

In Other Action

Also Tuesday, the Modesto City Council:

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2006

- Awarded a two-year, \$153,684 contract to Aaron Read & Associates, a Sacramento lobbying firm. Aaron Read & Associates has worked for the city since 2001 and helped Modesto secure a \$1.2 million reimbursement from the state for the costs of investigating Scott Peterson, who was convicted of murdering his wife, Laci.
- Accepted a \$250,000 federal grant allowing the Police Department to create a new gang education program for city schools. The program, Gang Resistance Education and Training, is targeted at students in fifth through eighth grade.
- Approved a plan to prohibit left turns except on green arrows at seven intersections. A review of collision records prompted the city to limit left turns at the following intersections: Oakdale Road and Orangeburg Avenue, Standiford Avenue and Tully Road, Standiford and Prescott Road, Standiford and Carver Road, Carpenter Road and Woodland Avenue, Pelandale Avenue and Sisk Road.
- Awarded a \$294,200 contract to Richard A. Heaps for traffic signal modifications at La Loma and Santa Ana avenues and at Needham Street and 12th Street/Virginia Avenue. Much of the cost will be covered by a state grant the city won [to improve air quality](#) by limiting traffic congestion.
- Approved a \$223,680 contract with Collins Electrical Co. to install five lighted crosswalks. The overall cost of the project is expected to be \$289,000; a state grant will cover \$247,884.
- Approved a \$69,845 contract with Fehr & Peers, a Walnut Creek traffic consultant, to conduct a study on traffic patterns near Vintage Faire Mall.

The extreme Prius

Car owners modify popular hybrid

by Jessica Hilberman

Tri-Valley Herald, Tuesday, Sept. 5, 2006

THE PRIUS has revolutionized the way Americans think about gas mileage. In just a few years, we went from being the country of the Hummer to a country where smaller, more efficient cars are suddenly all the rage.

In the Bay Area, people wait months to get a hybrid, dreaming all the while of cutting their fill-ups and zipping through the carpool lane. And some dream of all the changes they'll make after it arrives.

They are Prius hackers. John Davi is one of them.

Communications director for the CalCars Initiative, an advocacy group working to promote adoption of non-polluting automotive technologies, Davi's professional life revolves around bettering Prius gas mileage to more than 100 miles per gallon; it's done by adding a bank of batteries to existing cars.

Based in Palo Alto, CalCars' goal is to get just one U.S. automaker to sign onto making so-called "Plug-In Priuses" — Priuses that get 100 miles to the gallon.

"All we do is put more batteries into existing Priuses and add a plug," says Davi, of Palo Alto.

The idea is simple: Add batteries in the Prius' trunk so that it's able to run mostly on electric power. In effect, CalCars wants to see electric cars with a gas-power backup, rather than gas-powered, sometimes-electric vehicles.

The idea is catching on. Though there are only about 12 plug-in hybrids in the world now, at least two companies are planning on marketing kits that would allow Prius owners to add batteries and convert their own cars.

The first is due out this fall, spurred on by interest in a plug-in conversion performed at the Maker Faire in San Mateo in April. Over the course of the weekend, CalCars worked with volunteers to transform an average Prius to a super, 100 mile-per-gallon commuter-dream car.

They did it to send a message to automakers.

"We wanted to show Toyota and Ford that the batteries in their current hybrid can be used to make it work," Davi says. "If a bunch of backyard engineers can do this over a weekend, why can't the car makers?"

In answer to his own question, Davi says, "The only reason they don't want to plug in right now is that they don't know they can."

The goal of the Maker Faire conversion, CalCars' third, was to show the automakers the possibility of plug-in hybrids.

Of course there is a catch. Davi admits that dramatically modifying a Prius could void the warranty, and a Toyota spokeswoman concurs. Any modification that affects battery life voids the warranty, according to Mira Sleilati.

But Sleilati also says Toyota is "exploring opportunities for plug-ins down the road, as advances in battery technologies are researched and developed."

That's good news for CalCars, which may be nearing its goal in getting an automaker to sign on to plug-ins.

But while plugging in costs a few thousand dollars and is still in its infancy, other Prius modifications are growing in popularity. They are as elaborate as installing a MacMini computer with a touchscreen in the dashboard (a serious hack) and as basic as learning to shut off the interior, some argue annoying, beeping the car makes when it's backing up.

One of the most common hacks people are making is adding something called the EV button to their cars. It's pretty easy — the Prius is already set up to run on all-electric power for a few miles, but because of complicated emissions standards, the EV button is not a factory option in the U.S.

However, savvy drivers can have a European or Japanese friend send one from abroad and install it themselves, or they can turn to the Internet.

That's what Stephen McGrogan did. An electrical engineer from Pleasanton, McGrogan bought his white 2004 Prius to save money on his long commute and he quickly fell for the car.

"It's beautifully designed," he says. "It's very well-appointed in terms of cup holders and the sound system. Very quiet of course, rides well. It's a very usable car."

McGrogan uses his Prius to haul wood and loves the flat-folding seats.

Yes, and he can go 520 miles on less than 10 gallons of gas.

McGrogan's first experience with after-market Prius gear was with a bike rack. It's hard to put traditional bike racks on the hatchback, so he ordered a special Prius rack from Coastal Electronic Technologies. (Davi calls it the "everything you wanted to hack about your Prius but were afraid to ask" store.)

Enamored with this purchase, McGrogan decided to try his hand at real hack.

He teamed up with his son David to install an EV button. It was easy.

He says, "It was fun. I held papers and he did it. It's just pulling out a couple of connectors."

EV mode cuts down on noise in the community, says McGrogan. When he drives down the street to church, he doesn't have to wait for the Prius to go through its uninterruptible warm-up cycle; he circumvents it and keeps the car in all-electric mode where there's no engine noise and no gas used.

While McGrogan sees the EV button as a boon for convenience, Davi points out that it's good for the environment, too. "Start-up is the most polluting part of the engine cycle," he says. "Electric mode is useful for short distances, and you can keep the engine off when it would otherwise make more pollution."

So is the EV button a good substitute for the plug-in Prius? No, says Davi. "The button is nowhere close" to as effective as the plug-in cars he envisions taking over the road. "The EV button is great. It's a fun gadget," he says, but it's "not a victory."

Meanwhile, McGrogan has more plans for his Prius. He says, "Newer Priuses have a sound jack. I would like an option that does that, but the kit hasn't come yet."

So he waits, just as Davi waits for the big automakers to recognize that they're already building the car of the future — it just needs a couple of modifications.

Port of Long Beach awarded grant for hybrid-powered machinery

The Associated Press

In the Fresno Bee, Bakersfield Californian, SF Chronicle and other papers, Thursday, Sept. 7, 2006

The Port of Long Beach received a \$300,000 federal grant Wednesday that will help pay for the development and testing of lesser-polluting engines to power the fleet of tractors used to move cargo containers within marine shipping terminals.

Such vehicles, known as yard hostlers, are now powered by diesel engines that generate fuel emissions that can contribute to air pollution.

The Environmental Protection Agency grant will go toward research to build hybrid diesel engines that function with the aid of electric motors, like hybrid cars, switching to electric power when the vehicle is idle, or a hydraulic system that uses fluid compression to store energy.

The initiatives are designed to cut down on how much fuel the yard hostlers burn, particularly when idle, thereby reducing harmful emissions, port officials said.

The project is being headed by the Port of Long Beach in partnership with the adjacent Port of Los Angeles.

Research, development and testing of the hybrid engines is expected to take about two years and cost \$1.2 million.

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Thursday, Sept. 7, 2006](#)

Twelve bills we hope the governor will sign

State lawmakers approved hundreds of bills in the frantic final days of the 2006 legislative session, which ended last week. Many escaped much attention because of the shadow cast by other measures, such as a landmark bill to cap greenhouse gas emissions.

Many lower-profile bills, meanwhile, deserve the governor's signature. Here are a dozen that stand out:

Special election: Assembly Bill 1634, by Assemblyman Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, would reimburse counties \$39 million for the costs of November's special election called by Gov. Schwarzenegger. Stanislaus County would recoup about \$220,000; Merced County, \$340,000; and San Joaquin County, \$790,000.

Hunger: AB 2384, by Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, would require the Department of Health Services to set up pilot programs in seven counties to help small grocers in low-income neighborhoods to increase their offerings of fresh fruits and vegetables to consumers. Additionally, the bill will give food stamp recipients a rebate on fresh produce purchases. This is one of three bills being promoted by the California Hunger Action Coalition. The others are AB2205 and AB 569.

Tenants: AB 1169, by Assemblyman Alberto Torrico, D-Newark, would require that evicted tenants be given 60 days' notice, double the current requirement, when the eviction is not the tenant's fault. The bill responds to situations in which tenants are evicted as apartment owners convert units to condos.

Higher education: AB 2813, by Assemblyman Hector De La Torre, D-South Gate, broadens access to the Cal Grant Community College Transfer Entitlement Program by raising the age of eligibility from 24 to 27. This is one of three key bills to improve access to college. The others are Senate Bill 1563 and AB 358.

Egg donors: Senate Bill 1260, by Sens. George Runner, R-Antelope Valley, and Deborah Ortiz, D-Sacramento, would ensure that women donating eggs for stem cell research are fully informed of the potential risks and provide consent before taking ovarian stimulation drugs.

Initiatives: SB 1598, by Sen. Debra Bowen, D-Redondo Beach, would require initiative campaigners to list their five largest contributors on any petitions seeking signatures.

Teachers: SB 1655, by Sen. Jack Scott, D-Pasadena, would give school principals more authority to choose teachers who want to transfer to the state's lowest-performing schools.

Street racing: AB 2190, by Assemblyman John Benoit, R-Palm Desert, would increase penalties for illegal street racing, a big problem in the valley.

Conservators: AB 1363 by Assemblyman Dave Jones, D-Sacramento, would require court investigators to double the number of visits they make to dependent adults while checking on their welfare. It is one of several bills passed to regulate conservators and protect vulnerable seniors.

Foster care: AB 2216 by Assemblywoman Karen Bass, D-Los Angeles, would create better coordination among state and local agencies that care for abused and neglected children. It was the key part of a package that, unfortunately, was only partly successful this year.

Identity theft: AB 2886, supported by Sen. Chuck Poochigian, R-Fresno, would increase the potential charges for possession or trafficking in stolen identities. The bill also expands the list of identifying information protected and authorizes local law enforcement to investigate and prosecute mail theft.

Hydrogen: SB 1505, by Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, sets environmental standards for how California will develop hydrogen fueling stations that are part of the governor's "hydrogen highway." The standards encourage hydrogen made from renewable fuels and other sources that minimize [air pollution](#).

[Riverside Press Enterprise, Editorial, Wednesday, September 6, 2006:](#)

Paying cargo

Reprinted in the Fresno Bee, Thursday, September 7, 2006

Imposing a fee on every container entering and leaving the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles would go far toward funding new capacity to handle a coming influx of goods. An onslaught of imports threatens to further clog Inland highways with trucks and choke the air with pollution.

The Legislature on Aug. 31 passed SB 927 by Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach. The bill would require the ports of Long Beach and LA to set a fee of \$30 per 20-foot-equivalent unit, the standard measurement for cargo containers. The fee would work out to \$60 per truck.

Under SB 927, two-thirds of the container fees would go to the state to fund port traffic and air-quality improvement projects. The ports would use the remaining third of the fee to pay for security upgrades, such as high-tech X-ray machines and radiation scanners.

One drawback: The bill would forbid the state to use any part of the fee for highway enhancements, such as dedicated truck lanes. Instead, SB 927 specifies the building of rail underpasses and bridges, which would benefit most Inland cities.

A \$30 fee seems modest, but the Legislature's analysis of the bill estimated the fee would raise up to \$500 million a year. Over 20 years, a \$30 fee would finance nearly \$10 billion in goods-movement infrastructure. And the bill leaves open the possibility of future fee increases.

Opponents of SB 927 say any fee would encourage shippers to divert cargo headed for Long Beach or LA to other ports. And the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association last month called the proposal "a tax that would go to Sacramento and not enhance anything that we do."

Not so. A container fee would substantially enhance business while improving commutes by cutting down delays at rail crossings. The infrastructure that fees would finance would also reduce harmful pollution that idling trucks and trains generate.

A modest fee would be worth the cost to shippers when the state invests those dollars in rail enhancements that help speed goods from port to Inland distribution sites, better port security and strategies to cut air pollution. Gov. Schwarzenegger would do well to sign SB 927 - and inland motorists should be grateful when he does.

[Orange County Register, Commentary, Thursday, Sept. 7, 2006:](#)

California Focus: 'Gut and amend' bills deserve a veto

Many pet projects are passed using a deceptive legislative tactic

By Gary M. Galles, Pepperdine University economics professor

The California Legislature has finished its sausage-making for this term, leaving a pile of "statesmanship" on Gov. Schwarzenegger's desk. Unfortunately, however, much of it deserves to be vetoed as a blatant abuse of the legislative process.

In particular, those bills that were the result of the legislative practice dubbed "gut and amend" (GANDA), and which escaped virtually all scrutiny, should be vetoed, as the governor promised to do when he first ran for governor in 2003.

Especially as the Aug. 31 deadline neared, GANDA was used to cram bills through despite their failure in the regular legislative process. Backers took unrelated bills, deleted their contents and inserted completely different bills. Then, in the last-minute frenzy, they rushed them through with minimal scrutiny (e.g., seven different committee hearings in one room in under 40 minutes).

Several GANDA bills now await the governor's decision. They range from Senate Bill 44, [an air-quality measure](#) that morphed into one allowing car dealers to charge higher fees for document preparation; to SB1162 from State Sen. Gil Cedillo, which used a minimum-wage bill to resurrect his failed SB1160 to allow driver's licenses for undocumented aliens; to SB1696 (from Santa Ana's Sen. Joe Dunn), which turned a prohibition against domestic surveillance by the National Guard into a pay bump for Los Angeles County Superior Court. All of them deserve rejection as abuses of Californians by their representatives.

Bills that command the necessary consensus can pass in the light of day. Only those without sufficient support need the subterfuge of creating "new and improved" bills at the last minute, then pushing them through too quickly for effective reading, much less evaluation.

Those who get something they want from the GANDA process defend it, but their argument is preposterous. It amounts to claiming that, despite missing deadlines or failing to get approval, sometimes the Legislature "just needs to act." But that is not a reason; it simply assumes its conclusion - proponents need to be allowed to circumvent the rules to enact their failed pet projects, because proponents decided it was necessary.

More importantly, nothing GANDA-ed through the Legislature comes close to meeting a real need. For a GANDA bill to benefit Californians would require several things to be true. Unfortunately, those factors are typically false.

The bill would have to be the Legislature's business. In a world where they inject themselves everywhere, this sounds odd, but there is very little legislation that can add to our general welfare. Benefiting some at others' expense is another matter, but Californians' welfare requires that such bills be stopped, not greased through the process.

Only the Legislature must be capable of dealing with the problem. Where people can work things out for themselves, no legislation is needed. And those whose wisdom politicians laud during campaigns deserve credit for equal intelligence about their own affairs the rest of the time.

The problem must be so urgent that it cannot wait for the next legislative term.

The legislative sponsor must know how to solve the problem efficiently and equitably. Again, however, such a bill could navigate the normal legislative process. So a GANDA problem must also come as a very sudden surprise. But it strains credibility to think that someone could quickly find real solutions to problems that they didn't even recognize just a few weeks before, simply because he or she managed to get elected in a gerrymandered district.

One would look in vain for truly needed GANDA examples.

Gut-and-amend survives only because it allows legislative urgency to disguise last-minute actions not only from other legislators (who often have no time to even read end-of-session bills), but particularly from the public. Proponents may "need" it for their own purposes, but those purposes do not include advancing the welfare of all Californians. So every GANDA bill deserves a veto. Nothing short of such a stand for principle has any chance of protecting us from such unjustified abuse by those whose claims to represent us stand in sharp contrast to their actions.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, Sept. 7, 2006:](#)
Staff report shows bias toward sprawl

A cursory examination of the county's report on the Stamp Out Sprawl initiative reveals something strange. The Alliance, a private special interest business group, is an author of the report, which was supposedly prepared by staff. Since when is a private business considered staff? This unorthodox relationship demonstrates where the Board of Supervisors' real interests lie.

The report itself demonstrates a bias toward unbridled development in Stanislaus County -- the very definition of sprawl. Even though numerous studies have shown that after a few years, residential property taxes do not cover the cost of services, the board wants houses anyway. Houses seem to justify the endless commercial development the county allows just outside cities; this is supposed to reduce driving and improve air quality. But if the county would stop allowing urban development outside cities, there would be less sprawl, less driving and better air quality, the whole point of the Stamp Out Sprawl plan.

Agriculture is the most important industry in Stanislaus County. In order to support the county's economy, only agriculture and agriculture-related businesses should be allowed in unincorporated areas.

CAROL TENNIES, Modesto

[Stockton Record, Letter to the Editor, Thursday, Sept. 7, 2006](#)
Purported port pollution prompts questions

Regarding pollution at the Port of Stockton involving the transport of cement and other tonnage from the Bay Area, what pollutes the greatest for the same tonnage transported?

Is it ships, trains or trucks? What effect does it have on the traffic over the Altamont Pass?

There is no coal-fired electric generating plant on Rough and Ready Island.

If one were to be built, would it use the latest integrated gasification combine cycle technology?

W.R. Smith, Stockton

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2006](#)
Pollution bill makes little sense

Please explain how selling from one industry complying with emission controls to another still spewing their garbage into the atmosphere will help our atmosphere ("Both sides must give on global-warming bill," Aug. 28, Page B-6). This is about money, since there are steps that can be taken to prevent polluting. A better solution would be to help the polluters clean up their act.

Assembly Bill 32 makes as much sense as Modesto's stringent smog controls vs. the Bay Area staying with the old controls. Pollution is pollution, no matter where it comes from.

I am 100 percent against all legislators who put money ahead of environment and would like to see them all lose their positions. We desperately need lawmakers who have guts to buck the trend.

NORMAN J. NEFF, Modesto