be that few of them will ever actually pay to back up their comments.

"It's easy to tell a pollster you're willing to sacrifice for a cleaner environment," Pitney said. "But it's harder to do it."

Some of the building concern can be attributed to politicians' rhetoric, said David McCuan, a political science professor at Sonoma State University.

"But in reality, Californians' real challenges are local - housing, education, roads, and a fair wage from a steady job," McCuan said.

Experts also say that people voice opinions contrary to their actions in hopes that the collective momentum will force the hard choices on them that they can't make by themselves.

"We buy gas guzzlers but vote for gas sipping," says columnist James Surowiecki in New Yorker magazine. "Our desires as individuals to protect ourselves in large cars and to outclass our neighbors encourage us to buy bigger and bigger vehicles with more and more horsepower."

"In calling for laws requiring better gas mileage in our cars, voters are really saying that they're unhappy with the collective result of the choices they make as buyers," he says. "Sometimes, they know, we need to save ourselves from ourselves."

Residents truly embracing the fight against global warming "need to connect the environmental dots," Pitney said.

"Over the long run, high gasoline prices are the most efficient way to encourage conservation," he said. "Yet I've never seen any Californians cheering when the pump price goes up."

Rising ozone hurting plants

Research shows higher air pollution damages their ability to absorb carbon dioxide, contributing to warming

By Amber Dance, Los Angeles Times
Contra Costa Times, Saturday, July 28, 2007

Rising levels of ozone pollution near the ground are damaging the ability of plants to take up carbon dioxide, reducing their potential to act as a counterbalance to greenhouse gas accumulation, scientists said Wednesday.

When affected by projected high levels of ozone, plants can absorb up to one-third less carbon dioxide than healthy plants, the researchers found.

The finding adds a component that will have to be factored into climate models used to assess the future effects of global warming, they said.

The study, published online by the journal *Nature*, was the first to consider the indirect effect of ozone on vegetation.

"It points out a real gap in our knowledge of climate change," said David Karnosky, a global change scientist at Michigan Technological University who was not associated with the study.

Ozone forms when nitrogen oxides and volatile hydrocarbons meet in the presence of sunlight. The precursors to ozone come primarily from the burning of fossil fuels, although plants also emit carbon compounds that can participate in the reaction.

High in the stratosphere, ozone is beneficial, shielding Earth from harmful radiation. In the lower atmosphere, it functions as a greenhouse gas and is an air pollutant that can cause people to have difficulty breathing.

Ozone pollution is particularly high downwind of industrial areas across the Eastern United States, Southern California and parts of Texas.

The gas attacks plants by breaking down their cells, reducing growth and causing premature aging.

While the U.S. has been trying to limit nitrogen oxide emissions, ozone levels are creeping upward because of continued burning of fossil fuels.

In some areas of the world, ozone levels are now above 40 parts per billion. Some computer models project that 40 parts per billion will be the global norm by 2100, and levels will exceed 70 parts per billion in some areas, according to the study.

The researchers, led by Stephen Sitch, a climate scientist at the Met Office Hadley Centre for Climate Change in Britain, used computer models to analyze how plant life would respond to increasing levels of carbon dioxide and ozone.

Sitch and his colleagues projected that the largest reduction in carbon absorption would take place over North America, Europe, China and India.

"In those areas where ozone is a very large driver, the capability of those trees planted to sequester carbon is going to be limited," Karnosky said.

The scientists have not yet calculated how the ozone factor will affect temperature predictions.

Merced County offering free bus rides to cut down air pollution during worst months of the year

Merced ranks sixth nationwide as most ozone-polluted.

Leslie Albrecht, Staff Writer
Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, July 28, 2007

Donnell Hellams looks forward to August - not because of the long days and warm nights, but because of the free bus rides.

Starting Wednesday, Hellams and other riders of Merced County's The Bus will forego paying fares and ride free through the end of October.

The free rides - offered on all of The Bus's fixed routes - are part of the county's effort to cut down on air pollution during the smoggiest months of the year. More people on the bus means fewer cars on the road and less exhaust fumes in the air.

That's crucial during the summer, when the sun "bakes" car emissions to create ozone-filled smog, said Janelle Schneider, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Merced's air is some of the dirtiest in the country. The American Lung Association's 2007 State of the Air Report ranked Merced as the sixth-most ozone-polluted city nationwide.

From June to September, the Air District runs its Spare the Air program, which warns residents when air quality reaches unhealthy levels. On Spare the Air days, people are urged to do their part to limit pollution. Those steps include not using lighter fluid on the barbecue, not cutting the lawn with a gas-powered mower and, of course, not driving.

That's where The Bus' free rides fit in. Now in its third year, the program has been nothing less than a transit triumph, said Larnold Jones, Assistant Transportation Manager for Merced County Transit.

"When we started it we thought well we might get 20 or 30,000 extra people on The Buses a month, but then we were like, whoa, let's go back and check this," said Jones.

When officials counted the numbers again, they found that ridership had more than doubled, from 50,000 or 60,000 riders a month to 116,000 to 120,000. Last year, the program attracted 130,000 riders a month.

"I wish they'd do it more often," said Hellams, who rides The Bus at least once a week from Los Banos to Merced for physical therapy appointments.

Hellams said he appreciates the environmental benefits of the free bus rides, but the real payoff is financial. At \$4 a pop, regular trips to and from Los Banos add up quickly.

Merced County Transit is reimbursed by the federal government to make up for lost fare revenue.

Free bus rides aren't the only way Merced residents can help cut pollution. There's also two-wheeled transit. A new group called the Merced Bike Coalition is hosting group bike rides once a month to promote cycling as an alternative form of transportation.

"People always ask what they can do to clean the air and just getting out of your car any way you can by either by riding the bus or riding a bike is a real practical thing you can do, no matter who are, to help clean the air," said Mary-Michal Rawling of the Merced-Mariposa Asthma Coalition, which helped start the Bike Coalition.

In November, bus fares go back to normal (\$1 a ride in the city) but some riders who try The Bus for the first time during the free ride program stick with it even when they have to pay, said Jones. Last year about 14 percent of riders who tried The Bus during Spare the Air season kept riding after fares went back to normal.

"This is an opportunity to try Merced County Transit and take advantage of the free rides and see if we can help you get where you need to go when you need to get there," said Jones.

And leave the driving to The Bus.

Help Spare the Air

What Else Can I Do During Spare the Air Season to Keep the Air Clean?

Carpool or use alternative transportation.

If you must drive alone, do all your errands at one time.

If you barbecue, use an electric briquette starter instead of lighter fluid or better, use a propane or natural gas grill.

Avoid using gas-powered lawn care equipment.

Use water-based, not oil-based, paints and solvents. Bring your lunch to work to avoid a midday trip.

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

House passes divisive farm bill

By The Associated Press - Erica Werner
Madera Tribune, July 28, 2007

WASHINGTON - California farmers would see a bonanza of new money in a giant farm bill passed by the House on Friday that for the first time includes significant expenditures for fruit and vegetable growers.

Spending on traditional commodity subsidies, food stamps and other programs in the \$286 billion bill still dwarfs money for produce. Nonetheless California growers, the nation's biggest producers of fruits and vegetables, said they'd made historic advances.

"We're extremely ecstatic, even jubilant. As you know our industry has not been a part of the farm bill historically," said Tom Nassif, president and chief executive of the Western Growers Association, which represents farmers in California and Arizona. "What we said is that we want our fair share. ... This is a great step in that direction."

The five-year measure passed on a vote of 231-191. It includes about \$1.6 billion to help so-called specialty crops, the terms for fruits, vegetables, nuts and nursery products, in some cases creating new programs. Among the expenditures:

- \$350 million for a fruit and vegetable snack program that would allow specialty crop farmers to sell their products for school lunches.
- \$365 million for specialty crop competitiveness grants.
- \$215 million for a specialty crop research initiative.
- \$25 million for dedicated organic research.
- [\\$150 million for an air quality mitigation program that would help farmers in the San Joaquin Valley, one of the nation's most polluted air regions.](#)
- \$200 million for pest detection and surveillance.
- \$25 million in produce food safety grants.

"California agriculture is finally getting the respect and treatment it deserves," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced, who chairs an Agriculture Committee subcommittee and helped negotiate the numbers.

Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, cited the \$25 million for food safety grants as a potential hedge against scares like the spinach E. coli outbreak on the Central Coast last year.

Sacramento also got a win as Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Sacramento, helped get the Sacramento River included as one of five priority projects for funding under a new Regional Water Enhancement Program.

Cardoza thanked House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-San Francisco, for her support for programs important to California, but Pelosi had to wrangle the bill to passage over objections from some Democrats and GOP budget hawks who wanted deeper cuts to traditional subsidies for corn, wheat, soybeans, cotton and rice growers.

As passed the legislation aims to ban subsidies to farmers whose income averages more than \$1 million a year, down from the current limit of \$2.5 million. Still, it includes about \$42 billion in subsidies and other help for farmers. An amendment that would have imposed far stricter income limits on farmers while spending more on specialty crop and other programs lost on a lopsided vote.

The bill includes a long-sought deal to require country-of-origin labeling for meats and other foods.

But a tax measure to finance some \$4 billion in food stamp and other nutrition programs, which would impose new taxes on certain multinational companies with U.S. subsidiaries, sparked bitter opposition from Republicans.

The final tally was not enough to overcome President Bush's threatened veto, and Senate action is also uncertain.

California's House delegation split nearly along party lines. Nine-term GOP Rep. John Doolittle of Rocklin said it was the first farm bill he'd opposed and that despite his support for specialty crop spending he voted "no" partly because of the tax provision.

The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, a national coalition of more than 120 specialty crop organizations representing 350 specialty crops, said it was encouraged by the bill's passage.

"For the first time, the farm bill recognizes the priorities of an industry that accounts for more than half of all crop value in the country," the alliance said. "Our broad-based coalition has worked for more than two years for passage of a bill that is balanced and equitable for the country's specialty crop producers."

As a result of its passage, "our industry is closer to being better equipped to compete in a global marketplace, and Americans will enjoy a safer, healthier and more nutritious food supply," the alliance said.

House passes farm bill, but veto threat looming Bush wants to ban subsidies to farmers with higher incomes.

By MICHAEL DOYLE, Sun-Star Washington Bureau
Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, July 28, 2007

WASHINGTON - The House of Representatives on Friday approved a farm bill that devotes record funds to fruits and vegetables while imposing subsidy changes denounced by critics as inadequate.

The House approved the bill by a somewhat misleading 231-191 margin. Many Republicans actually support the underlying legislation, but voted no because they opposed the last-minute addition of a tax provision.

"We have been able to put a bill together that has broad support all across the spectrum," said the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn.

In fact, the politics, prospects and policies of the Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act of 2007 are quite complex. Questions may outnumber answers.

Question: Is Congress done? Answer: Hardly. The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee must now write its own version of the bill. In theory, the Senate must finish in September so the House and Senate can reconcile their competing bills before the current farm bill expires Sept. 30.

Peterson acknowledged it might be a stretch to finish everything by then.

Q: Is President Bush happy with the bill? A: Not yet. While saying the White House "appreciates the progress" made so far, the Office of Management and Budget warns that the current version would be vetoed. For instance, the Bush administration wants to ban subsidies to farmers with gross annual incomes greater than \$200,000. The House bill sets the income limit for subsidy recipients at \$1 million.

Q: Should I care about this if I'm not a farmer? A: Absolutely. For instance, the bill increases benefits for the Food Stamp program that currently serves 25 million U.S. residents, and it expands to all 50 states an after-school snack program.

Other effects of federal policy on food price and availability grow very complicated. For instance, the bill pleases sugar producers by guaranteeing minimum prices. Consumers, though, pay more at the grocery store because of this sugar policy, the non-partisan Government Accountability Office has concluded.

Q: Who are the big winners? A: Specialty crops, certainly. This means fruits, vegetables, wine - everything not covered by traditional crop subsidies. The bill counts \$1.7 billion over five years for specialty crops.

This is roughly quadruple the amount authorized in 2002. It would pay for research, school lunch purchases, promotion campaigns and more. It's also a long-term victory for industry groups like the Western Growers Association, because this gets specialty crops into future farm bills as well.

"This bill threads the needle," said the chairman of the House horticulture and organic agriculture subcommittee, Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced. "There is something for everyone to dislike, but everyone got what they needed."

Q: How about commodities like cotton, rice and wheat? A: Winners, all. The House bill largely retains the crop subsidy program written in 2002. Farmers still will be able to collect several kinds of subsidies, which in 2005 totaled \$19 billion nationwide.

Farmers in Iowa, Texas and Illinois led the way in subsidies in 2005. Even California growers, generally more known for their fruits and vegetables, collected \$649 million in Agriculture Department payments that year.

Q: Those numbers are pretty impressive. Where do they come from? A: The Environmental Working Group, another winner in the farm bill debate.

The watchdog group's online subsidy database, searchable at www.ewg.org, has become an indispensable tool in farm policy. Since 2004, the subsidy database has recorded more than 86 million searches.

Q: Who are the big losers? A: Self-styled reformers lost big. So did bipartisanship, at least temporarily.

Late Thursday night, the House by a 309-117 margin soundly rejected a sweeping proposal to cut further subsidies and provide more for nutrition and conservation.

Critics also couldn't stop the House bill from boosting subsidy payments that individual farmers could receive. Individual direct payments could total \$60,000 instead of the current \$40,000 limit.

And, on Friday, farm-state lawmakers brushed off a challenge to the controversial sugar program.

"Under the guise of saving the family farm, Democrats and Republicans have turned the farm safety net into a slop bucket for American corporate welfare," complained Raymond Offenheiser, president of Oxfam America.

The cozy bipartisanship that customarily enfolds a farm bill also took a hit. Last week, the House Agriculture Committee passed the bill unanimously. This week, angry Republicans rallied against a last-minute, multibillion-dollar provision they call a tax hike but that Democrats said simply closed a tax loophole affecting foreign corporations.

Only 19 Republicans voted for the bill Friday, while 177 voted against it. Democrats supported the bill by a 212-14 margin.

Q: Did the House amend the farm bill much? A: No. The committee wrote a 744-page bill that survived largely intact, even though 31 amendments were considered by the full House on Thursday and Friday.

The most ambitious amendments failed. The ones accepted were generally small bore, like a "pollinator protection" measure pushed by Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Fla., that authorizes an unspecified sum to research the collapse of bee colonies.

Q: A bill this big must have lots of earmarks, right? A: Not really. The bill does target some spending; for instance, a new \$300 million regional water quality program is supposed to give priority to the Sacramento River watershed, the Everglades and the Upper Mississippi River Basin, among others. The bill also steers money to certain regions without naming them.

For instance, a new [\\$150 million air quality grant](#) program aids farmers in California's San Joaquin Valley, although it's not explicitly named. In general, though, the farm bill does not spell out many earmarks.

Q: How much will this bill cost? A: A lot. The legislation has a five-year price tag of \$286 billion, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Over 10 years, the estimated cost would be \$614 billion. Food stamps account for much of this.

The real cost could be higher, as the Congressional Budget Office notes that lawmakers wrote the bill so that it shifts billions of dollars of spending past the 10-year mark.

U.S. Airlines Under Pressure To Fly Greener Carriers Already Trying to Save Fuel as Europe Proposes Plan

By Del Quentin Wilber, Washington Post Staff Writer

Washington Post, Saturday, July 28, 2007

Airlines and airplane makers have largely slipped under the radar in the debate over global warming.

But a dispute over a European emissions-trading proposal has caught many carriers and their trade groups by surprise, spurring them to launch a public relations blitz highlighting their green bona fides, even if most of their work has been aimed at boosting their bottom lines

Long a punching bag for consumer complaints and neighborhood protests over noise and poor air quality, the industry wants to avoid becoming a target on another front.

"People are looking across the Atlantic and seeing what is happening in Europe," said Nancy N. Young, the new vice president of environmental affairs at the Air Transport Association, U.S. carriers' main trade group. "We know that it's coming here. . . . Aviation has lost the public square in this debate. We need to do a better job of letting people know that our environmental interests are directly aligned with our business interests."

Industry officials are quick to point out that commercial aviation contributes a very small percentage of the greenhouse gas and particle emissions that scientists blame for global warming. But they also acknowledge that aviation's impact could surge if the industry continues its worldwide growth spurt.

Boeing expects the number of commercial jetliners to nearly double, to 36,420, in the next 20 years. The Federal Aviation Administration expects 1.2 billion passengers a year to travel on U.S. carriers by 2020, up from 741 million last year.

By 2050, the industry is expected to contribute anywhere from 6 to 10 percent of the gases and particles tied to global warming, up from about 3 percent today, said Michael J. Prather, a professor at the University of California at Irvine and lead author of a 1999 report on aviation's role in global warming for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

"It's a growth industry that lives off" jet fuel, Prather said.

Aviation's expansion has led to political problems for the industry in Europe, where there is increasing pressure to cut back on air travel, reduce airport expansion and increase taxes on tickets. Some religious leaders have suggested that flying on vacation is immoral.

In response, the European Union proposed rules that would require airlines serving domestic routes to enter into an emissions-trading scheme by 2011. Carriers flying to and from Europe, including U.S. airlines, would have to enter the system by the following year. The plan is based on one already in operation for other European industries that buy and sell credits to emit certain amounts of carbon dioxide.

The United States and other nations plan to vigorously fight the proposal at an international meeting of aviation authorities in Montreal in September. They say it would drive up costs for airlines and violate the principle of air-service deals brokered between governments. Moreover, they say, Europe doesn't have the right to force carriers to buy credits for carbon dioxide emitted in U.S. or international airspace, and they would rather set up a global framework for emissions trading than confront a hodgepodge of different regional systems.

"The emissions issue is real," said Marion C. Blakey, the FAA's administrator. "But we want to move forward on a global basis. To this point, the Europeans have shown no flexibility." Some members of Congress are also skeptical of the European plan. House Transportation Committee Chairman James L. Oberstar (D-Minn.) said he met in April with European leaders in Brussels and urged them to reconsider it. "It's an invasion of our sovereignty," he said.

Oberstar said he was concerned about aviation's affect on global warming and would hold hearings on emissions trading. An FAA funding bill under consideration in the House has several provisions dealing with greenhouse gas emissions, including the development of more fuel-efficient planes

In the shadow of the global fight, U.S. airlines, international carriers and manufacturers have been pumping out press releases to highlight their efforts to be greener. They also do not hesitate to mention that they work in one of the few industries where reducing carbon dioxide emissions, the main culprit in climate change, is closely tied to their own economic well being. Fuel is the top expense for most carriers. Trade groups boast that last year U.S. airlines used about 1 billion fewer gallons of fuel than in 2000, but carried 12 percent more passengers.

"We make no bones that our saving fuel is in the company's best interest because we are saving dollars to the bottom line," American Airlines spokesman Tim Wagner said. "But the good news is that lies in a parallel direction with decreasing our environmental impact. . . . Our corporate clients have been increasingly asking about global climate change."

American and Delta Air Lines jets, for example, often taxi using one engine to reduce fuel use, and the two carriers have promoted their efforts to add swept extensions to their planes' wings to reduce drag and boost efficiency. They are also pushing to incorporate better and more fuel-efficient navigation procedures into their operations.

American launched an effort to find ways to reduce the weight of planes, removing ovens, galleys and even potable water to make them lighter. And Delta has recently arranged for passengers to make donations to an environmental group to offset the carbon they emit on a flight. The group, the Conservation Fund, uses the money to plant trees.

In a recent speech, Giovanni Bisignani, the head of the International Air Transport Association, lauded the sector's 70 percent improvement in fuel efficiency since the dawn of the jet age. While admitting that "our carbon footprint is growing, and that is not politically acceptable," he set 2050 as a goal for having a "zero emissions" plane.

Bisignani said in an interview that he was hoping to get ahead of the debate because he was concerned that politicians would target airlines to boost "their green credentials."

"We are only a small part of an important problem," Bisignani said.

Aircraft and engine makers are also jumping on the green bandwagon in hope of avoiding more regulations.

At the recent Paris Air Show, the industry's major trade meeting, Boeing, Airbus and engine makers promoted technologies and their efforts to reduce carbon emissions. A few weeks ago, Boeing launched its 787 Dreamliner, which it says will be 20 percent more fuel efficient than the plane it is replacing. Airbus has also lauded the fuel efficiency of its new super-jumbo A380.

Under pressure from clients who want fuel-efficient planes, Boeing representatives said the company will not introduce a plane unless it is at least 15 percent more efficient than the one it is replacing.

Rolls-Royce, which is supplying engines for the 787, also is trying to find new ways to make planes more fuel efficient. Richard J. Parker, the company's director of research and technology, said that most in aviation circles "feel a little shell-shocked" by the public outcry over the industry's contribution to climate change because they have made such strides in improving fuel burn.

Airplane and engine makers have set a goal of reducing carbon emissions on the next generation of jets by 50 percent by 2020, Parker said, adding that those reductions could come with trade-offs.

If engineers focus on reducing carbon dioxide emissions, new engines might be noisier or produce more nitrogen oxides, gases that mostly harm local air quality.

"Will people living near airports win out, or will the planet as a whole win out?" Parker said.

Mayor Tries to Transform Mexico City

By JULIE WATSON, The Associated Press
Washington Post, Sunday, July 29, 2007

MEXICO CITY -- The mayor of crime-ridden, smog-choked Mexico City is trying to do what some might consider impossible: transform his megalopolis into a place that's more healthy, livable and even fun.

And despite much skepticism, initiatives such as "urban beaches" and outdoor movies have become a wild success.

Mexico's capital of nearly 20 million people exemplifies chaos. Its potholed streets are snarled by more than 4 million drivers each day. The city is notorious for "express kidnappings," in which victims are forced to drain their bank accounts from automated tellers at gunpoint. Millions live in cement hovels with little running water.

At times, the city seems hostile to human life itself -- one sinkhole recently swallowed a young man, along with a car and a building's facade.

Since taking office in December, Mayor Marcelo Ebrard has imposed tougher traffic rules to make pedestrians safer, installed security cameras in high-crime neighborhoods and required city staffers to ride their bicycles to work once a month.

The city trucked in sand to build "urban beaches" at seven public pools, screened outdoor movies and inaugurated "bicycle Sundays" when thousands of cyclists, skaters and pedestrians take over the main avenues. Ebrard even invited former Vice President Al Gore to lecture city residents about climate change this week.

On Sunday, the government held a "green referendum," asking capital residents to weigh in on questions such as whether buses and taxis should be replaced with newer, cleaner vehicles.

The mayor's goal is transforming the city into Latin America's latest model of urban renewal. The big idea behind these relatively inexpensive measures is that by encouraging happiness, rather than solely economic growth, he just might change residents' image of their city -- and themselves.

"For us, it's important to continue promoting healthy living, and that means taking back public spaces to create a safe, better city," Ebrard explains.

So far, residents are packing the urban beaches and, on Sundays, the city's famous tree-lined Reforma Avenue.

Small things can make a big difference, said Jorge Melindez, 41, who brought his three children to bike down the normally congested main thoroughfare.

"It's so stressful living here and this gives us a break after screaming at cars all week," Melindez said. "This doesn't take time away from confronting the problems. In fact, it helps so we can confront them."

Ebrard, 47, a former police chief, is following the example of Bogota, Colombia, where Enrique Penalosa built bike paths, closed thoroughfares to cars on Sundays and kept vehicles from parking on sidewalks. Penalosa's efforts softened life's edges in Bogota, another kidnapping-plagued Latin American capital.

Ebrard's efforts may even restore the popularity of his battered, leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party. The party's losing presidential candidate, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, alienated supporters with protests that clogged the city for months last year.

Ebrard has become a leading figure in the party and some speculate he could be a candidate for president in the 2012 elections. He's getting recognition internationally, as well: The World Bank lauded his efforts to reduce emissions and handed over a check for more than \$168,000 to build nearly 200 miles of bike lanes in the city.

But only time will tell if his plans can transform Mexico City.

Riding a bike remains an act of courage during the week because few vehicles respect bike lanes.

Then there are the sinkholes. Mexico City has at least 200 fissures that have made some streets impassable. Civil Defense Secretary Elias Moreno blames earthquakes, groundwater extraction and torrential rains for the problem, and the city has been using cement to try to plug up the holes.

Jesus Robles, president of the capital's leftist Alternative Party, said Ebrard should focus on solving bigger problems in the city, such as water leaks, which he said go three months without being addressed.

Associated Press Writer Carlos Rodriguez contributed to this report.

HOW TO FIX OUR GRIDLOCK

BY SUE DOYLE, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Saturday, July 28, 2007

Build monorails. Forget monorails. Double-deck the freeways. Get rid of car-pool lanes.

From Santa Clarita to Studio City, commuters around the region have resoundingly spoken out about what drives them crazy getting around Los Angeles - and how to make it better.

The ideas on how to ease the Southland's persistent bottlenecks come even as a recent state report projects California's population will balloon to 60 million by 2050, further straining already jammed freeways and roads.

But while transit officials grapple with funding issues and dwindling space, nearly 100 readers who outlined their transit visions to the Daily News were quick to target two key areas: public transportation and freeways.

And the short of it is: More, more, more. And speed up the pace between designing projects and building them to save money and to get motorists moving sooner.

"Think of the comprehensive benefits and savings on so many levels if we would get our act together, and do it in five to 10 years," said Steve Carrizosa of Los Angeles. "We could do it!"

Fixes for the region's freeways - many of which are transformed into virtual parking lots during rush hour - drew a lot of readers' attention.

From adding more lanes - including at least one for just buses - to double-decking, adding tolls and lowering speed limits, motorists assailed the Southland's current freeway system.

"Should the FlyAway transit system, and other public transportation systems, have their own lane on the freeways, the majority of us would be delighted to use it and leave our cars parked," said Sylvia Aronica of Arleta.

Others weighed in on double-decking some freeways, and more suggested charging tolls to use roadways to help cover construction and maintenance costs.

Caltrans officials have previously said double-deck freeways would be massively expensive and difficult to engineer in earthquake country.

But the concept of paying tolls to use certain freeway lanes - known as high-occupancy toll lanes - has caught on well in San Diego and Orange County and is an idea that Los Angeles should consider, said Robert Poole, director of transportation studies at the Reason Foundation.

Under the program, drivers pay a toll that's as high as it needs to be to keep the lanes moving. The lanes provide reliable and quick alternatives for motorists who don't have much time to be stuck in traffic.

"Most people don't use the HOT lanes every day, but they have the security of knowing that if they really do need it, they have the option," Poole said.

Bobbie DeNisi of Los Angeles took the concept of double-decking freeways in another direction with the idea of constructing a two-lane elevated roadway down the center of the San Diego Freeway to the airport.

The roadway would remove all the airport traffic from the regular freeway lanes and could be supported with money from tourism. It could stretch from Sherman Way to Rosecrans Avenue with no exits except the main one at the airport.

"Let (tourists) support the roadways that locals need to use for everyday," DeNisi said. "And let the airport pay for the extra traffic it causes."

Meanwhile, a hefty chunk of readers urged more motorists to get out of their cars and use public transportation.

The result would free up the roads and money that would have been spent for expanding freeways could be spent on other things to improve the community.

Retired engineer Frederick Frey said he uses the Orange and Red lines at least once a week to go downtown from his home in Canoga Park.

But Frey wonders why there aren't more people on board.

"People will spend thousands of dollars to take trips to New York, London and Paris and use the subway to go all around the city," Frey said. "But if you suggest to them that they should try using the Orange or Red lines, they are offended."

Mass transit also could be expanded with more subways, light rail and busways, and some suggested raising the gas tax to \$1 a gallon to help pay for it.

Solo drivers also could be charged for the environmental and economic impact they cause, said Jay Ross of West Los Angeles.

"The key is to understand that building new roads and widening freeways will not solve our traffic problems," Ross said. "You can't build out of traffic."

A number of staunch supporters called for monorails, including one that would wrap around the city and run up to Thousand Oaks.

Naturally, however, there are the critics.

"Forget about monorails," said Matthew Hetz of Los Angeles. "At Disneyland, they are a toy and amusement ride ... and do not work for real-world scenarios."

While a stronger mass-transit system with more people using it would help the region, Poole said that in the end, public transportation will play just a small role in solving the area's troubles.

Coaxing people out of their cars to use a mass-transit system that doesn't always go directly where they need to go - and can take longer - is hard to do, Poole said.

"The big problem is that most people want other people to use transit and not themselves," Poole said.

At the same time, building more freeway lanes and other transportation projects that generate emissions are becoming more difficult because of the impact on air quality, people and communities.

"There's a lot of concern about global warming," said Mark Pisano, executive director of Southern California Association of Governments. "The public needs to understand that with transportation projects that generate capacity and emissions, we'll have a difficult time with them."

Ultimately, amid all of the ideas on how to revamp the region's roads - everything from making Victory Boulevard a one-way route and coordinating more traffic signals - Jean Ross of Mission Hills had what could be the most valuable idea of all.

"Courtesy should be an everyday occurrence for all of us," she said. "Especially on our overcrowded freeways and streets."

[Fresno Bee Editorial, Monday, July 30, 2007:](#)

Valley residents want air board changes

Survey points to support for new members with expertise.

Valley residents overwhelmingly favor changes in the makeup of the regional air district's governing board. That's the clear conclusion from a new survey by a respected state research organization. Will the Valley air board get the message?

History suggests not. But some 76% of Valley residents and a whopping 80% of likely voters believe the air board should include people with professional expertise in health and environmental issues, according to the survey by the non-partisan Public Policy Institute of California. The air board currently comprises only elected officials and is dominated by members of the boards of supervisors from the eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

We've long advocated altering that structure, along with many others. Several legislative efforts to effect changes in the board's makeup have been rebuffed, but the new survey suggests there is a powerful constituency for such reforms. Here's hoping these new numbers add arrows to the quivers of those trying to reshape this crucial agency.

The problem has been that the elected officials who dominate the air board are frequently tied very closely to the same agricultural, industrial and commercial interests they regulate. Those interests naturally resist changes that, in many cases, make their operations more expensive.

The result is a bias in favor of the status quo. But the status quo, in this case, can be deadly. The Valley's bad air causes hundreds of deaths, thousands of illnesses and billions in additional health costs in the Valley each year.

The new survey also points out that Valley residents are more keenly aware of the problems of air quality than people in other areas of the state. Across California, 35% of residents say "air pollution is a big problem in their region." In the Valley that figure is 56%.

And more Valley residents -- 35% -- are worried about the impact of poor air on their families than is the case around the state, at 25%.

More survey results:

More residents -- 29% -- identified air pollution as the state's biggest environmental problem.

More residents -- 37% -- look to the state for enforcement of air quality standards than local or federal governments. Regional air districts -- such as the Valley's -- which are limited to controlling stationary sources of pollution -- are favored by a mere 16% of state residents.

In the effort to reduce our dependency on foreign oil imports, state residents favor better fuel efficiency by a wide margin -- 75% to 41% -- over allowing more oil drilling off California's coast.

Support for AB 32, the ground-breaking law requiring California to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, is even more popular now that it has been signed than it was when it was first being discussed last year. More than three-quarters of those responding to the survey -- 78% -- favor the legislation. That's up from 65% a year ago. And support cuts across partisan political lines.

All of this suggests that state and Valley residents know very well we have a problem and are concerned that it be addressed. Will their "leaders" get out in front of them and pursue more aggressive steps to make things better? Or will the leaders lag behind their constituents?

[S.F. Chronicle editorial, Monday, July 30, 2007:](#)

FOLLOWING UP

A diesel decision

What we said: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger faces a major clean-air test: Will he crack down on soot-spewing diesel engines or give in to protests from business fuming about the extra costs?... The governor needs to send a serious message on a top priority issue." - Editorial, July 25, 2007

What happened: California's diesel-powered construction equipment must be retrofitted or replaced to cut polluting emissions over the next 13 years, under a directive approved by Gov. Schwarzenegger's appointees on the state Air Resources Board. The vote was hotly opposed by the construction industry because of its estimated \$3 billion cost in re-equipping 180,000 vehicles.

The decision was also a test of the governor's resolve in a business versus environment showdown. On this issue, he delivered on an important step in cleaning up California's dirty air. The move also makes California the first state to attempt a major cleanup of diesel engine emissions.

What's Next: Air board chair Mary Nichols said the unanimous vote was "one in a series" and indicated that an even bigger decision on curbing diesel trucks is expected by year's end. That showdown will pit huge trucking and delivery fleets against the air board in an even bigger showdown.

[Commentary in the Contra Costa Times, Saturday, July 28, 2007:](#)

The real truth about ethanol

Assemblyman Mark DeSaulnier spun another one of his fairy tales in a recent Times' commentary on ethanol (co-written by one of his union buddies). If you believe him, ethanol is the savior of the world. Claiming ethanol is 63 cents a gallon cheaper than gasoline is patently untrue according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Its 2007 report says E85 ethanol fuel retails for 20 cents less (not 63 cents), but because ethanol contains about 34 percent less energy per unit volume it also will result in about 34 percent reduction in miles per gallon.

It goes on to say if you adjust the price based on energy per gallon, E85 ethanol sells for the equivalent of 66 cents more than a gallon of gasoline.

On top of that, ethanol, as most bio-fuels in general, is "energy negative" taking 72 percent more energy to produce than is contained in the final product.

Carbon dioxide is often cited as a major factor in so-called global warming. DeSaulnier claims that ethanol can be a significant tool in solving our air-quality problems. Use of ethanol, as currently produced, emits a similar net amount of carbon dioxide. So just where is the positive effect on air quality?

Although DeSaulnier doesn't mention this, assertions are often made that oil companies are subsidized by the government. Although this is true, consider this. Most ethanol in this country is made from corn. Corn ethanol subsidies totaled \$7 billion in 2006 for 4.9 billion gallons of ethanol. That's \$1.50 per gallon. So if you consider subsidies based on gallons produced, ethanol gets 54 cents, and oil gets 1 cent.

The main reason for DeSaulnier's statements is that he is trying to help his union buddies get more ethanol plants built in California along with more union jobs.

DeSaulnier was a key player in giving away obscene pension and health care benefits while a county supervisor thus leading the county into a financial morass. He did this as a payoff to the unions who owned him. Apparently, they still do.

A word of advice for Brother Mark: Do your research, and check your facts before writing about saviors like ethanol. It really makes you look silly.

Hambrick is a resident of Walnut Creek.

[Commentary in the Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, July 29, 2007:](#)

Proposed tariff will add billions to California shipping cost

California is one of the world's most important gateways for shipping and receiving goods.

Every day, millions of packages and millions of pounds of food grown in Kern County and the entire Central Valley are shipped to destinations around the world through the state's ports, railroads and highways. The livelihoods of thousands of hard-working Californians depend on our highly efficient and cost-effective system of transporting goods.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are the busiest in the United States, moving more than twice as many goods as the Port of New York and New Jersey. As trade with China, Japan and the Pacific Rim continues to grow each year, California ports will become even more important for Kern County agriculture because farmers will be able to sell more locally-grown products in international markets.

Unfortunately, some of my colleagues in Sacramento have been exploring ways to make it more expensive to ship goods through California ports. One such proposal, Senate Bill 974, would impose a new \$30 tariff on every container entering the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach and Oakland. It is estimated that this measure would increase shipping costs in California by as much as \$1.5 billion a year to pay for new regulations and government bureaucracy.

Proponents of SB 974 want to use the new fees to combat air pollution and mitigate other potential environmental impacts. While it is important for policymakers to improve air quality and protect our environment, increasing fees on California businesses is the wrong approach. Higher tariffs will make it more expensive to do business in our state and will encourage companies to ship their products through ports outside of California.

Reduced use of California ports could have a significant impact on Central Valley roadways and the environment. Right now, ships entering California ports utilize an efficient transportation network of freight trains and trucks to move goods. But higher shipping costs could force companies to use other West Coast ports or modes of transit, leading to more trucks on local highways and more air pollution in the Central Valley. More truck traffic along Highway 99, an important artery for transporting goods grown and produced in Kern County, will only exacerbate our current challenges with traffic, highway safety, and air quality.

The proposed cargo fees could drive up costs for families and businesses across the Central Valley, but the hundreds of millions of dollars squeezed from shippers would only benefit the three coastal ports and their surrounding communities. Kern County taxpayers would be stuck with the bill to reduce air pollution and traffic congestion caused by increased port usage outside of California.

I believe that lawmakers must do more to expand California's shipping industry and to encourage international trade. In recent years, pro-growth economic policies have restored California as an economic leader and a jobs-creating machine. Now is not the time to return to the days when California was closed for business.

Assemblywoman Jean Fuller represents the 32nd Assembly District, which includes Bakersfield, Ridgecrest, Tehachapi, Taft, Kern River Valley and the Frazier Mountain communities.

[Editorial in Orange County, Register, Sunday, July 29, 2007:](#)

Save the Earth, protect freedom

Pristine nature saved by government-enforced sacrifice is a powerful concept. But there are free-market principles that can save the Earth and protect individual freedom

By STEVEN GREENHUT, Senior editorial writer and columnist for the Register

Political movements don't succeed because of well-reasoned argument, careful economic analysis and thoughtful consideration by the public. They advance when proponents of an ideology successfully tap into the deeply held feelings, grievances or social and religious impulses of the average person. They succeed when politicians create appealing imagery.

This is true, in the extreme, with every totalitarian movement. Everyone knows how Hitler tapped into Germans' sense of humiliation following World War I, and how communist movements played on the public's envy of the wealthy. All governments tell fables about heroic warriors and noble public servants to gin up support for policies, especially war. I've always been fascinated by Soviet-era artwork, in which selfless laborers (New Soviet Man) are depicted building up the people's society. (That artwork, by the way, isn't that much different from the images portrayed in America during the New Deal.)

Even policies in relatively free societies advance in a similar way, which is why those of us who promote libertarian ideas succeed best when we tell compelling stories about freedom, individualism and entrepreneurship. We do the worst when we serve up cost-benefit analyses, no matter how accurate they may be. I'm reminded of this truth as I watch the presidential candidates clumsily struggle to craft a message that taps into the soul of the American public. It's oddly entertaining watching Democrat John Edwards try to convince Americans that our society, economically speaking, resembles Depression-era Oklahoma, or Republican Rudy Giuliani trying to convince us that America faces a wartime threat equal to that faced during World War II.

No one's buying either man's moonshine. But there is one political movement that has succeeded in the imagery department. It is, of course, environmentalism. Do you really think the dubious theory of manmade global warming has captured the passion of the world because of those boring charts Al Gore champions, or because its proponents have successfully exploited the dark, apocalyptic thinking that lurks deeply within nearly every affluent Westerner's heart?

It's somehow satisfying to believe that mankind's greed has caused a potential cataclysm that will destroy life as we know it. Most people - especially those of us who live in a growing urban area - look around and see that lovely strawberry field bulldozed to make way for new condos, and they conclude that the environment is, indeed, under assault. People can then organize and make demands of the government. They can even suffer - by, say, driving a Prius rather than a Porsche, or by recycling! Why not, if it's for the greater good? Better yet, legislators can pass regulations that force other people to suffer, too, lest they be allowed to avoid the consequences of their own consumerism and sloth!

Playing off those dark visions, a la "Blade Runner," are the bright visions of natural beauty. California's vast natural resources have always helped define this state. That's mostly to the good, by the way. John Muir, the Scottish-born founder of the Sierra Club, wrote compelling essays about the beauty of this state. His efforts helped preserve the Yosemite Valley and then transfer it from state control to the National Park System, but Muir had a deeper influence on the way Californians would think about their state. "Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?" he wrote. "And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit - the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge."

That's an image, and one with lasting resonance. Unfortunately, the natural result of such thinking remains the advancement of government control over more land-use decisions. It has meant the creation of a regulatory morass that not only saps economic growth, whittles away at individual freedom and obliterates property rights (think the California Coastal Commission), but it doesn't provide the best-possible protection for the environment, either.

Consider these well-reasoned (but not very image-filled) facts:

- Individuals take better care of their private resources than government takes care of "public" resources. When government controls resources, the "tragedy of the commons" ensues. For instance, when the government owns the prairie, every rancher has an incentive to feed as much cattle on that land as possible. There is no incentive for conserving the grasslands for another day. When the land is privately owned, ranchers have the incentive to manage and replant their property.

Pollution problems are the worst when there are no well-defined property rights, explains Richard Stroup, an economics professor at Montana State University. "When rights to resources are defined and easily defended against invasion, all individuals or corporations, whether potential polluters or potential victims, have an incentive to avoid pollution problems," he wrote. "When air or water pollution damages a privately owned asset, the owner whose wealth is threatened will gain by seeing that the threat is abated, in court if necessary." He gives the example of Britain, where fishing clubs have well-defined fishing rights in streams and rivers and zealously defend those rights against polluters.

- The worst environmental disasters are caused by government. Stroup points to communist-era Hungary, where 10 percent of all deaths were attributed to pollution. When Eastern Europe opened up, the environmental disaster of the communist bloc was exposed, in shocking detail. In a world of government planning and no property rights, who cared if the factory had to pump more carcinogens into the air in order to make the next five-year plan? Indeed, many of the environmental disasters in the United States were caused by government management or by government-granted privileges to big employers, which were allowed to pump their "externalities" (i.e., pollution) into the public air and waterways.

Nations with freer markets and less regulation tend to be more affluent, and affluent nations have the excess wealth to spend on environmental cleanup. Furthermore, government regulations often cause the problems they seek to reduce. For instance, governments that try to stop sprawl succeed only in

reducing the supply of housing by locking up open space and thereby increasing housing costs, which then forces people further into the hinterlands.

- Incentives can be far more useful than punishments, when it comes to environmental protection. The man who coined the term "free-market environmentalism," R.J. Smith, senior fellow for environmental policy at the National Center for Public Policy Research, argues that endangered-species laws impose such harsh penalties on landowners (e.g., stopping development plans) that they give developers the incentive to discourage any such habitats. For instance, the once-endangered Wood Duck has become plentiful because of pre-ESA private efforts - conservationists went through old-growth forests, adding duck nesting boxes. No landowner would allow that these days, because the presence of an endangered duck would mean turning control of the land over to the feds. If property owners were rewarded for encouraging such habitats, we'd find more habitats for endangered critters, Smith argues. Despite common lore, private companies have much incentive to protect the environment and set aside open space (even without being coerced to do so by government), with the Irvine Co. being a fine Orange County example.

Those are just a handful of arguments for enhancing the role of markets, and reducing the number of command-and-control dictates, to improve the environment. But it's hard for those arguments - with all the talk of property rights, externalities, tragedies of the commons, etc. - to compete with bleak images of manmade climate catastrophe, or the glorious image of the Yosemite Valley.

There lies our ongoing dilemma.

[Commentary in Orange County Register, Sunday, July 29, 2007:](#)

Robert Samuelson: Primer on Prius politics

The popular hybrid is a symbol of feel-good environmentalism that doesn't really accomplish anything except self-congratulation

By ROBERT J. SAMUELSON

Newsweek and Washington Post Columnist

WASHINGTON My younger son calls the Toyota Prius a "hippie car," and he has a point. Not that Prius drivers are "hippies." Toyota says that typical buyers are 54 and have incomes of \$99,800; 81 percent are college graduates. But like hippies, they're making a loud lifestyle statement: We're saving the planet; what are you doing?

This helps explain why the Prius so outsells the rival Honda Civic Hybrid. Both have similar base prices, about \$22,000, and fuel economy (Prius, 60 miles per gallon city/51 highway; Civic, 49 mpg city/51 highway). But Prius sales in the first half of 2007 totaled 94,503 cars, nearly equal to all of 2006. Civic sales were 17,141, up 7.4 percent from 2006. The Prius' advantage is its distinct design, which pronounces its owners as environmentally virtuous. It's a fashion statement. Meanwhile, the Civic hybrid can't be distinguished from the polluting, gas-guzzling mob.

The Prius is, I think, a parable for the broader politics of global warming. Prius politics is mostly about showing off, not curbing greenhouse gas emissions. Politicians pander to "green" constituents who want to feel good about themselves. Grandiose goals are declared. But measures to achieve them are deferred - or don't exist.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is the champ of Prius politics, having declared that his state will cut greenhouse emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 (about 25 percent below today's levels) and is aiming for an 80 percent reduction below 1990 levels by 2050. However, the policies to reach these goals aren't yet formulated; that task has been left to the California Air Resources Board. Many mandates wouldn't take effect until 2012, presumably after Schwarzenegger has left office. As for the 2050 goal, it's like his movies: make-believe. Barring big technological breakthroughs, the chances of reaching it are zero.

But it's respectable make-believe. Schwarzenegger made the covers of Time and Newsweek. The press laps this up; "green" is the new "yellow journalism," says media critic Jack Shafer. Naturally, there's a bandwagon effect. At least 35 states have "climate action plans." None of this will reduce global greenhouse gas emissions from present levels.

Even if California achieved its 2020 goal (dubious) and the United States followed (more dubious), population and economic growth elsewhere would overwhelm any emission cuts. In 2050, global population is expected to hit 9.4 billion, up about 40 percent from today. At modest growth rates, the world economy will triple by midcentury.

Just to hold greenhouse emissions steady requires massive gains in efficiency or shifts to nonfossil fuels. The McKinsey Global Institute predicts that, under present trends, worldwide energy use will rise 45 percent from 2003-20. China accounts for a third of the increase, all developing countries for four-fifths. Even after assuming huge improvements in energy efficiency (better light bulbs, etc.), McKinsey still projects an increase of 13 percent in global energy demand.

But we've got to start somewhere, right? Higher fuel-economy standards and higher gasoline taxes might reduce demand for fuel. We should limit dependence on insecure foreign oil. But practical politicians won't enact these policies, except perhaps for higher fuel economy standards. They'd be too unpopular.

Prius politics promises to conquer global warming without public displeasure. That's one appeal of higher fuel economy standards. They seem painless. It sounds too good to be true - and is. Costs are disguised. Mandates and subsidies will give rise to protected markets. Companies (utilities, auto companies, investment banks) will manipulate rules for competitive advantage.

The government's support for ethanol is instructive. In 2006, 20 percent of the U.S. corn crop went for ethanol; the share is rising. Driven by demand for feed and fuel, corn prices have soared. With food costs increasing, inflation has worsened. The program is mostly an income transfer from consumers to producers and ethanol refiners. Americans' oil use and greenhouse gases haven't declined.

Deep reductions in greenhouse gases might someday occur if both plug-in hybrid vehicles and underground storage of carbon dioxide from coal-fired power plants become commercially viable. Meanwhile, Prius politics is a delusional exercise in public relations that, while not helping the environment, might hurt the economy.