

Help available to make vehicles greener

By Ben Keller, The Business Journal

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AT&T set a rather large example for environmental stewardship when it committed to replacing 15,000 of its cars, vans and trucks with cleaner burning vehicles by 2018.

While most companies lack the finances needed to switch over to fuels like compressed natural gas and propane, interest is slowly growing for the sake of the air and rising gasoline prices.

Those factors and more were addressed during a meeting hosted last week by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, where a handful of fuel and vehicle distributors spoke about how their products will work to move the country away from petroleum and clear toxic emissions from the roads.

Following the presentations, attendants representing cities, schools and private companies were all given the opportunity to test several vehicles, including the clean-natural-gas-fueled Ford Transit Connect and GM 3500 van and the propane-fueled Ford E350 van and F250 pickup.

The meeting was arranged by the San Joaquin Valley Clean Cities Coalition, a partnership of public and private agencies and businesses united under the Clean Cities initiative by the U.S. Department of Energy that aims to reduce petroleum use by 2.5 billion gallons per year by 2020.

The coalition reported from a survey that a total of 2,316 alternative-fueled vehicles throughout eight San Joaquin Valley counties displaced the equivalent of more than 6.96 million gallons of gasoline in 2010 and reduced greenhouse gases by 13,288 tons.

Mark Gilio retrofits between 400 to 500 vehicles a year with motors that are compatible with alternative fuels. The owner of A-1 Alternative Fuel Systems in Fresno, Gilio is one of only two companies in the state that performs the conversions, most of which he does through a drop-ship contract with Ford whenever dealerships order the vehicles.

Gilio said he has the capability of upgrading 2,500 vehicles a year to run off CNG or propane if only the demand were there.

"It is growing, but not amongst the public yet," Gilio said. "Most of the private fleets are in the Bay Area or in Southern California. Otherwise it's usually municipalities, cities and counties because they have their own fueling stations."

California has the greatest number of natural gas fueling stations at 221 for compressed natural gas and 35 for liquefied natural gas. According to Gilio, however, the lack of fueling stations in the San Joaquin Valley, with around 20 natural gas stations and 30 for propane, has stalled large investments into alternative fuel vehicles, even among companies that can afford them.

For the most part, those facilities are being installed and operated by public agencies and school districts, he said.

Since 1995, the Visalia Unified School District has used various grants to replace its buses with CNG models, which now total 42, or around 50 percent of its fleet. Kings Canyon Unified School District started its move toward natural gas around the same year and now has 25 of its 67 buses running off CNG and is now looking to obtain five Ford Transit Connect vans for general use.

Both the Fresno Unified School District and Clovis Unified School Districts have also purchased new CNG buses within the past three years, as have cities like Porterville, Chowchilla, Tulare and Visalia.

Public agencies may look forward to greater incentives to clean their fleets through a new program by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District that covers up to \$20,000 for the cost of each new natural gas, propane, hybrid or electric vehicle. Other programs will extend up to \$3,000 to private companies and the general public for the purchase of clean vehicles.

Aaron Tarango, supervisor of grant programs with the air district, said those interested in taking in the grants should act fast as available funding is always uncertain from year to year.

"This year we got \$200 million in incentive funding to give away in the district," Tarango said. "Depending on type of project you're looking at, we may be way oversubscribed in the number of applications we're able to fund."

While not at levels achieved in the public sector, a few private companies are setting ambitious goals in their quest for cleaner, cheaper-running vehicles.

Since AT&T pledged \$565 million in 2009 to replace 15,000 of its fleet nationwide with clean fuel or electric vehicles, the company has put 2,088 on the road in California, 1,896 running on CNG.

"We always want to make sure we're doing right by the communities we serve and going to vehicles that help reduce emissions in our environment is a big important step," said AT&T spokesperson John Britton. "And it's part of our long-term strategy to reduce costs."

UPS recently negotiated with the air district for \$1.4 million in funding that would deploy 50 electric trucks at various locations in the San Joaquin Valley, enough to reduce fuel consumption by 160,000 gallons per year and remove 16 tons of nitrogen oxides from the air.

According to the Alternative Fuels & Advanced Vehicles Data Center, emissions from vehicles that run off natural gas are 10 percent lower in volatile organic compounds than gasoline, 20- to 30 percent lower in carbon monoxide and 80 percent lower in particulate matter but 400 percent higher in methane. Propane showed similar reductions in pollutants but only a 10 percent increase in methane.

In a July 2011 price report by the Department of Energy, the nationwide average price for a gallon of gasoline was \$3.68 compared to the equivalent amount of energy for CNG at \$2.07 and \$3.09 for propane.

Several incentives are aiming to make investments in alternative fuel vehicles easier. In 2007, Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 118, providing about \$100 million annually over seven years to encourage new fuels and technologies. The 2011-2012 cycle sets aside \$24.5 million of that to boost the number of natural gas and propane-powered vehicles in the state and the stations that support them.

Currently waiting in the House Energy and Commerce Committee is a bill that will allow a federal income tax credit through 2016 for those that purchase vehicles powered by natural gas. HR 1380 would also have the Department of Energy providing grants to automobile manufacturers to help make such vehicles more efficient.

Pollution: Iran cities worst, Canada and U.S. best

Frank Jordans, Associated Press

In the S.F.Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, Sept. 27, 2011

Geneva -- Cities in Iran, India, Pakistan and the capital of Mongolia rank among the worst on the planet for air pollution, while those in the United States and Canada are among the best, according to the first global survey released Monday by the World Health Organization.

The southwest Iranian city of Ahvaz earned the unfortunate distinction of having the highest measured level of airborne particles smaller than 10 micrometers.

WHO released the list to highlight the need to reduce outdoor air pollution, which is estimated to cause 1.34 million premature deaths each year. The global body said investments to lower pollution levels quickly pay off because of lower disease rates and, therefore, lower health care costs.

The list, which relies on country-reported data over the past several years, measures the levels of airborne particles smaller than 10 micrometers - so-called PM10s - for almost 1,100 cities.

WHO recommends an upper limit of 20 micrograms for PM10s, which can cause serious respiratory problems in humans. They are mostly sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide from power plants, auto exhausts and industry.

Ahvaz's annual average of PM10s was 372 micrograms per cubic meter. Heavy industry and low-quality vehicle fuel are the main causes of air pollution in the desert city of 1.3 million.

The study found that the Mongolian capital, Ulan Bator, had an annual average PM10s density of 279 micrograms per cubic meter, followed by another west Iranian city, Sanandaj, with 254 micrograms.

Cities in Pakistan and India, such as Quetta and Kanpur, as well as Botswana's capital, Gaborone, also ranked high on the pollution scale.

WHO said the reasons for high pollution levels varied, but often rapid industrialization and the use of poor quality fuels for transportation and electricity generation are to blame.

At the other end of the list are cities in Canada and the United States, which benefit from lower population density, favorable climates and stricter air pollution regulation.

Yukon territory's capital, Whitehorse, had a yearly average of just 3 micrograms of PM10s per cubic meter, while Santa Fe, N.M., measured 6 micrograms.

Washington, D.C., had a level of 18 micrograms, Tokyo measured 23 micrograms, and Paris had 38 micrograms of PM10s per cubic meter.

House approves bill to delay, scrap EPA rules

The Associated Press

In the Hanford Sentinel and other papers, Friday, Sept. 23, 2011

The Republican-controlled House on Friday took another swipe at the government's ability to control air pollution, passing a bill that would delay or scrap rules to reduce mercury and other harmful air emissions.

The 249-169 vote sent the legislation to the Senate, where Environment and Public Works Committee chairman Barbara Boxer vowed to defeat it.

"Let me be clear: This is a train we must stop," the California Democrat said after House passage. "I will do everything I can to block the rollbacks being pushed by House Republicans and polluters."

Should Boxer fail to defeat the bill, the White House threatened to veto it. Spokesman Jay Carney said Friday that the protections being rolled back under the bill would prevent tens of thousands of premature deaths and hundreds of thousands of childhood asthma attacks.

The bill would require President Barack Obama to set up a committee of Cabinet-level officials to evaluate the toll that a dozen-plus EPA regulations would have on jobs, electricity, gasoline prices and competitiveness.

The regulations targeted in the legislation include everything from toxic air pollution, to gases blamed for global warming and to health-based limits for soot and smog-forming nitrogen oxides.

Republican-backed measures added to the bill extended its reach by nullifying regulations drafted by the Obama administration to control air pollution that blows into downwind states. They also control for the first time toxic air emissions from some of the oldest coal-fired power plants. The EPA can't draft new regulations on those issues for years and has no deadline to re-issue them.

Republicans said they were not out to gut clean air protections, but instead wanted to phase in a timeout that would allow further analyses and buy time for the economy to recover. However, they held little back in criticizing the nation's environmental agency and its director, Lisa Jackson.

"EPA is a rogue agency," said Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb. "They are producing rules in a fast and furious manner that greatly affect this nation's ability to generate electricity. This bill just wraps three of them together and says, take a step back, do a cost analysis as the president has asked of agencies."

"This agency, though, as headed by Ms. Jackson, has said to us ... that she will not ... follow the president's own executive order to look at the costs, the cost-benefit analysis."

A key opponent of the Republican bill, Democratic Rep. Earl Blumenauer of Oregon, said, "Under the guise of asking for more information, the (bill) delays two of the most crucial clean air protections of the last decade. It is a blatant giveaway to polluters that will cost thousands of American lives and hundreds of billions of dollars in preventable health care needs."

While the EPA does a cost-benefit analysis of its rules now, it is not as expansive as the examination required by the bill and doesn't look at the cumulative costs of all rules. Current law also bars the agency in some cases from considering costs, such as when it sets a health-based air pollution standard.

That was changed when the House adopted a measure from Rep. Bob Latta, R-Ohio, that would allow EPA to consider cost when it defines how much pollution is unhealthy to breathe.

Republicans and industry trade groups also alleged that the independent committee was necessary because the agency's own analysis can't be trusted.

In a letter to House members Thursday, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said that the bill would cut down "on the common problem of EPA conducting overly-rosy analysis to justify the rule it wants to put in place."

Democrats said the bill didn't consider benefits at all.

Rep. John Dingell, the Michigan Democrat and chief architect of the 1990 overhaul of the federal Clean Air Act, said the legislation would flip the EPA's priorities by putting cost ahead of health.

"The first decision would be cost ... and the second decision would be how the health of people would be affected," Dingell said.

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, Tuesday, Sept. 27, 2011](#)

Our View: Rigid EPA too severe on Valley

Struggling area fined for ozone emissions but has made great strides in meeting air standards.

Ford to City: Drop Dead.

The infamous 1975 New York Daily News headline was splashed across the front page after President Gerald Ford declined to provide federal aid to help the city avoid bankruptcy.

Our reaction to the Environmental Protection Agency's move last week to fine the San Joaquin Valley \$29 million for violating the Clean Air Act would read:

Merced to Feds: Get Smart — Have a Heart.

Technically, we broke the rules. Our ozone emissions in the Valley exceeded the parts-per-billion standard the Clean Air Act set for compliance to cut air pollution and other stuff we don't want our kids breathing.

We get that.

But we offer two arguments why the feds should have made an exception this time around.

First, according to the Associated Press, we were victimized by a freakish wind pattern last Thursday: "A rare weather phenomenon recently described as the 'Fresno Eddy' created a swirl of counter-clockwise wind between Bakersfield and Clovis. Pollutants at the southern tip of the Valley rode the eddy to a point east of Fresno where the violation occurred."

In other words, an imperfect storm of uncontrollable air currents did us in. Our contribution came mainly from vehicle emissions, which rise this month because schools are back in session and a lot of crops need to be harvested. Cars and tractors performing essential roles are to blame for our "dirty" air.

Our second argument against the fine is that we've been down so long it looks like up to us. We're the Appalachia of the West, although the one back east is faring better than our beleaguered part of the state. Foreclosures, unemployment, poverty rates — you know the grim litany.

What the eight counties of the Valley don't need right now is a fine by folks who've never stood in line for a minimum-wage job ... who've never had to forego fresh fruit because it costs too much ... who've never lost their house.

Do we want clean air? Of course. Do we need to cut back emissions so our high asthma rates go down? Sure. Do we understand this? We do.

But instead of lashing us with a fine we can't afford, why don't the feds give us a warning, a bureaucratic slap on the wrist? Why don't they recognize that we in the Valley need all the help we can get? That when the state pays the fine (in the form of a \$12 hike in vehicle registration fees), it means less money for needy people and projects?

"The Valley in recent years has made great strides in reducing emissions at factories and on farms," the AP reported, "but suffers because pollution generated as far north as San Francisco is sucked into the bowl."

Give us a break.

[Bakersfield Californian, Health Beat Blog, Tuesday, Sept. 27, 2011:](#)

Preliminary reading: Arvin's air equally bad

By Kellie Schmitt

Last week, I wrote that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials were heading out to Arvin to monitor the downtown's air. They were responding to residents' complaints that the area's new monitor--located at Di Giorgio Elementary School --didn't accurately represent the air most people there breathe.

Some preliminary results from the mobile monitors are in, said Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director. Last Wednesday, district officials placed a portable monitor in central Arvin on Meyer Street between Hood and Franklin Streets, and measured ozone from 10:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. That monitor's hourly average clocked in at 95.4 ppb, which they rounded to 95.

Meanwhile, the reading at Di Giorgio was 94.5, rounded up to 95.

Sadredin's take: "Although a one-day comparison is not enough to reach an ultimate scientific conclusion, the data provides a reasonable preliminary indication that the permanent monitor at the Di Giorgio Elementary School is a good representative for ozone concentrations to which Arvin population is exposed to. We are hoping to more monitoring in the coming months to reach a more definitive conclusion."

The district may return at different times during the year to see if the relationship between the two site stays consistent. If the district officials finds that the Di Giorgio site isn't accurate, they will do "everything we can" to find a better location for Arvin, Sadredin said