

Cyclists urge City Council for bike lanes

By Roger Phelps, The Porterville Recorder

Friday, Nov. 19, 2004

Bicycle aficionados wheeled out an array of arguments on why the city should seek grants for putting in bike lanes, then suggested some grant sources that seem easy to tap.

"I teach at Porterville High," said resident Maria Ennis, addressing City Council members Tuesday. "I appreciate your efforts for the students' sake."

Representatives of the Porterville Blue Skies Coalition, an anti-smog activist group, wrote Nov. 8 to advise city officials about grants available from a local air district, and from the state of California.

"The coalition is pleased to report that we have identified two sources of funding that combined would pay for over 25 miles of Class II bicycle lanes at a cost to the city of under \$2,000," members wrote. "With the combination of the two grants the coalition feels we are in a uniquely favorable position to take a major step toward stemming the further decay of our local air quality."

Councilman Richard Stadtherr said Tuesday he was familiar with the research done by the group.

"There's money available," Stadtherr said. "One of the nice things about it is it's non-competitive. We will not be thrown in a hopper with other people."

According to research by the anti-smog activist group, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is prepared to issue grants of up to \$150,000 to a city that proposes to build transportation networks of bike lanes and bike paths.

Porterville also should be able to get \$23,000 from the state for bike lanes if it can put up \$2,300 in matching money, coalition officials wrote.

Councilman Cameron Hamilton said the first step is to discover whether city grant applications would need to specify sites and projects where money would be spent. If so, some staff work is necessary before filing applications, he said.

"I'd like to do it if they are not site-specific," Hamilton said. "You guys are onto something, but we need a deeper look."

City staff members will report next meeting to the council on whether the grants are site-specific.

Air quality is not the only argument for bike lanes and bike paths, residents said.

Several residents stood to say that Porterville is unsafe for bicyclists, to a degree that demands immediate action.

Others cited the social problem of obesity, especially mounting child obesity, as a good reason for the city to actively encourage bike riding.

State toughens diesel rules for watercraft, railways

The Associated Press

Published in the Orange County Register

Friday, Nov. 19, 2004

SACRAMENTO - California stepped into another area that has been the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal government Thursday, as state air regulators adopted stricter fuel standards for watercraft and locomotives.

The new diesel standards will apply only to locomotives and marine vessels that operate within the state, such as harbor vessels and engines that transfer cars within railroad yards.

The board estimates that the new standards will cut airborne particulates from locomotives and watercraft by about 25 percent, nitrogen oxides by about 3 percent, and sulfur oxide emissions by 78 percent - a boon for asthma sufferers who live near train tracks or rail yards.

Report: Hydrogen polluting

More carbon dioxide product of fuel making

By Harrison Sheppard, Sacramento bureau

L.A. Daily News

Thurs., Nov. 18, 2004

A report issued Thursday by a Libertarian think tank seeks to debunk Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's plans for a "hydrogen highway," by claiming hydrogen-fueled vehicles will make little difference in reducing harmful emissions.

The Reason Foundation report argues that, even while hydrogen cells may be clean-burning, the processes used to manufacture and distribute hydrogen are dirty enough to nearly negate the benefits -- and the cost of conversion isn't worth the difference.

The study instead advocates increasing conservation, lowering freeway speed limits and making gasoline-powered cars smaller.

"Until we figure out ways to create hydrogen that are less energy-intensive or the performance of hydrogen improves, it's not a good air-quality measure," said Adrian Moore, the study's project director.

State environmental officials concede the study's argument has some merit, given the current state of technology. But they note that hydrogen is still an emerging science, and that the ultimate goal is to produce hydrogen cells through clean, renewable sources such as solar, wind and biomass, rather than natural gas.

"Every day, these vehicles coming out are lighter and more fuel-efficient," said Michele St. Martin, spokeswoman for the California Department of Environmental Protection. "At the end of the day, experts are saying hydrogen-powered vehicles will be at least twice as fuel-efficient as gasoline vehicles."

Earlier this year, Schwarzenegger proposed creating a "California Hydrogen Highway Network," with up to 200 hydrogen fueling stations located along the state's freeways by 2010. The project is expected to cost \$75 million to \$200 million, with much of the cost picked up by the private sector.

The state has already opened hydrogen fueling stations in Los Angeles, Davis and San Francisco, and expects to have 18 more open soon, she said. City governments in those regions are using hydrogen cars in pilot programs.

Hydrogen-car supporters say they are the clean-burning wave of the future, producing only water, not dirty carbon dioxide, in their exhaust.

The Reason study said it is not the emissions of hydrogen-fueled vehicles that are troubling, but the way that hydrogen is produced and distributed. Hydrogen plants would most likely run on natural gas, resulting in high emissions of carbon dioxide, the study argues.

The study also notes that converting some vehicles to hydrogen may actually make them greater polluters, because hydrogen vehicles are heavier and take more energy to generate the same horsepower.

V. John White, an adviser to the Sierra Club on clean-air issues, said he is skeptical of findings by the Reason Foundation because of the group's ideological bias. Hydrogen, he said, is only one part of a multipronged strategy to reduce emissions in California, and the hydrogen field continues to improve.

"The Reason Foundation doesn't accept we're living in a carbon-constrained world and petroleum is rapidly reaching its peak and will soon begin a long decline," White said. "The alternatives to our addiction to petroleum are important to develop."

Bus rides to be free in summer

By Scott Pesznecker

MercedSun-Star

Wed., Nov. 17, 2004

Uncle Sam's buying rounds for everyone.

Rounds of bus rides, that is.

For three months next summer -- when the Central Valley's air quality is at its worst -- people will be able to ride Merced County Transit buses for free.

The rides are courtesy of a \$622,500 federal transportation program to lure people out of their cars, which contribute heavily to smog on bad-air days.

The funds will cover fares in August, September and October 2005 and in summer 2006.

"The idea is we're going to have a heavy promotion toward the middle or the end of spring to kick it off, to let everybody know," said Merced County Transit Transportation Manager Larry Shankland.

Outgoing Livingston Mayor Gurpal Samra first mentioned offering free rides three years ago as a way to contribute on "Spare The Air" days. Spare The Air is a state program that alerts people when smog reaches unsafe levels.

"The problem back then was, you never knew when a Spare The Air day was coming until it was a Spare The Air day," Shankland said.

The Merced County Association of Governments found funding for the rides by dedicating its share of federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality dollars to enough transit-related projects.

Congestion Mitigation Air Quality money can only be spent on purchases and projects that help improve air quality.

But county association officials must spend their federal funds within about a year of allocating them to projects, MCAG Executive Director Jesse Brown said.

The strict timeline rules out using the funds for long-term projects such as highway construction, Brown said. It also can cause some planners to lose their funding if a project takes longer than anticipated to get started.

Because MCAG successfully found enough projects to use its \$5 million in funding -- and because enough other counties were not successful -- Merced County received an additional \$4 million for other air quality projects.

In addition to free bus rides, the extra funding will also allow county transit officials to buy eight new buses. Also, buses will be fitted with global positioning systems, allowing transit officials to track their fleet.

Merced County increased its share of Congestion Mitigation Air Quality funds by 73 percent, the largest increase in the state.

"It's a very reasonable policy," Brown said about how counties can lose or gain the federal funds. "It just means we all need to do the best job we can to keep projects moving ahead on the schedules that we set."

Shankland said the influx of federal funds might help Merced County Transit gain new passengers, especially by offering free rides.

"The proof is always in the pudding," he said. "Will that happen? I don't know."

Truckers drop fight to stop cleaner diesel Bush EPA has backed Clinton-era regulations

The Associated Press
in various papers
Wed., Nov. 17, 2004

WASHINGTON - After years of resistance, the U.S. trucking industry says it will not try to impede or delay a new federal rule aimed at cutting diesel pollution.

The American Trucking Associations, a trade group, is satisfied by the Bush administration's attention to industry concerns, the group's officials say. The Clinton-era rule backed by President Bush's Environmental Protection Agency in 2001 requires cleaner diesel fuel beginning in 2006, and less-polluting diesel engines in tractor-trailer rigs and other heavy-duty trucks and buses starting in 2007. All new engines would be covered by 2010.

"Many environmental groups have been concerned that ATA will seek a delay in the implementation of the rule. I can tell you without reservation that ATA does not intend to challenge EPA's diesel engine emission standards," Bill Graves, the group's president, said in a prepared speech that he planned to deliver Wednesday afternoon.

"It is very clear to ATA and the motor carrier industry that this rule will result in significant positive impacts on the quality of our nation's air," Graves, a former Republican governor of Kansas, says in the speech, a copy of which was provided to The Associated Press.

The new rule requires refiners to lower the amount of sulfur in diesel fuel for truck and bus engines from the current level of 500 parts per million down to less than 15 parts per million by June 2006. That means less pollution will come out of the tailpipes.

It also requires manufacturers to phase in between 2007 and 2010 cleaner-burning diesel engines for tractor-trailer rigs and other heavy-duty trucks and buses.

EPA calls it 'great news'

"This is great news. This will result in dramatic emission reductions and improve air quality for millions of Americans," EPA spokeswoman Cynthia Bergman said Wednesday.

About 159 million people live in areas where smog or microscopic soot makes the air unhealthy, the EPA says in a recent analysis.

The EPA estimated the new rule will cut emissions of smog-forming nitrogen oxides, soot, carbon monoxide, acid rain-causing sulfur dioxide and other air toxics, preventing 8,300 premature deaths, more than 9,500 hospitalizations and 1.5 million lost work days.

New trucks will cost an average \$5,000 to \$10,000 more and the fuel economy is expected to be only slightly less efficient, according to the trade group.

After a scandal involving the sale of heavy-duty engines with computer software that altered pollution-control equipment under highway driving conditions, engine manufacturers agreed to pay \$850 million to produce cleaner engines after Oct. 1, 2002. The EPA created the 2007 rule as the next step in reducing diesel emissions.

The trucking and petroleum industries and other businesses had fought the 1997 EPA health standards for limiting the amount of soot in the air. Those standards were used as a basis for the 2007 diesel rule and other diesel-cutting regulations. The health standards were delayed several years by unsuccessful court challenges.

[Modesto Bee editorial, Friday, Nov. 19, 2004:](#)

White House fiddles while Valley air kills

The deadly evidence continues to pile up: Air pollution kills people. The latest bad news is that even small and temporary increases in smog during the summer can cause several thousand premature deaths across the country.

That's especially bad news for the San Joaquin Valley, where we yield to no one in the depth and danger of our air quality problems.

The most recent study was conducted by Yale and Johns Hopkins universities and published this week in the prestigious Journal of the American Medical Association. It analyzed data gathered between 1987 and 2000 in 95 cities across the United States.

Ozone is the main culprit in smog. It forms from chemicals in emissions from various sources - mostly vehicles. It can trigger asthma attacks and other problems.

Earlier studies have clearly drawn that connection between ground-level ozone and respiratory illnesses. The new study is the first to provide evidence that smog also causes premature deaths.

Nationwide, air quality is improving. But that simple statement conceals a number of other daunting problems.

For one, air quality around here isn't getting appreciably better. The valley faces special conditions of geography and climate that make our air pollution an even more intractable problem.

Another problem is that the more we study air pollution, the more it becomes clear that we didn't really know how bad its effects can be. The latest study is a good example of that. It's also hard to gain ground on the problem when so many more people keep moving here, adding their own measure to the pollution we all cause.

The newest report also found that the average amount of ozone in the air above the cities studied was far below the federal standard for violations - and the valley recorded 109 such violations last year.

Add to that mix the Bush administration's single-minded determination to dismiss scientific evidence and gut existing clean air laws, and the struggle becomes decidedly more difficult.

But it's a struggle we must undertake. We've made a useful start on reducing pollution from off-road sources. Now it's time to target the main offenders: the vehicles we drive.

We can't go on blowing huge amounts of deadly toxins into the air we breathe and expect that things will ever get much better.

[Letter to the Bakersfield Californian, Thurs., Nov. 18, 2004](#)

Voice of Wasco heard

With Measure U, the citizens of Wasco have spoken with a clear, loud voice. "Don't ruin our quality of life." Five out of every six Wasco voters have requested that new milk factories, with their thousands of animals, are not to be located anywhere near the city's potential boundaries.

Those milk/manure factories which have located nearby Wasco during the past few years have shown the residents more than they ever wanted to know about the perils of living near this kind of polluting industry. Never have flies been such a problem in Wasco as this current fall season. The relatively clean, country air of Wasco (compared to urban Bakersfield) is now sometimes putrid with the stink of fresh and rotting "you know what."

The voice of Wasco now needs to be joined by other voices in Kern County. We don't need four more years of Supervisor Ray Watson telling people that massive, factory dairies are harmless because of modern technology. He has even implied that Measure U was a waste of time and money through an ad he placed in the Wasco paper.

We also don't need four more years of Ray Watson sitting on our Board of Supervisors and our local air quality board, where he approves every new polluting industry that comes along with the lame excuse that there have been nominal improvements in our lousy air quality recently. Please join together to recall Ray Watson. Enough of this nonsense.

-- TOM FRANTZ, Shafter

[Madera Tribune editorial, Thurs., Nov. 18, 2004](#)

Decision on cleaner diesel is welcome

The American Trucking Association has come out in favor of new rules for the manufacture of diesel fuel and diesel engines, and the result is likely to be that in a few years we'll be seeing cleaner air here in the San Joaquin Valley.

Which is good, because studies are showing us that in the summer, when air pollution is usually at its worse, some people react badly. They become ill. Some die.

That isn't all because of diesel engines. But diesel is part of the mix, and with cleaner-burning diesel fuel and cleaner-running diesel engines, that mix will tend to be less injurious to those who are susceptible to respiratory disorders.

A bigger contributor to air pollution is still the automobile - the older generation of automobile, that is. Newer cars run cleaner, but older ones aren't as clean, and every time those geezer cars' engines are started, the air gets a bit smoggier.

Some air pollution realists say it would be a good investment to round up all the pre-1992 cars and crush them - first paying the owners for them, of course, enough to enable those owners to buy newer and cleaner-running cars.

But then what would happen when all the newer cars became older cars? Would we buy them out all over again?

The biggest air-pollution culprit of all, though, is something we can't do much about, which is the shape of our valley. It's a big bowl into which polluted air from the populous coastal cities flows, and then stays. So any pollution we produce joins what already is a heavy load produced elsewhere.

That's why the diesel decision is good news.