

Sierra fires, high temps cue air quality warning

The Associated Press

SF Chronicle, Contra Costa Times & other papers Thursday, September 25, 2008

FRESNO, Calif.—Air pollution officials warn that smoke from two stubborn fires will impact air quality across the San Joaquin Valley for the next few days.

The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District said Wednesday that particulate matter from a 3,700-acre blaze in Sequoia National Park and another 9,400-acre blaze in Kings Canyon National Park could cause health issues for people with respiratory and heart problems.

Temperatures as high as 95 degrees and a lack of breezes are combining to trap bad air in the valley. The air board said even foothill communities in Fresno, Madera, Tulare and Kern counties normally above the smog line are being affected.

Officials are warning people with respiratory problems to limit outdoor activity.

Foundation gives grants for air quality

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, Sept. 25, 2008

The Fresno Regional Foundation is offering \$80,000 in grants to public agencies and private groups to help improve air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.

The foundation invites organizations -- particularly in low-income communities -- to apply for grants that will be awarded for one year and range from \$1,000 to \$20,000.

The application deadline is 5 p.m. Oct. 9.

Regional Roundup

By News-Sentinel Staff

Lodi News Sentinel, Thursday, September 25, 2008

Air district out of funds for diesel upgrades

VISALIA — Nearly 2,000 drivers of pollution-emitting diesel trucks will have to wait another year for state money to upgrade their engines.

The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District says it has run out of money for the state program that modifies or replaces engines in older, more polluting trucks in an effort to reduce particulate pollution.

District officials would have needed \$137 million to fund all 2,758 applications. Only \$40.5 million was budgeted for the program in the Valley this year.

Executive Director Seyed Sadredin said he doesn't know yet whether the truck owners will have to reapply next year, or whether their applications can be carried over.

Calif. bond would launch bullet train project

By STEVE LAWRENCE, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, September 24, 2008

SACRAMENTO, (AP) --A century and a half after California built its first railroad, the Golden State may be about to launch the most ambitious rail project undertaken by any state — a nearly 800-mile system of bullet trains that can top 200 mph.

On Nov. 4, California voters will decide whether to authorize the sale of \$9.9 billion in state bonds to help pay for a high-speed rail line linking Anaheim, Los Angeles, Fresno and San Francisco.

Planners say it would be the first leg of a system that would complement air travel and eventually include stations in Sacramento, San Diego and Oakland.

Planners say the first trains could be running within six years in some corridors and that the entire 800 miles of track could be completed by 2020 if sufficient financing is available.

"This is the next big thing that's going to transform the state," said the project's executive director, Mehdi Morshed, a former state bridge engineer who likens high-speed rail to construction of the transcontinental railroad and California's freeway system. "I think this will be the beginning of a very big transformation in transportation, not only in California but the nation."

A Field Poll taken in mid-July found that 56 percent of voters supported the bond measure, Proposition 1a. So far, no opposition group has surfaced to pay for a campaign against it.

"We thought about it," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, who signed ballot arguments against the proposition. "I checked the cushions behind the sofa and couldn't find \$500,000 to jump-start the campaign."

The measure's supporters had raised more than \$580,000, most of it from construction and engineering companies, by Sept. 23, far below what they hope to take in.

Despite the lack of organized opposition, the project faces some potential problems that could weaken support.

The state's poor economy and seemingly endless budget deficits could discourage voters from agreeing to take on more debt, although supporters tout the project as a way to create jobs. Paying off the bonds over 30 years with interest would cost about \$19.4 billion, according to the state Legislative Analyst's Office.

Also, the primary route chosen to carry trains through the coastal mountains from the Central Valley to the San Francisco Bay area, the Pacheco Pass southeast of San Jose, has drawn criticism from environmentalists who say it would encourage sprawl.

One group, the Planning and Conservation League, has filed a lawsuit arguing that a more urban and northerly route through the Altamont Pass would be the better choice.

There also is the possibility some voters will be confused when they receive two somewhat different analyses of the proposition in voter guides sent out by the secretary of state's office.

That happened because lawmakers and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger decided to add some oversight requirements to the bond measure, but they didn't move fast enough to get those revisions in the primary voter guide. That forced the secretary of state to put together a supplemental guide with the revised language.

Over the years, Schwarzenegger has been hot and cold on the project. He twice supported legislation that postponed the bond measure going to the ballot, but last year wrote an op-ed piece saying high-speed rail would be a "tremendous benefit" for California.

His spokesman, Aaron McLear, says the governor hasn't taken a position yet on the bond measure. Schwarzenegger did agree to sign the bill adding the oversight requirements, which supporters said would help persuade voters to support the bonds.

The bullet train project has been on the drawing boards for 14 years. A commission formed in 1994 recommended construction of a high-speed train system linking the state's biggest cities.

Legislation passed in 1996 created the California High-Speed Rail Authority, the nine-member board that has been overseeing planning for the trains.

Lawmakers approved the bond measure in 2002 and initially put it on the November 2004 ballot. They later postponed the vote until 2006 and then to this year out of concern that California had more pressing infrastructure needs.

The proposition includes \$9 billion for high-speed rail and \$950 million for conventional commuter and intercity rail, including trains that would connect with the bullet train system.

The entire 800-mile system is estimated to cost about \$45 billion, with the authority counting on federal funding, private investments and some local government money to help cover expenses.

About 30 companies or consortiums have expressed an interest in investing in some fashion, Morshed said.

Supporters, citing use of high-speed rail in Europe and Asia, tout it as a proven way to supplement highways and air travel, ease oil use and air pollution and fight global warming as California's population climbs toward 60 million by the middle of this century.

But opponents label the project a boondoggle and say the bond money would be better used for water projects, to expand the state's highway system or to spend more on existing commuter rail service.

They warn of big cost overruns, contending the price tag could hit \$90 billion.

"We're not against high-speed trains, per say," said Coupal, of the taxpayers group. "At some point, California might be ready, after a little bit more study, to look at different transportation systems and a high-speed rail line might be part of the mix."

He argues that California doesn't have the population density to support a profitable high-speed rail system and that the trains would need state subsidies to keep running.

But Morshed says the authority's ridership projections are based on train use in California and throughout the U.S., not on ridership in more densely populated countries such as Japan.

The authority predicts the high-speed trains, unlike commuter rail, wouldn't need operating subsidies from the state because their fares would be competitive with the cost of an airline ticket.

"Just look at evidence in other parts of the world," Morshed said. "In every one of those countries, the commuter rail and urban rail and buses are subsidized. In every one of them, the high-speed train service makes money."

Rep. Jim Costa, the Fresno Democrat who was the author of the bond measure when he was in the state Senate, said he is confident Congress will authorize federal funding for the project.

"There's a bipartisan mood in Congress that believes that high-speed rail is part of the investment in our national infrastructure," he said.

The project's planners are hoping to get about a third of their money from Washington.

Tina Andolina, legislative director for the Planning and Conservation League, said the environmental group supports development of high-speed rail but felt a court challenge was necessary because the group opposes using the Pacheco Pass as the primary route between the Central Valley and the San Francisco Bay area.

The lawsuit, filed in August in Sacramento County Superior Court, says the environmental impact report that supported the route's selection was inadequate. It asks the court to block any steps toward developing the rail system until the authority adopts an acceptable EIR.

Morshed said the authority picked the less-developed Pacheco Pass because it would be a faster and more direct route to Southern California and avoid fights with cities in the Altamont corridor over construction of multiple tracks for high-speed rail.

He said high-speed trains might also use the Altamont Pass, but they would operate at slower speeds and require fewer tracks than full high-speed service.

Despite the lawsuit, an Oakland-based group that includes several environmental organizations, including the Planning and Conservation League, has endorsed the bond measure.

"If Proposition 1a doesn't pass it would be the death knell for high-speed rail for at least a decade and probably forever because it's just going to get too expensive to build," said Stuart Cohen, executive director of the group, the Transportation and Land Use Coalition.

Feds urge ports to delay clean truck program

By Daisy Nguyen, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Thursday, September 25, 2008

LOS ANGELES -- Federal authorities said Wednesday they are investigating whether a plan to ban older trucks from entering the twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach imposes unfair regulations and fees on truckers and shippers.

The Federal Maritime Commission said certain aspects of the clean truck program might violate the Shipping Act, which prohibits ports from giving "unreasonable preferences or imposing any undue or unreasonable prejudice or disadvantage." It urged port authorities to delay implementing the program, which is scheduled to begin Oct. 1, until the details of the plan have been properly evaluated.

The ports vowed to proceed with the program.

"We believe that the practices that the commission proposes to investigate are essential to the health, security and safety of the ports, and those who work and live near the ports," officials from both facilities said in a joint statement. "We are certain that these safety and security practices will be found reasonable and lawful under the Shipping Act."

The cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach passed plans earlier this year aimed at reducing truck emissions at the nation's busiest cargo container complex by as much as 80 percent. The plan would replace 16,800 trucks built before 1989 with newer, cleaner-running models and require trucks to meet tougher 2007 federal emissions standards by 2012. A \$35 cargo fee will be assessed to help pay for the new vehicles.

The American Trucking Associations, which represents 37,000 trucking companies, sought a court order to stop the program but a federal judge denied the request and an appeals court on Wednesday upheld the ruling.

The industry group said it does not oppose efforts to clean up the air but objects to costly regulations on truckers. They include a Long Beach requirement that trucking companies dispatch only drivers who have undergone a security background check and obtained a federal Transportation Worker Identification Credential. The Los Angeles plan requires the nearly 17,000 independent truckers who work at the port to eventually become employees of trucking companies.

The federal commission said it will look into the restricted access, cargo fees and other measures associated with the program.

"We do think that (the commission) is correct in saying that both ports may be violating the Shipping Act," said Clayton Boyce, a spokesman for the truckers association.

The two ports handle about 40 percent of the nation's imported goods.

Heart Elementary rallies students, parents to conserve gas

By Robert Jordan, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald Thursday, September 25, 2008

PLEASANTON — The traffic started with a trickle and then came in droves.

Kids sporting a variety of colorful shiny helmets arrived at Hearst Elementary School on skateboards, scooters and bikes, and some did it the old-fashioned way and walked. Some students had parents in tow, but all arrived wearing the same white T-shirt that read "Spare the Air Every Day".

In an effort to promote safety, reduce air pollution, manage traffic and achieve a healthy lifestyle, the students at Hearst participated in the "I Pool to School" event on Wednesday.

The program, sponsored by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, city of Pleasanton and the Pleasanton school district, was designed to get more parents and kids to carpool, bike or walk to school.

It's one of two programs the air quality district is sponsoring in the Tri-Valley. From Oct. 6 to 10, San Ramon, Dublin and Pleasanton will participate in "International Walk to School Week."

"We do everything by walking," said Katie Rocca, who moved to Pleasanton two months ago. "It's nice to be outside and see things and to bump into people and meet new friends."

Rocca and her 8-year-old daughter, Annecy, make the half-mile trip to Hearst twice a day. And Rocca and her family walk to downtown, the library and to the market to do their grocery shopping.

But Rocca wasn't the primary target for Wednesday's program.

It was aimed at residents like Koji Tamasu who drops his son Jason, 10, off at while Hearst on his way to work every day. And Rajeev Awasty and his 9-year-old son Rahul, who also drive to school each day.

"Any amount of attention toward conserving and preserving air is a good thing," said Tamasu, who plans to carpool more.

Rahul Awasty tried to get his dad to let him ride his bike to school.

"It's not much pollution," Rahul said about biking to school. "(Cars) are why gas prices are so expensive because we are about to run out."

The Awasty family lives about two miles away from the school, and Rajeev Awasty said that because of the distance he'd have to think about the bike request.

After pooling to Hearst, students gathered at the front of the school on Case Avenue to hear a variety of political and school officials speak, including Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty.

In front of about 200 students and parents, each speaker urged students to go home and share the pooling message with their parents.

Pleasanton city officials were also hoping Wednesday's event drove more people to the Web site www.Pleasantonschoolpool.org, where families could fill out a form and be paired with neighbors for pooling opportunities.

The Web site began in 2006 and was designed based on Rides for Bay Area Commuters, now known as 511.org, a program in which employees use a database to pair up with co-workers to ride to work together.

Lisa Adamos, Pleasanton's economic development specialist, said "Pool to School" transformed from an original traffic congestion program back in the 1990s at Mohr Elementary, and over the years, it was added to other transportation programs started in the city.

No way to bypass fuel study at airport

FAA stands pat; flight center had hoped for waiver on \$18K study

By ADAM ASHTON

Modesto Bee, Thursday, September 25, 2008

The Federal Aviation Administration this week left little wiggle room for a company that wants to avoid a costly environmental impact study for its plan to sell fuel at Modesto Airport.

The FAA wrote to city officials, saying the Modesto Flight Center should pay for a review that would assess how it would store hazardous materials, such as fuel.

The FAA also wants the study to address how a second fuel provider at the airport would affect air quality, other land uses and wildlife.

The review likely will cost Modesto Flight Center owner Richard Corbett at least \$18,000. Like other developers, he'll have to pay the city, which then hires an environmental consultant of its choosing.

Corbett has maintained that the study is unnecessary, partly because city officials had assured him he wouldn't have to go through with it as recently as June. He's been trying to get the city to give him a lease for a business expansion since December.

"At the very beginning, had they said (the environmental studies) are needed, my client could have budgeted for it," said Corbett's attorney, Charles Brunn. Brunn spoke to the Modesto City Council on Tuesday, asking officials to grant the lease and expedite Corbett's business proposal.

Council members said they were dismayed Corbett appeared to get "the runaround" from City Hall. But they pointed to the FAA letter as a reason that the environmental reviews could not be bypassed.

"Unfortunately, that's just the cost of doing business with government," Councilwoman Janice Keating said. She tried to find a way to cover Corbett's proposal under an existing airport plan, but the environmental reviews for the 1993 document are considered outdated.

Councilman Will O'Bryant asked City Manager Greg Nyhoff to look into what led to the miscommunication that held up Corbett's plan. Corbett had cleared two city advisory commissions before his request was pulled from a City Council agenda in July because of the city attorney's concerns that it would run afoul of state and national environmental laws.

"I want to do a reverse investigation here," O'Bryant said. "It just reeks of being stonewalled, and I want to make sure the city's not doing it."

Corbett wants to be the second fuel provider at the airport and would compete with Sky Trek Aviation.

Brunn mocked the idea that Corbett's proposal could harm the environment.

"Fish? I haven't seen any fish swimming across the runway," he told the council. "Wildlife? I haven't seen any grizzly bears. Plants? It's a tarmac! It's been around as long as I can remember. If there are any plants, they get rid of them."

Emission Rights for Sale in Auction Backers Say Process Puts a Price on Pollution

By David A. Fahrenthold and Steven Mufson, Staff Writers
Washington Post Thursday, September 25, 2008

Maryland and five other Eastern states will conduct the first U.S. auction today to sell power plants the right to emit greenhouse gases -- putting a price tag on pollution that has become a national worry but that has remained essentially free.

The auction is the latest step in a regional end-run around the federal government's refusal to cap emissions. The states in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative have set their limits, and they want local power plants to pay for their share.

Today's auction is expected to have a minimal impact on U.S. emissions. The number of "allowances" for sale will cover a fraction of the national total, and experts say prices will probably be so low that utilities can pay a little and continue polluting.

But the programs' backers say the auction will be historic, demonstrating a new way to handle an environmental problem that has often seemed too big to grasp.

"This will be the first time that a price will be put on emitting greenhouse gases," said David Littell, commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection in Maine, one of the member states. "It's clear that some type of system like this will be adopted eventually" on a national scale, he said.

Greenhouse gases, which scientists say accumulate in the Earth's atmosphere and trap the sun's heat, are emitted by cars, factories, power plants and other things. Environmentalists have pushed the federal government to adopt a national "cap-and-trade" system, requiring polluters to reduce their emissions or pay for them.

But the most recent bid to impose national controls on greenhouse gases, proposed by Sens. John R. Warner (R-Va.) and Joseph I. Lieberman (I-Conn.), fizzled on Capitol Hill this year.

Now the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, composed of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Maryland, will test one of the idea's central premises: that government can make pollution a commodity, without creating oversupplies that render the allowances worthless or scarcities that would make the costs crushing for utilities.

Companies have been largely supportive, although some have expressed concern that businesses might consider moving, once utilities pass along the costs of buying emission permits.

"We're going to be doing exactly what [the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative] was intended to do: Lead the nation and show that an auction can be executed in a successful way," said Ralph Izzo, chief executive of PSEG, a New Jersey-based electric utility. "This should give Congress the confidence to say 'Hey, this can work.' "

Despite its expected import, the auction will have less visible drama than a cattle sale at a county fair: It will be conducted online. Six of the 10 states will offer allowances worth about 12.5 million

tons of carbon dioxide pollution. The largest share, about 5.3 million tons, will be sold by Maryland, which is the largest source of emissions among the six. States not participating today are New York, New Jersey, Delaware and New Hampshire.

The buyers will probably include power plants -- the cap applies only to larger plants in the 10 states, about 233 in total. But, organizers said, some allowances could also be bought by brokers, who plan to re-sell them later.

Yesterday, it was unclear how much they would pay. The auction's rules say the price can go no lower than \$1.86 per ton. But futures markets have said the allowances might be worth \$4.55 each.

That should add up to millions for the states. Maryland's environmental secretary, Shari T. Wilson, said the state would use the money on programs to help low-income residents pay their utility bills and help residents make their homes more energy-efficient.

The effect on Maryland power plants and the state's utility bills is harder to judge. Wilson said research had shown that the cost of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative allowances might add \$1 per month to the average bill. One company with large power plants in the state, Mirant, would not say yesterday whether it planned to buy allowances today.

Initiative officials plan to hold another auction in December and one every quarter thereafter. The first deadline, when companies must have enough allowances to cover what they've emitted, will not come for three years.

And even then, it is not expected to be a difficult one: Some observers say they think the initiative's cap was set too high, so power plants might not need all of the allowances available.

"There would be more allowances than there are emissions" if the deadline were today, said Emilie Mazzacurati of the analysis firm Point Carbon.

But, said backers of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, the number of available allowances is set to shrink over time, so that by 2018, there will be 10 percent fewer available than there are today. Eventually, they said, it will make sense to shrink the amount of emissions that power companies have to pay for.

"It puts a price on emitting the pollutants, where before it was free," said Franz Litz, a senior fellow at the World Resources Institute who worked on the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative program as an employee of New York state. "I then have an incentive to alter the way I do business."

Boxer blasts absent Bush officials

The Associated Press

LA Daily News, Thursday, September 25, 2008

WASHINGTON - Sen. Barbara Boxer called top Bush administration officials cowards Wednesday after they failed to attend a hearing on the administration's environmental record.

Boxer, D-Calif. and chairwoman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, was incensed that two high-level officials at the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Interior skipped the committee hearing. "They're cowardly and they have been a danger to the people of this country," Boxer said.

Boxer called the hearing to explore the administration's environmental record, especially its decision to reject California's petition to control greenhouse gases from motor vehicles. The panel also was looking into a proposal to loosen rules protecting endangered species.

Boxer's comment appeared to be aimed not just at the two absent officials - acting EPA air pollution chief Robert Meyers and Assistant Interior Secretary Lyle Laverty - but at the Bush administration in general. Top-level officials have repeatedly refused to answer the committee's questions on a variety of topics, Boxer said, and many of them appear to be "in hiding."

Boxer aimed most of her ire at EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson, who has not appeared before the environment committee since March. Boxer accused him of "perjury" for his repeated refusal to appear, noting that Johnson had promised during his 2005 confirmation hearing to testify before the committee when asked.

Calif. bond would launch bullet train project

By Steve Lawrence, Associated Press Writer

In the Merced Sun-Star, Contra Costa Times & other papers, Thurs., September 25, 2008

SACRAMENTO - A century and a half after California built its first railroad, the Golden State may be about to launch the most ambitious rail project undertaken by any state - a nearly 800-mile system of bullet trains that can top 200 mph.

On Nov. 4, California voters will decide whether to authorize the sale of \$9.9 billion in state bonds to help pay for a high-speed rail line linking Anaheim, Los Angeles, Fresno and San Francisco. Planners say it would be the first leg of a system that would complement air travel and eventually include stations in Sacramento, San Diego and Oakland.

Planners say the first trains could be running within six years in some corridors and that the entire 800 miles of track could be completed by 2020 if sufficient financing is available.

"This is the next big thing that's going to transform the state," said the project's executive director, Mehdi Morshed, a former state bridge engineer who likens high-speed rail to construction of the transcontinental railroad and California's freeway system. "I think this will be the beginning of a very big transformation in transportation, not only in California but the nation."

A Field Poll taken in mid-July found that 56 percent of voters supported the bond measure, Proposition 1a. So far, no opposition group has surfaced to pay for a campaign against it.

"We thought about it," said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, who signed ballot arguments against the proposition. "I checked the cushions behind the sofa and couldn't find \$500,000 to jump-start the campaign."

The measure's supporters had raised more than \$580,000, most of it from construction and engineering companies, by Sept. 23, far below what they hope to take in.

Despite the lack of organized opposition, the project faces some potential problems that could weaken support.

The state's poor economy and seemingly endless budget deficits could discourage voters from agreeing to take on more debt, although supporters tout the project as a way to create jobs. Paying off the bonds over 30 years with interest would cost about \$19.4 billion, according to the state Legislative Analyst's Office.

Also, the primary route chosen to carry trains through the coastal mountains from the Central Valley to the San Francisco Bay area, the Pacheco Pass southeast of San Jose, has drawn criticism from environmentalists who say it would encourage sprawl.

One group, the Planning and Conservation League, has filed a lawsuit arguing that a more urban and northerly route through the Altamont Pass would be the better choice.

There also is the possibility some voters will be confused when they receive two somewhat different analyses of the proposition in voter guides sent out by the secretary of state's office.

That happened because lawmakers and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger decided to add some oversight requirements to the bond measure, but they didn't move fast enough to get those revisions in the primary voter guide. That forced the secretary of state to put together a supplemental guide with the revised language.

Over the years, Schwarzenegger has been hot and cold on the project. He twice supported legislation that postponed the bond measure going to the ballot, but last year wrote an op-ed piece saying high-speed rail would be a "tremendous benefit" for California.

His spokesman, Aaron McLearn, says the governor hasn't taken a position yet on the bond measure. Schwarzenegger did agree to sign the bill adding the oversight requirements, which supporters said would help persuade voters to support the bonds.

The bullet train project has been on the drawing boards for 14 years. A commission formed in 1994 recommended construction of a high-speed train system linking the state's biggest cities.

Legislation passed in 1996 created the California High-Speed Rail Authority, the nine-member board that has been overseeing planning for the trains.

Lawmakers approved the bond measure in 2002 and initially put it on the November 2004 ballot. They later postponed the vote until 2006 and then to this year out of concern that California had more pressing infrastructure needs.

The proposition includes \$9 billion for high-speed rail and \$950 million for conventional commuter and intercity rail, including trains that would connect with the bullet train system.

The entire 800-mile system is estimated to cost about \$45 billion, with the authority counting on federal funding, private investments and some local government money to help cover expenses.

About 30 companies or consortiums have expressed an interest in investing in some fashion, Morshed said.

Supporters, citing use of high-speed rail in Europe and Asia, tout it as a proven way to supplement highways and air travel, ease oil use and air pollution and fight global warming as California's population climbs toward 60 million by the middle of this century.

But opponents label the project a boondoggle and say the bond money would be better used for water projects, to expand the state's highway system or to spend more on existing commuter rail service. They warn of big cost overruns, contending the price tag could hit \$90 billion.

"We're not against high-speed trains, per say," said Coupal, of the taxpayers group. "At some point, California might be ready, after a little bit more study, to look at different transportation systems and a high-speed rail line might be part of the mix."

He argues that California doesn't have the population density to support a profitable high-speed rail system and that the trains would need state subsidies to keep running.

But Morshed says the authority's ridership projections are based on train use in California and throughout the U.S., not on ridership in more densely populated countries such as Japan.

The authority predicts the high-speed trains, unlike commuter rail, wouldn't need operating subsidies from the state because their fares would be competitive with the cost of an airline ticket.

"Just look at evidence in other parts of the world," Morshed said. "In every one of those countries, the commuter rail and urban rail and buses are subsidized. In every one of them, the high-speed train service makes money."

Rep. Jim Costa, the Fresno Democrat who was the author of the bond measure when he was in the state Senate, said he is confident Congress will authorize federal funding for the project.

"There's a bipartisan mood in Congress that believes that high-speed rail is part of the investment in our national infrastructure," he said.

The project's planners are hoping to get about a third of their money from Washington.

Tina Andolina, legislative director for the Planning and Conservation League, said the environmental group supports development of high-speed rail but felt a court challenge was necessary because the group opposes using the Pacheco Pass as the primary route between the Central Valley and the San Francisco Bay area.

The lawsuit, filed in August in Sacramento County Superior Court, says the environmental impact report that supported the route's selection was inadequate. It asks the court to block any steps toward developing the rail system until the authority adopts an acceptable EIR.

Morshed said the authority picked the less-developed Pacheco Pass because it would be a faster and more direct route to Southern California and avoid fights with cities in the Altamont corridor over construction of multiple tracks for high-speed rail.

He said high-speed trains might also use the Altamont Pass, but they would operate at slower speeds and require fewer tracks than full high-speed service.

Despite the lawsuit, an Oakland-based group that includes several environmental organizations, including the Planning and Conservation League, has endorsed the bond measure.

"If Proposition 1a doesn't pass it would be the death knell for high-speed rail for at least a decade and probably forever because it's just going to get too expensive to build," said Stuart Cohen, executive director of the group, the Transportation and Land Use Coalition.

Carlisle to get real-time air pollution data

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Thursday, September 25, 2008

CARLISLE, Pa.—A new air monitor able to provide real-time air pollution data is to be installed atop a Carlisle building in the coming months.

The equipment is an upgrade over an older monitor that takes up to six months to produce results because the data must first be analyzed by a federal agency.

Diesel exhaust makes Carlisle's air among the worst in the nation, generated by the heavy truck traffic on area highways. The cost of the new monitor is \$40,000, including maintenance for 10 years.

It is being paid for by Carlisle Regional Medical Center, the Clean Air Board of Central Pennsylvania and The Sentinel newspaper. Pollution levels will be printed daily in The Sentinel, and hourly updates will be posted on its Web site, <http://www.cumberlink.com>.

France's EdF buying British Energy for \$23.2B

By Greg Keller, AP Business Writer

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, September 25, 2008

PARIS-French power provider EdF agreed Wednesday to buy British Energy Group PLC for about \$23.2 billion in cash, betting big on the prospects for Britain's nuclear industry at a time of growing global concern about greenhouse gas emissions.

The deal, which has the blessing of the French and British governments, would hand over British Energy's eight nuclear plants to EdF - already the world's largest nuclear plant operator with 58 reactors in France. EdF also plans to open four more in Britain if the deal closes.

Electricite de France SA Chairman Pierre Gadonneix said the deal was "a major step in EdF's development," by "consolidating our leadership in nuclear power globally, and consolidating our development in the UK."

The deal - which has been accepted by British Energy's top two shareholders - comes after EdF sweetened a bid that the British company had rejected in July. EdF is offering 774 pence for every ordinary share of British Energy - an increase of nine pence per share from its July bid.

The takeover would bring more French nuclear expertise to Britain, which has been looking to diversify its energy mix. France gets about 80 percent of its energy from nuclear plants - the highest percentage of any major industrialized country.

Businesses and government officials across the European Union want greater energy independence and less reliance on oil and coal that pollute the air. The 27-country bloc has set a goal of reining in its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020, and nuclear power is one way to possibly achieve that target.

The British government, which owns 36 percent of British Energy, said the deal - one of the biggest foreign direct investments in Britain - would diversify the country's energy sources, create jobs and help manufacturers.

"This deal is good value for the taxpayer and a significant step towards the construction of a new generation of nuclear stations to power the country," British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said in a statement.

"Nuclear is clean, secure and affordable; its expansion is crucial for Britain's long-term energy security, as we reduce our oil dependence and move towards a low-carbon future," he added.

WestLB Research analyst Peter Wirtz said the deal was a good one strategically for EdF, by better balancing the group's generating capacity in Britain.

Currently EdF's British subsidiary is heavily weighted to coal power, which represents 80 percent of its installed capacity. British Energy is even more heavily dependent on nuclear power, which accounts for 83 percent of its installed capacity. Together, nuclear power will represent 58 percent of the combined group's capacity, and coal power 36 percent.

In Paris trading on Wednesday, shares of EdF rose 4.4 percent to 52.35 euros (\$77.12). In London, shares of British Energy climbed 6.2 percent to 769 pence (\$14.26).

The deal would create Britain's largest power company measured by generating capacity, with 16.5 gigawatts of installed capacity. British Energy is already Britain's biggest electricity producer.

British Energy's two largest shareholders, the British government and investment fund Invesco, have both pledged to tender their shares in the offer. Along with other pledges from British Energy board members, EdF said it has won approval from shareholders representing a total of 45 percent of British Energy's capital.

Also Wednesday, Centrica PLC, Britain's largest gas supplier, said it was in talks with EdF about an option for Centrica to take a 25 percent stake in the company after the EdF-British Energy deal is completed. Centrica said it would be at the same price paid by EdF for British Energy - 774 pence a share.

Shares of Centrica were flat at 330 pence (\$6.12).

British Energy chairman Sir Adrian Montague said his company spent the past six weeks working with EdF to seal a deal.

"This new transaction is regarded by the board as good for the shareholders, good for our staff, good for the nuclear industry and also good for the country," Montague told BBC Radio 4.

"In the short term I think you will find a stronger supplier of energy in the U.K. as we bring together British Energy's generating capability with EDF's strength of the supply business," Montague said.

The British government said EdF had agreed to continue operating British Energy's eight existing nuclear power stations as well as invest in four new reactors.

EdF, which is owned 85 percent by the French government, aims to complete the deal by the end of this year or early 2009. The deal requires the approval of shareholders and regulators.

Dougie Rooney of the British union Unite welcomed the deal, saying the union's job now was to make sure that EdF kept existing plants open and maintained investment.

Anti-nuclear campaigner Greenpeace criticized the deal, saying it would do nothing to promote British energy security or tackle climate change.

"Just yesterday Gordon Brown promised the U.K. a million green-collar jobs in the manufacturing sector, but his push for nuclear power has led to a deal which will benefit the French taxpayer and create French jobs," said Nathan Argent, head of Greenpeace's nuclear campaign.

The French power company has been looking to gain access to new nuclear sites in Britain, which has announced plans to invest billions to develop renewable energy sources - including nuclear.

EdF is already present in Britain via its EdF Energy subsidiary, which employs 13,000 people and handles 5.5 million customer accounts. It operates two coal-fired power stations as well as a natural gas-fueled power plant.

British Energy has one coal-powered station in addition to its eight nuclear power stations.

The British government has a target of generating 10 percent of electricity from renewable sources by 2010 and 15 percent by 2020. It has emphasized the importance of a new generation of nuclear power stations in meeting a broader target to cut carbon dioxide emissions by at least 60 percent of 1990 levels by 2050.

EdF is also in the midst of another buyout bid: It has offered to purchase U.S. wholesale power supplier Constellation Energy Group Inc. in hopes of overturning a deal Constellation made last week to be sold to Warren Buffet's MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co.

EdF's Gadonneix said that should the Constellation offer fail, he is "open" to working with other U.S. partners.

[The Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Thursday, Sept. 25, 2008:](#)

Safety must be top concern

Lord knows, Kern County can use more jobs. And the money poured into the local economy from expansion of the Big West refinery would be a godsend in these dire economic times.

But the economic benefits of the refinery's expansion cannot outweigh concerns for public safety.

The refinery has existed for decades on Rosedale Highway. Once on the outskirts of town, the refinery is now surrounded by homes, stores, schools and businesses.

Under its new owners, Big West, a subsidiary of Flying J, a \$700 million expansion is being proposed. Company officials call it the "Clean Fuels Project" because it will allow the facility to boost gasoline and diesel output without increasing the volume of crude oil coming into the facility.

At first, the company proposed using hydrofluoric acid to boost this production. But that triggered a public outcry over the highly toxic chemical that would create a widespread killing zone if it escaped from the refinery.

In response, Big West changed its plans, calling for the use of modified hydrofluoric acid. Some refineries use sulfuric acid instead.

With concerns remaining over the use of both modified hydrofluoric and sulfuric acids, county planners and consultants have identified a less risky alternative that would convert gas oil into gasoline and diesel by building a new processing unit similar to one now operating at the refinery.

In addition to avoiding the use of higher-risk chemicals, it would [reduce air pollution](#) and greenhouse gases and create less odor.

While Big West prefers its original plan to use hydrofluoric acid, company officials have acknowledged the county's alternative is safer. However, it will make the expansion less profitable.

County staff also is requiring Big West to adjust its expansion plans to address the project's environmental and safety impacts. These adjustments include the planting of 10,000 trees, and the installation of sophisticated monitoring and emergency response systems.

The additional requirements are similar to those that would be placed on recently constructed refineries, according to Ted James, Kern County's planning director.

Tonight, Kern County planning commissioners will consider the company's request to expand the Rosedale Highway refinery.

Commissioners will be advising the Kern County Board of Supervisors on Big West's application for a precise development plan, height variance, and conditional-use permits to cover injection wells and storage tanks. Supervisors are expected to consider the project in late October.

In their deliberations, planning commissioners and supervisors are urged to place safety first.

[San Jose Mercury News editorial, in the S.F. Chronicle, Thursday, Sept. 25, 2008:](#)

Two green bills deserve governor's signature

It's frustrating that both of the initiatives on the November ballot involving energy and clean air, Propositions 7 and 10, are bad deals the first an inept stab at mandating clean energy and the second a bond that will waste millions while enriching its sponsor. Not coincidentally, both were authored by interests outside California. But the California Legislature has been doing good work in these areas, so Gov.

Arnold Schwarzenegger can keep progress on track. Two bills that especially deserve his signature by Tuesday's deadline are:

Sen. Alan Lowenthal's SB 974, which would impose modest fees on cargo entering California's major ports Oakland, Long Beach and Los Angeles. The money would be used to combat the massive amounts of pollution spewed by cargo ships and by the trucks and trains that haul goods inland.

Sen. Darrell Steinberg's SB 375, which is a modest step toward a much-needed state policy encouraging efficient development. Compact growth in or adjacent to existing cities conserves resources and creates neighborhoods where people don't have to drive everywhere, reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions...

SB 375 offers transportation funding as an incentive for prudent planning...

On a sunny day on the bay, it's hard to think of a port as a major polluter, but container ships burn the filthiest of fuels. California's ports bring in 60 percent of all of the goods distributed through the United States, and the truck traffic to transfer those cargo containers is a killer, too. Literally. The Air Resources Board estimates 3,700 premature deaths a year in California from port-related pollution.

The modest fees, about \$30 per 20-foot container, would be passed on to purchasers of the goods, so Walmart and other mega-retailers are fighting them. But the amount would add only a tenth of 1 percent to costs a half-cent per DVD player, for example. The fees would generate around \$300 million statewide and would be spent on direct air pollution reduction, including electrifying the ports so that ships can turn off their burners, and on smoothing traffic flow by building more grade crossings so trains don't stop traffic as they move through the region.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a study which alerts the dangers of living close to Oakland, CA. For more information, please contact Maricela Velásquez at \(559\) 230-5849.](#)

Estudio alerta sobre el peligro de vivir cerca de Oakland, CA

En el nuevo análisis participó la coalición de Comunidades por un Mejor Ambiente

Manuel Ocaño, Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, September 25, 2008

Un estudio que dirigieron la Oficina de Recursos del Aire de California y el científico latino Manuel Pastor en la Universidad del Sur de California determinó que la ciudad de Oakland tiene decenas de focos de contaminación cerca de escuelas públicas.

El estudio dice que Oakland tiene 216 fuentes de contaminación, de las que unas 50 está muy cerca de escuelas públicas.

Es el segundo estudio consecutivo de este tipo en Oakland en lo que va del año. El primero determinó que hay mas casos de cáncer y de asma entre la población que reside cerca del puerto de Oakland.

En el nuevo análisis participó la coalición de Comunidades por un Mejor Ambiente.