

Steve Worthley named board chairman

By Valerie Gibbons

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010

Dinuba-area Supervisor Steve Worthley will take the helm of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors this year, accepting the gavel Tuesday from Visalia-area Supervisor Phil Cox.

Cox said his time as chairman added to his appreciation for the county staff, particularly the work of County Administrative Officer Jean Rousseau and Assistant County Administrative Officer Kristin Bennett.

"Coming into this office every day has been a great experience for me," Cox said. Cox also noted the challenges of 2009, which brought with it hundreds of layoffs and the reorganization of the Health and Human Services Agency and the Resource Management Agency.

"Even though we've had a very challenging year, it's also been a very productive year," he said. "But I am very happy to be handing this responsibility over right now."

This is Worthley's third stint as chairman of the board. He has been an attorney for 31 years.

Worthley also serves as the board representative to the Local Area Agency Formation Commission, a position he has held for 11 years. The commission is charged with oversight of all annexations by county cities of unincorporated lands as well as other governmental agencies and special-district services.

He also serves as the board's representative to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District governing board, a position he has held for six years. He served as the air district board's chairman in 2008.

Porterville Supervisor Mike Ennis will serve as the board's vice chairman this year.

The board will present its State of the County address Jan. 26.

McNerney brings home transportation, public safety, education funds

By Kim Santos

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY — Congressman Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton, announced Wednesday that key transportation, public safety, and education projects in San Joaquin County will receive federal funding.

The following will receive funds: Operation Peacekeeper Youth Gang Outreach Program, \$200,000; Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) Alignment Project, \$300,000; Give Every Child a Chance Job Mentoring Program, \$500,000; San Joaquin Regional Operations Facility construction, \$500,000; Interchange at 1-5 and French Camp Road, and Arch-Sperry Road construction, \$800,000; Metro Express-Airport Way Corridor Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project, \$2.8 million.

In addition to these projects, areas of California suffering from [air quality challenges, including the San Joaquin Valley](#), are set to receive \$10 million to provide for the replacement of older diesel engines. These grant funds are intended to help improve air quality throughout the region.

Biomass seen fueling California economic revival

Mark Glover

Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, January 13, 2010

California could tap the energy stored in wood, garbage, plants and animal waste to fuel a job creation engine that could pull the state out of its economic doldrums, biomass energy advocates said Tuesday.

So far, though, the engine has barely crept out of the station, said James D. Boyd, vice chairman of the California Energy Commission.

"(Biomass) is a treasure sort of waiting to be discovered," he said.

Boyd on Tuesday addressed attendees of the Pacific West Biomass Conference & Expo, which wraps up its three-day run today at the Hyatt Regency Sacramento.

Conference organizers – including Grand Forks, N.D.-based Biomass Magazine and Lakewood, Colo.-based BBI International – said the general goal of the gathering is to connect current and future producers of biomass-derived energy with various industries in a five-state Western region consisting of California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

California, Boyd said, is fertile ground for biomass industry growth, including ventures that produce electric power, biofuels and industrial heat and power. The state's forests, its 2 million cows and its farm crops are just some potential sources.

"Frankly, in this state, we have biomass galore," Boyd noted.

However, Boyd said relatively little has been done to tap the potential of biomass statewide.

Among his examples, Boyd pointed to the lack of municipal solid waste power plant construction in the state since 1990. He said air-quality concerns helped stall that movement, but air-quality control technology has advanced rapidly since 1990.

Boyd also acknowledged that solid waste power plants affect operations of recyclers and composters.

But he added that there's "room for everybody in this arena." Boyd characterized solid waste power plants as an "untapped resource" in California.

He pointed to isolated biomass success stories, such as the Altamont Landfill in Livermore. There, garbage from San Francisco and Oakland is transformed into liquefied natural gas. About 500 Waste Management Inc. garbage and recycling trucks are fueled by it.

"That's a win-win for everyone," Boyd said.

Yet it's just a fraction of what the state could do to exploit its potential fuel sources. Boyd characterized California as a potential gold mine for methane processing, non-food-crop-based ethanol production, biomass-derived electrical power and other biomass technologies.

Boyd said obstacles include: the cost of building biomass facilities, meeting California's tough air-quality standards and the state's "financial uncertainty."

Still, biomass "might be part of the answer to the new California economy," Boyd said.

He said the California Energy Commission welcomes proposed biomass projects and has grant money available to help promising biomass enterprises.

Conference attendees run the gamut, including the Sacramento Municipal Utility District and Rancho Cordova-based TSS Consultants, a provider of services to the bioenergy industry. U.S. firms on-site specialize in industrial services, biofuel engineering, biomass-derived electricity, advanced biofuel development, waste disposal, aggregating, equipment manufacturing and agriculture.

The conference includes a trade show, more than 90 speakers, general session panels and specialized seminars.

Biomass includes a wide range of biological materials, including wood, liquids, waste materials and plant matter. Plant and animal matter can produce electricity, heat and solid materials. Biomass-involved industries include forestry, power production, agriculture, waste management and food processing.

Port truckers get three more weeks to find loans

By Cecily Burt, Oakland Tribune

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010

More than 800 Port of Oakland truckers who renewed grant applications last week to buy diesel trucks and filters are getting a few more weeks to line up additional financing, the California Air Resources Board announced Tuesday.

Truckers who are eligible for the new grants and need extra time to get loans may continue to work at the port until Feb. 16 as long as they have a radio frequency identification tag. Extensions will be revoked after that date if they cannot cover the full costs of the new equipment. Drivers who have lined up financing can get a work extension until April 30.

About 1,300 drivers who haul cargo for the port were denied grant funding last year when a \$22 million fund ran out. Nearly 1,000 drivers rushed to renew their grant applications with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District last week after the state found another \$11 million to help them buy new trucks and filters to comply with strict air quality rules that went into effect Jan. 1.

The new grant funds will help about 100 truckers with \$50,000 grants toward new rigs and as many as 1,200 truckers with \$5,000 grants toward new filters that trap as much as 85 percent of dangerous particulate emissions. Drivers will have to prove by Feb. 5 that they have secured additional financing to pay for the filters, which can cost as much as \$21,000, or new trucks, which typically are \$75,000 or more.

The new schedule was created so the truckers had more time to line up financing and for the air board and air district to be able to process all the paperwork, said Cynthia Marvin, assistant division chief for the California Air Resources Board.

"We wanted to provide a reasonable opportunity for people to obtain financing," she said.

Jose Alberto Buendia, of Berkeley, renewed his grant and hopes to get a loan through Cascade Sierra Solutions after being turned down by One California Bank. He said the extension was welcome news.

"That's good, beautiful," he said. "All the drivers want to put in the filters, they just need some help. Even my family has a lot of problems with the asthma."

Representatives from the air district will be at OT-411 on Thursday and Friday to answer questions

Dirty air: Utah officials urge limit on kids' play

By MIKE STARK, Associated Press Writer

In the SF Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010

Salt Lake City (AP) --Schools in parts of Utah kept students inside for sports and recess Tuesday after soaring pollution levels prompted state health warnings on driving and outdoor activity.

Highland Park Elementary students with [respiratory problems](#) were kept inside for morning recess and no one was allowed outside for lunch recess, principal Sue Parker said.

Most students don't seem to mind, but teachers have to make an adjustment to their plans, she said.

"It's a drag," she added.

For the third straight day, AIRNow, a national index for reporting daily air quality, ranked portions of Utah as having the most polluted air in the country, thanks to a growing layer of dust pinned by cold air against the Salt Lake Valley floor.

Tuesday's pollution levels in Salt Lake and Davis counties far exceeded health standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency. State data showed that Salt Lake City has exceeded standards for tiny flecks of pollution known as PM2.5 since Saturday, with Tuesday's reading nearly three times that of federal standards.

At those levels, it's more likely that harmful bits of pollution will be inhaled and damage sensitive lung tissue, cause tightness in the chest and other health effects, said Rebecca Jorgensen, with the state health department's asthma program.

"It's going to affect even those that don't have chronic conditions," Jorgensen said.

Prolonged exposure to PM2.5 has been linked to premature death in people with heart and lung disease, increased hospital admissions and exacerbated health problems.

A Pacific storm Wednesday was expected to blow in, increasing chances for precipitation and partial relief from inversion-trapped pollution.

"Right now, we don't think it will completely clear the air" but it will help some areas, said Linda Cheng, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Salt Lake City.

State environmental officials late Tuesday afternoon issued a new "red" air quality alert for the five counties on Wednesday, saying everyone should reduce exertion outdoors.

Texas town welcomed drilling, now fears pollution

By JOHN McFARLAND, Associated Press Writer

In the SF Chronicle Contra Costa Times and other paper, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010

Texas (AP) -- Like thousands of other Texans living atop one of the country's most productive natural gas fields, folks in this tiny town were giddy when drillers started offering up the fat checks.

The mayor likened it to the Gold Rush, and many of the 200 residents of a town that once sold its name to a satellite television company were hoping to be next in a long line of landowners to strike it rich by drilling into the Texas earth.

Many in the town on the rural plains of Fort Worth didn't even bother to ask whether the drilling might sour the air above the gas-rich rock formation called the Barnett Shale. "Nobody even thought about that kind of stuff," Mayor Calvin Tillman said.

By the time state regulators started testing the air around Dish, there were 15 wells inside the town limits and more than 12,000 spread across the massive shale. Results of those tests, released late last year, found elevated levels of the cancer-causing chemical benzene near Dish, spooking residents who now fear that what once looked like found money could end up harming their health.

"I had friends of mine that got filthy rich off oil and gas companies drilling out here," said Rebecca McKamie, who wonders whether pollution is the cause of serious health problems in her family and deaths of her farm animals. "I'm not against the oil and gas industry. I'm against being poisoned."

This month, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality is planning to release an analysis of more extensive air-quality tests above the 5,000-square-mile shale, which runs beneath Dallas, Fort Worth and about 20 counties. The agency's focusing on benzene, which can escape through equipment leaks or accidental emissions.

People are regularly exposed to small doses of benzene by industrial pollutants, cigarette smoke, gasoline fumes and vehicle emissions. But long-term exposure can cause leukemia, and the results of the testing could lead the state to take severe actions, including issuing fines or placing new, restrictive rules on drillers.

"Everything is on the table," commission spokesman Terry Clawson said.

The Texas Pipeline Association, which represents gas companies on the shale, supports the state's increased testing and is seeking more. But the group said drillers are following existing rules and don't believe their facilities are releasing harmful levels of benzene.

"I believe we are operating in a very safe manner and an environmentally friendly manner," said John Satterfield, the environmental health and safety manager at Chesapeake Energy Corp., the largest producer on the shale. "We're not poo-pooing the idea that benzene is harmful. We are trying to place it in perspective."

While Dish is the only town to formally complain to the state, the agency has taken calls from angry residents from all over the shale, most notably in Fort Worth. In Flower Mound, about 15 miles southeast of Dish, the town council last month considered by ultimately rejected a drilling moratorium driven by pollution fears.

"We've got to conduct widespread testing throughout the Barnett Shale to ensure those problems aren't elsewhere, and I think that's the lesson from Dish," said state Sen. Wendy Davis, a Fort Worth Democrat.

Dish residents started noticing problems in 2005, the same year the town changed its name from Clark in a publicity stunt, agreeing to be called Dish in exchange for free satellite TV for everybody in town.

That was also the year five gas companies opened an unmanned compressor complex, and it didn't take long for complaints to start rolling in. People were upset about noise, then the putrid and overpowering smells.

Lloyd Burgess, whose Lucky B Ranch borders the complex, said it wrecked his business and may have killed some horses. He knows he can't prove that, but points to gnarled, lifeless trees drooping between his land and the complex.

"If it kills trees, how good could it be for people?" he said.

Health problems followed for some. McKamie recently underwent a blood test that found an unusual enzyme in her liver that could be an indicator of cancer. Her daughter, Julianne, has for three years seen doctors and specialists in an effort to diagnose crushing pain in her arms, sudden loss of circulation that makes her hands turn blue and randomly occurring loss of strength.

They can't conclusively link their problems to the compressor plant or drilling, but wonder if benzene contributed.

"I don't know if it's all related. We have a right to know if it is," said McKamie, a 25-year resident of the town whose farm is about a mile from the compressor plant. "We're breathing it, we're working it, we're feeding our animals it, and then we're eating the meat."

Frustration in Dish boiled over last month, when all 50 chairs were full last month at a town meeting with state regulators. Town commissioner Tim Sciscoe said he wanted a congressional investigation and "some handcuffed perp walks" for state regulators he accused of being unresponsive.

Susana Hildebrand, the commission's chief engineer overseeing the Barnett Shale studies, took the brunt of the residents' anger.

"Sometimes when you're really upset you may not hear it, but we are really concerned about the area," she said. "All levels of this agency are involved. We want to solve this. We want to help them."

Texas agency finds no air problems in Fort Worth

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times & Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010

FORT WORTH, Texas—The Texas environmental agency says a survey of more than 100 natural gas facilities in Fort Worth showed no cause for concern about potentially dangerous pollutants.

The agency says the study was done the week of Dec. 14 because of concerns from residents.

John Sadlier of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality says pollutants were below the level that would cause health concerns. Among the pollutants tested for was benzene, a known carcinogen that has been detected elsewhere on the Barnett Shale.

Fort Worth is one of many cities atop the Barnett Shale—a massive underground rock formation loaded with natural gas.

The agency plans to release results of another in-depth study on the Barnett Shale this month.

Contentious plant closure gets final approval

Heather Knight, John Coté, Chronicle Staff Writers

Wednesday, January 13, 2010

SAN FRANCISCO -- San Francisco's last polluting power plant will be shuttered by the end of this year - ending a decade of debate over what to do with the Mirant Corp.'s Potrero Hill plant, one of the dirtiest in California.

City officials and the plant's owners reached an agreement last summer to shutter the 40-year-old fossil fuel plant on the southeastern waterfront. But the California Independent System Operator - charged with ensuring enough energy would be produced without the Mirant plant - didn't sign off on the closure until Tuesday.

"Five years ago, San Francisco had two of the most polluting power plants in California," Mayor Gavin Newsom said, referring to Mirant and the Hunters Point plant that closed in 2006. "At the end of this year, we will have no polluting power plants in this city."

Yakout Mansour, president and CEO of Cal-ISO, which oversees the reliability of California's electric grid, sent a letter to Newsom on Tuesday stating the organization is convinced the city will have enough energy without Mirant once transmission projects, including a new transbay cable undergoing testing and transmission improvements being made by Pacific Gas and Electric Co., come online.

Newsom said he expects Mirant to be closed by November.

Still, Mansour cautioned in his letter that eliminating a plant always poses concerns over blackouts, especially in the case of "natural emergencies." Newsom said the city will be no worse off following an earthquake or other natural disaster with the new transmission projects coming online.

Higher disease rates

The mayor added that the plant closure brings environmental justice to the city's southeast neighborhoods, which have suffered far higher rates of diseases including asthma and breast cancer than other, less polluted neighborhoods.

Newsom said he will announce in his State of the City address today that he envisions the land occupied by the plant becoming part of an "innovation corridor" including Mission Bay, the central waterfront, Potrero Hill and Bayview-Hunters Point. He said he wants the area to become a hub of businesses specializing in green technology, digital media, digital arts, online gaming, biotechnology and nanotechnology.

Parts of that are already under way, including a biotechnology hub at Mission Bay and the mayor's previously announced idea for a green technology center at the Hunters Point shipyard.

"It's very much symbolic of old San Francisco being transformed into new San Francisco," Newsom said.

First, the cleanup

Before any such transformation can happen, the land around the Mirant plant must be cleaned. PG&E, which owned the site before Mirant Corp., began removing debris in the area Tuesday as part of a plan to reinforce the shoreline to prevent coal tar contamination from seeping into the bay.

Some chemical experts believe that tar-related toxins have been migrating into the bay mud for decades. A Chronicle report in February showed that PG&E has known about the coal tar contamination for more than a decade but didn't conduct a full study on whether the toxins were moving into the bay until last year. The utility is to present its preliminary results to the Port Commission on March 9, said PG&E spokesman Matt Nauman.

In the interim, the company is constructing a barrier designed to prevent toxic byproducts from getting into the bay and stop erosion along 155 feet of shoreline that extends from the southern part of Pier 70 to the northern portion of the power plant.

PG&E's tentative deadline for completing its investigation of the toxins and conducting necessary cleanup is 2012.

"We know the city has plans to redevelop this area of San Francisco, and we want to support that by addressing our historic operations now," Nauman said.

City Hall officials were pleased by Tuesday's announcement. Supervisor Sophie Maxwell, who has advocated with others to close the plant for the 10 years she's been in office, called the announcement "a great victory."

"It was a lot of pushing and pulling and really being a pain in the butt, but it took that kind of persistence to make this happen," she said.

City Attorney Dennis Herrera, whose office negotiated the closure with Mirant Corp. said, "After years of contention ... we are today united in our appreciation that it was achieved."

Dem candidate promotes energy in bid for Utah gov

By BROCK VERGAKIS, Associated Press Writer
In the SF Chronicle, Tuesday, January 12, 2010

Salt Lake City (AP) -- Democrat Peter Corroon launched his gubernatorial bid Tuesday by saying Utah should become energy independent within 10 years by investing in renewable energy.

"While our federal government talks about it, Utah can achieve it," the mayor of Salt Lake County said in a speech officially announcing his candidacy. "We can and should become self-sustaining like the pioneers before us."

Utah has an abundance of energy resources — including coal, natural gas and wind energy — to meet the goal, he said.

Department of Energy statistics show Utah already produces more energy than it consumes but not in every category.

For instance, the state produces about 19.5 million barrels of petroleum a year while consuming 55.7 million barrels.

"That's a pretty big gap," said Rayola Dougher, senior economic analyst for the American Petroleum Institute. "It's not realistic or realizable for Utah" to meet its own petroleum needs.

However, she said states should look to their resources to keep more jobs and money at home.

Corroon's push for greater investment in renewable resources came as the state experienced its third straight day of having the worst air quality in the nation, making it unhealthy for elderly people and children with breathing problems to be outside.

Much of that pollution is the result of automobile emissions.

In an interview following his speech from the steps of Salt Lake Community College, Corroon said he doesn't want to restrict the availability of any resources.

"It's about expanding natural gas stations in Utah. ... It's about using solar panels on buildings so buildings can create their own energy," Corroon said. "It means that in Utah, we can supply enough of those energy resources to take care of our own demand."

Corroon said he wants state government to support job creation in the energy sector. He also promised a greater investment in education to help drive economic and energy development.

Corroon is challenging Republican Gov. Gary Herbert in a special election to complete the term of Jon Huntsman.

Huntsman resigned in August to become U.S. ambassador to China, handing over the reins to Herbert, who had served as lieutenant governor since 2005.

Democrats believe Corroon is their best chance to win a gubernatorial election since Scott Matheson did so in 1980.

Corroon has maintained high approval in the state's most populous county by developing a reputation as a fiscal conservative. He won a second term in 2008 with 66 percent of the vote but isn't well known outside the county.

Both candidates believe promoting energy and economic development along with improving education could lead to victory at the polls. Herbert highlighted those themes during his inauguration speech.

Neither Herbert or Corroon was expected to face any challengers within their own parties.

Report Links Vehicle Exhaust to Health Problems

By MATTHEW L. WALD
In the NY Times, Tuesday, January 12, 2010

Exhaust from cars and trucks exacerbates asthma in children and may cause new cases as well as other respiratory illnesses and heart problems resulting in deaths, an independent institute that focuses on vehicle-related [air pollution](#) has concluded.

The report, to be issued on Wednesday by the nonprofit Health Effects Institute, analyzed 700 peer-reviewed studies conducted around the world on varying aspects of motor vehicle emissions and health. It found “evidence of a causal relationship,” but not proof of one, between pollution from vehicles and impaired lung function and accelerated hardening of the arteries.

It said there was “strong evidence” that exposure to traffic helped cause variations in heart rate and other heart ailments that result in deaths. But among the many studies that evaluated death from heart problems, some did not separate stress and noise from air pollution as a cause, it said.

The institute, based in Boston, is jointly financed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the auto industry to help assure its independence. Its reports are peer-reviewed but are not published in a scientific journal.

The researchers noted that proving that air pollution from vehicles caused illness was difficult. The pollutants studied often come from sources like industry in addition to cars and trucks, they said, and many of the studies failed to rule out factors like income levels that could contribute to the illnesses studied.

Many people who live near major roads fall into lower-income categories. Vibration and noise rather than air pollution could also cause some health damage, the report said.

Nonetheless, “we see a strong signal that says traffic exposure seems to be causing effects,” said Dan Greenbaum, the president of the institute.

The study found that the biggest effects occurred among people who lived within 300 to 500 meters — about two-tenths to three-tenths of a mile — from highways and major roads. That applies to 30 percent to 45 percent of the population of North America, the authors said.

The pollutants studied in the report do not include ozone, the chemical for which the Environmental Protection Agency proposed new regulations last week. Ozone is more prevalent in places distant from highways.

For many categories of health effects, the authors concluded that the studies completed so far suggested that air pollution from vehicles was the cause, without establishing that as fact.

Contacted for comment, the environmental agency said it welcomed the study. The agency added that it was taking steps to cut toxic materials in gasoline and that the federal recovery act included \$300 million for cleaning up diesel engines.

Outside experts briefed on the study had mixed reactions.

“Like the issue of second-hand smoke, it’s very difficult to understand the exact mechanisms that make it bad — but it’s easy to understand that it is in fact bad,” said Rich Kassel, an expert on diesel engines at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group. “This study underscores that difficulty.”

“Despite 40 years of building ever-cleaner vehicles, we still have a vehicle pollution problem in this country,” Mr. Kassel said.

Howard J. Feldman, the director of regulatory and scientific affairs at the American Petroleum Institute, noted that the evidence of a causal factor was inconclusive for some ailments.

“The only conclusive thing that was found was with the asthma,” Mr. Feldman said. “Nothing else was found to be conclusive, which to me was interesting in itself.”

“These are epidemiological studies, which by definition reflect past exposures with past fuels,” he added.

As emissions from traffic decline, Mr. Feldman predicted, exposures from other sources will become more important.

[San Diego Union-Tribune editorial, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010:](#)

Permanently derailed High-speed rail's illegal business plan should be last straw

In November 2008, state voters narrowly approved Proposition 1A, a \$9.95 billion bond measure meant to act as seed money for a \$40 billion to \$45 billion private-public joint venture to establish a high-speed rail system linking Northern and Southern California. A business plan showing how the system would operate and be financed was supposed to be released no later than Sept. 1, 2008, but the plan wasn't released until after the election.

It was tough not to be cynical about the delay, given that the business plan cut ridership projections, raised red flags about difficulties in attracting private investments and provided details that undercut claims that the bullet-train system would reduce traffic congestion and air pollution.

The cynicism grew when a revised business plan came out last fall that sharply cut already-reduced ridership projections and forecast much higher ticket prices. Even with the changes, the plan still made wildly improbable forecasts of 41 million passengers per year. That's far more than the 26 million passengers a year carried by the entire Amtrak system nationwide, which has 500-plus destinations in 46 states.

The evidence was already strong that voters should be asked to cancel the project. On Monday, the evidence became overwhelming. The Legislative Analyst's Office released a terse analysis that depicted the latest business plan as vague, unsubstantiated and not credible – and then concluded with this bombshell:

"The Proposition 1A bond measure explicitly prohibits any public operating subsidy. However, the plan ... assumes some form of revenue guarantee from the public sector to attract private investment. This generally means some public entity promises to pay the contractor the difference between projected and realized revenues if necessary. The plan does not explain how the guarantee could be structured so as not to violate the law."

In an e-mail, a spokesman for the California High-Speed Rail Authority, Jeffrey Barker, said the authority was responding to the LAO criticism by putting together a business plan that "does not require government operating subsidies" and could comply with the wording of Proposition 1A by offering private investors a "ridership guarantee" instead of a "revenue guarantee."

But a "ridership guarantee" and a "revenue guarantee" are the same thing because ridership times ticket price equals revenue. The Legislative Analyst's Office told us yesterday that it agrees.

It appears the rail authority sees semantic acrobatics as the way to answer the LAO's concerns about the bullet-train project's inability to attract \$10 billion to \$12 billion in private investments without guaranteeing investors their money is safe. It's time to dredge up this warning from the original business plan: Potential private investors "made it clear that they would need both financial and political commitments from state officials that government would share the risks to their participation."

"Shared risks" means "subsidies if things go bad." There's no reconciling that with Proposition 1A's intent. This poorly crafted, nonsensical boondoggle of a ballot initiative should be repealed as soon as possible.

[Blog in LA Times, Monday, January 11, 2009:](#)

California cap-and-trade: A political gamble?

It may be no accident that an advisory committee to the California Air Resources Board today recommended that 75% of an expected \$20 billion in annual revenue from the state's proposed global warming measures be kicked right back to state residents.

"Household friendly" is the way the announcement put it.

The 16-member Economic and Allocation Advisory Committee is made up of distinguished economists and environmental policymakers such as Stanford's Lawrence Goulder and Berkeley's Dan Kammen, but they can put their fingers to the wind as much as anyone.

"I continue to believe the best program will be one that returns value to the people through tax cuts, rebates or dividends, and I applaud the committee for recognizing those options," said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in a statement after the vote.

Goulder told reporters that "Political feasibility was not a criterion we employed." But with a 12.5% unemployment rate, California's landmark [AB 32 climate legislation](#) faces major challenges as the air board prepares a complex program to cap the state's greenhouse gas pollution by 2012, auction emissions allowances to industry and design a trading program to alleviate the burden.

Industry has mounted a vigorous campaign against the program, citing a study that pegs the cost to households at \$3,857 a year in higher energy prices -- a figure that the air board flatly disputes. Other studies estimate the rise in energy costs at about 1.3% per household. The advisory committee is now reviewing the air board's economic analysis and will issue a report on the costs next month.

Polls show a drop in California residents' concern over global warming. A Republican legislator is gathering signatures for a ballot initiative to roll back the law until state unemployment drops to 5.5%. And leading GOP gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman has also called for a delay in implementing the rules.

The advisory committee's report calls for auctioning 100% of greenhouse gas emissions permits for industry, a program that is expected to generate as much as \$20 billion a year by 2020. The system would gradually lower the cap so less pollution would be emitted, and it would allow industries to trade permits among themselves to save money.

Despite heavy lobbying from California utilities, the committee specifically recommended against offering free allowances for them to reduce electricity prices, "which would remove the incentive for consumers to invest in energy efficiency," it said.

A cap-and-trade system with 100% auctioned permits is already operating in nine Northeastern states covering only power plants and has raised \$500 million in the first 15 months. Europe's cap-and-trade program suffered major problems after giving away allowances to industry, which removed incentives to conserve fossil fuels. Now the European Union is phasing in an auction system expected to generate \$71 billion a year by 2020.

The California program, as recommended by the board, would allocate a quarter of the revenue to projects such as renewable-energy plants that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And it would offer special breaks to low-income families who might suffer from higher energy prices. It also opens the way for "border adjustments" for industries such as cement, which could lose business to out-of-state producers that are not subject to carbon regulation.

-- Margot Roosevelt

[Hanford Sentinel, Editorial, Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2010:](#)

Another View: Score two for the environment

After eight long years during which regulators pillaged the environment rather than protecting it, there's a clean breeze wafting out of Washington. Last week, the Obama administration took key steps toward reversing two of President George W. Bush's more egregious assaults on science, conservation and public health.

Remember Tim DeChristopher? He was the courageous University of Utah student who, in December 2008, thwarted the Bush administration's 11th-hour attempt to auction off pristine parcels of Utah's red-rock desert for oil and gas development by submitting bogus bids. DeChristopher was partly vindicated when a federal judge later blocked the land leases because the Bureau of Land Management hadn't bothered to evaluate the impact of drilling on air quality and prehistoric artworks. That prompted a review of BLM procedures, which culminated Wednesday when Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced a series of reforms to ensure that such fiascoes aren't repeated.

Under the changes, there will be more government and public review of proposed leases and a better planning process. Congressional Republicans and the oil industry are crying foul, saying Salazar's initiatives will create delays and lead to higher energy prices. But it's hard to believe things could get worse for the industry than they are now; the Bush administration's laissez-faire attitude led to multiple

court challenges of leasing decisions. In essence, the failure of federal regulators to do their job forced the courts to do it for them, costing the industry millions in legal fees and worsening delays.

In even better news for everyone who breathes, the Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday proposed a stricter federal standard for smog. In 2008, the EPA's science panel had unanimously recommended an air standard of less than 70 parts per billion of ozone, a pollutant that has been linked to respiratory conditions and premature death. Scientists also proposed a secondary standard during growing seasons to protect crops, whose growth is retarded by ozone -- the main ingredient in smog. Yet after direct intervention from Bush, the secondary standard was rejected and the primary standard was set at 75 parts per billion, too high to protect human health. After reviewing the evidence, EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson is now proposing to set the standards that the agency had originally endorsed. Meeting the tougher rules will be expensive, but not as costly as treating the medical conditions linked to smog.

The score: Public recreational, cultural, health and conservation interests 2; polluters 0. The game has changed.

(This editorial appeared in the Los Angeles Times.)

[Blog in the NY Times, Wednesday, January 13, 2010:](#)

Q&A: Hong Kong's Air-Pollution Problem

By REENITA MALHOTRA HORA

EPA Thick smog hangs over Hong Kong. [Air pollution](#) reached dangerous levels one of every eight days in 2009, according to news reports.

The air pollution in Hong Kong reached "life threatening" levels on average one in every eight days in 2009, The South China Morning Post reported in an article that was picked up widely by other news media last week.

According to the report, the "roadside air pollution index" recorded by Hong Kong's Environmental Protection Department indicated "very high pollution" on at least 44 days in the city's central district — up from 39 days in 2008.

Green Inc. reached out to Eva Wong, a spokeswoman with the Environmental Protection Department, to discuss the situation. Excerpts from that e-mail exchange are below.

Q.

Has the air pollution situation in Hong Kong really become worse in 2009 compared with previous years?

A.

Concentrations of all the major pollutants except ozone in the general (ambient) air reduced in 2009 as compared with 1999. At the roadside, there are also discernible signs of air quality improvements due to the comprehensive vehicle emission control programs taken after 1999.

However, nitrogen dioxide concentration rose by 11 percent in the period.

The rise in nitrogen dioxide concentration at the roadside in 2009 could be explained by the high level of solar radiation and lower than normal rainfall, which favors the photochemical formation of ozone in the region. Hence, 2009 saw a rise in ozone concentration in the ambient air by 10 percent as compared with 2008. The higher ozone concentration is conducive to the oxidation of nitrogen monoxide emitted from vehicles to form nitrogen dioxide, resulting in a higher nitrogen dioxide concentration at the roadside.

Q.

Is it true that the air pollution in Hong Kong is already so consistently dangerous that the threshold for severe harm to human health is exceeded almost every day?

A.

The health effects of air pollution vary according to the species of the causing air pollutants and their concentrations.

To alert the public to the health risk posed by air pollution, particularly in the short term, most countries use an air pollution index (A.P.I.), the compilation of which does not have a universal methodology.

In Hong Kong, the A.P.I. system was developed originally based on the former U.S. Pollutants Standards Index system. It is in general comparable with those adopted in other Asian cities, such as Singapore and Taipei. Like the A.P.I. systems in other cities, we provide advice to those more susceptible to air pollution, such as those with heart and respiratory illnesses, to take precautionary measures when the A.P.I. reaches the very high band — i.e., an A.P.I. exceeding the 100 mark.

Apart from emissions, weather conditions affect daily air pollution levels. We usually have good air quality in summer because the summer monsoon brings a cleaner background airstream from the ocean and the air-mixing level is higher favoring the dispersion of pollutants. Our air pollution is higher on days with unfavorable weather conditions that hinder dispersion, or favor photochemical smog formation and when we are under the influence of the continental airstream. Such conditions more often occur in autumn and winter.

On the whole in 2009, the A.P.I. level breached the 100 mark 7 percent to 13 percent of the time at each of our three roadside air-quality monitoring stations.

Q.

We understand that Hong Kong's air-pollution index allows for levels of emissions many times higher than those recommended under the World Health Organization's Air Quality Guidelines. Can you comment?

A.

Our A.P.I. system makes reference to Hong Kong's current Air Quality Objectives (A.Q.O.'s). In response to the release of a new air-quality guideline by the WHO, we are in the process of updating our A.Q.O.'s.

We are considering the views gathered from a public consultation on a set of proposed new A.Q.O.'s, which are largely comparable with those of the European Union, and a host of air-quality improvement measures for achieving the proposed new A.Q.O.'s with an aim to deciding how best to take forward the updating.

Meanwhile, we have also commissioned the health experts of the local universities to review our A.P.I. system for better communication of the air-pollution levels and their respective health effects to the public.

[Blog in the NY Times, Wednesday, January 13, 2010:](#)

A Cement Giant Tackles its CO2 Emissions

By ROBERT P. WALZER

Bloomberg A Cemex cement plant in Monterrey, Mexico. The company is angling to reduce its carbon footprint at plants around the world.

With cement production accounting for as much as 5 percent of global emissions of [carbon dioxide](#) — and the potential for expanded carbon caps looming — Cemex, one of the world's largest producers of building materials, is angling to bring down its carbon dioxide emissions and perhaps wind up with some credits it can sell.

"We are preparing ourselves for a carbon-constrained world," said Luis Farías, the company's senior vice president for energy and climate change, in a telephone interview from Monterrey, Mexico, where Cemex is based. "We're stabilizing the costs of fuel and tying ourselves to lower emission methods."

The company, with operations more than in 50 countries, says it is reducing its carbon footprint by shifting to renewable energy and by using biomass as inputs to its kilns. It has also begun exploring new technologies to capture, store and recycle carbon dioxide.

Mr. Farías said that in 2009 the company substituted 16 percent of the fossil fuels it uses to fire its cement plants — mainly coal and petroleum coke — for renewable fuels, greatly surpassing its target.

It aims for at least an 18 percent substitution rate in 2010, he said.

By doing so, the company benefits by generating carbon reduction credits that can offset some of the commitments of its European operations under the Kyoto protocol, he said.

"It turns out to be a sound investment when you factor in the emissions reduction credits," Mr. Farías said.

He added that the company gained technological know-how in fuel substitution from RMC, the British ready mix company it acquired in 2004, especially RMC's German operations, which Cemex is transferring to its plants worldwide.

Mr. Farías said that in Cemex's operations around the world, it variously uses municipal waste, sewage sludge, tires, plastics, tree trimmings from forestry companies and agriculture residues, such as rice husks, to fuel its plants.

In Egypt, he said the company is waiting for regulatory approval to begin burning on a larger scale the biomass residue from palm and rice plantations along the Nile River for its plant in Assiut.

"Ultimately, we could achieve a 75 percent substitution rate worldwide or more," said Mr. Farías, who declined to set a timetable.

Meanwhile, Mr. Farías said that 18 percent of Cemex's electricity will come from renewable energy sources in 2010 compared to 3 percent last year.

That is mainly the result of a 250-megawatt wind farm in Mexico completed last year by the Spanish company Acciona, which will provide one quarter of Cemex's electricity needs in Mexico.

Cemex also contracted to buy power from an existing hydroelectric energy project in Panama last year, Mr. Farías said.

Last year, the United States Energy Department awarded Cemex a \$1.1 million grant to help create an industrial-scale process to capture and store carbon that Mr. Farías said is an early stage.

"This is our vision of the future," he said. "We're trying to be prepared."