

Kern faces soot challenge

EPA defends new daily pollution rules as 'most health protective ... in U.S. history'

BY SARAH RUBY, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley recently met an air target set to move out of reach in 2015.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District went three years without violating a federal limit for microscopic soot and combustion dust. Known as PM 2.5, it's been linked to premature death by state and university epidemiologists.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency changed the standard last month, cutting the daily pollution limit by nearly 50 percent. None of the valley's air monitoring stations now comply, said Scott Nester, director of planning at the air district. The district has until 2015 to change that, with the possibility of a five-year extension.

"It will be a challenge for us to get there," Nester said.

More controversial is the EPA's decision not to change its long-term soot limit, which the district doesn't yet meet. Preserving the status quo could cost thousands of lives annually, according to EPA's cost-benefit analysis.

Members of EPA's scientific advisory panel spoke out against the agency's decision earlier this month, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. California "would see a large chunk of the benefits" of a tighter standard because of its size and notorious pollution problem, Bart Ostro, EPA's chief air pollution epidemiologist, told the *Times*.

"We're talking about ... hospitalization and emergency room visits, asthma attacks and work loss as well as mortality," Ostro told the *Times*.

Long-term exposure to fine particle pollution is the most dangerous, said Brent Newell, an attorney with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment.

"It's obvious EPA considered cost to industry" of a tighter standard, he said.

When EPA announced the new standard, it defended its work.

"Regardless of the rhetoric, facts are facts -- today EPA is delivering the most health protective national air standards in U.S. history," said Stephen Johnson, EPA administrator, in a news release.

Chamber urges recycling

BY BRUCE SPENCE

Stockton Record, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006

STOCKTON - It's not easy bein' green, as Kermit the Frog once famously said.

But it is smart to be green, as the Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce would like to be famous for saying.

The chamber has begun shaping up what will be a long-running program to reach as many of the thousands of businesses and a range of governmental entities with the message that being green - recycling and using recycled goods, reducing air pollution, conserving energy and so on - isn't just good for the community, it's good for improving the bottom line.

The Green Team San Joaquin, which was launched several months ago, aims to not just educate businesses about the smartness of being green but also to provide a string of networking opportunities with a growing variety of businesses that make money from recycling, said Frank Ferral, the chamber's program/public policy director.

That entails the chamber itself buying into the program.

That means in December installing a "green" carpet made of 35 percent recycled carpet materials as well as a new painting with 100 percent recycled paint.

"The chamber is basically walking the walk and talking the talk about going green," Ferral said. "It all goes back to reducing the cost of doing business."

Thus far, the chamber has involved about 55 businesses in the county to participate in educational presentations. Various agencies, such as the California Air Resources Board and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, already are involved.

Last week, at a presentation for a small group of people at the Waste Management recycling center on East Turner Road in Lodi, topics included financial incentives to support clean-air technology and the outlook for cleaner vehicles.

Chamber Chief Executive Officer Doug Wilhoit said the goal is to reach thousands of businesses.

"I think once they see the value of this to their company, whatever it might be, then they'll make the time to do these things," he said. "We're finding that businesses that find it a value improve their bottom line."

John Christian, materials, purchasing and asset manager with Air Products and Chemicals, a south Stockton cogeneration plant, said going green is such an important concept that the company contributed \$2,500 toward the program.

"We believe it's the right thing to do," he said. "I'm not sure it helps the bottom line. I do believe it helps the environment so it's an important thing for the community."

Chris Nwabuzoh, owner of Trinity Cleaners, 1588 E. March Lane, has signed up to be involved with the Green Team effort, though he's not sure what that will entail.

He also does environmental consulting work through his Oakland-based Sequoia Environmental Corp., and he likely will speak to other business people and perhaps contract for work through the chamber program.

He might pick up some pointers, too, he said.

"There's always that likelihood," he said. "In my business, I'm always learning."

Eric Horton, co-owner of A Plus Materials, a recycler of construction and demolition materials in the Stockton Port, said he sees the Green programs as an opportunity to meet people who might need our services.

Just as important, it's a chance to talk with representatives from regulatory agencies about guidelines and how they impact businesses, he said.

"I see it as a golden opportunity to further our business as well as promote recycling," he said. "It's a neat concept, and I've never heard of anything like this before in my 16 years in recycling, especially a chamber doing this. This is so unique."

The Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce will stage four workshops on energy conservation as part of its Green Team San Joaquin program.

The first one will be from 7:30 to 10 a.m. on Oct. 24 at the Hampton Inn & Suites at Highway 99 and Arch Road exit (5045 S. State Rte 99).

The free workshop will include:

- A presentation by Pacific Gas and Electric on energy conservation at work and home.
- A presentation entitled "Breathe a Little Easier by Reducing Air Pollution," by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.
- A chamber presentation on green policies, practices and purchasing.
- Another chamber presentation on incentives through the Recycling Market Development Zone.

The chamber requests confirmed attendance to the sessions by sending an e-mail to fferral@stocktonchamber.org or fax plans to attend to (209) 466-5271.

Find out how we make our editorial decisions

Modesto Bee, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006

The Bee is inviting applications for 2007 visiting editor positions. The program is intended to help readers learn about the process we use in determining editorial decisions. We benefit from the community input.

Participants can learn about a wide range of issues and people in three months. Last quarter, for instance, our three visiting editors joined us in:

Learning about proposed changes in state law regarding cable television and how Modesto might be affected.

Hearing the goals of the new executive of the valley air pollution control district.

Visiting the Stanislaus National Forest and the Sierra Pacific mill at Chinese Camp.

The qualifications for visiting editors are simple. Participants must be regular Bee readers and have a keen interest in local issues. They must be available Wednesday afternoons starting at 2:30, and willing to join in civil discussions with people of like and different minds.

If you are interested in serving as a visiting editor in 2007, you can apply by sending:

A one-page letter on why you would like to be a visiting editor.

A résumé or short paragraph about yourself, including occupation and community involvement.

Send these to Editorial Board, Attention: Donna Moullette, The Modesto Bee, P.O. Box 5256, Modesto 95352. Or e-mail dmoullette@modbee.com.

The deadline is Nov. 1. Applications will be screened and candidates interviewed by Dec. 1. Those chosen will have their choice of quarters to serve.

Landfill expansion to be discussed Wednesday

Lodi News Sentinel, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006

A community meeting on a proposal to expand San Joaquin County's landfill on East Harney Lane will be held from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at George's banquet at the Lockeford Inn Restaurant, 18700 E. Highway 88, Lockeford.

The county's Public Works Department plans to increase the maximum landfill height to 420 feet, increase the maximum daily garbage weight disposal limit 1,200 pounds and increase the number of incoming vehicles to 850 per day. Public Works representatives will be available to answer questions at Wednesday's meeting in Lockeford.

The public is invited to comment on a draft Environmental Impact Report, which details how the landfill expansion would affect air quality, noise, traffic and aesthetics. The draft EIR is available at the meeting, at the Lodi Public Library, 201 W. Locust St., and at the county Public Works Department, 1810 E. Hazelton Ave., Stockton. A copy is also available online at http://buethepr.com/north_county_landfill.html.

Written comments may be submitted to the Public Works Department through 5 p.m. Nov. 6. For more information, call Claudia Gemberling at 953-7624, or send an e-mail to cgemberling@sjgov.org.

News Items from Around California

From the Associated Press

In the Sacramento Bee, Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006

OXNARD, Calif. (AP) - Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in downtown Oxnard to protest a proposed liquefied natural gas project off the city's coast.

BHP Billiton's of Australia has proposed building a natural gas floating port in water 13.8 miles out to sea from Oxnard.

About 300 people including elected officials gathered at Plaza Park on Saturday to express worries of environmental destruction brought by the project - in particular the fear that air pollution blown by on-shore winds would find its way to the city.

"We breathe here. Don't pollute our air," said Oxnard City Councilman Zaragoza.

BHP Billton spokeswoman Kathi Hann said the company will meet all clean air regulations, and said the efforts going into the project will actually improve the area's air quality.

"That's ridiculous. We know where we live, and we know how the wind blows," said Gloria Roman of the Greater Oxnard Organization of Democrats.

Mayor Tom Holden encouraged the protesters to direct their ire at Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has the power to veto the plan.

City wants subdivision to build roads, fund fire station

By ADAM ASHTON - BEE STAFF WRITER

Modesto Bee, Friday, October 13, 2006

Bringing more than 9,000 new residents to a mostly undeveloped area between Modesto and Riverbank is bound to change the neighborhood.

Whether that change is good — new housing, parks and amenities — or bad — clogged roads and lost farmland — remains to be seen.

Modesto released a draft environmental impact report Thursday for a development that would bring more than 3,200 homes and a regional commercial center to the city's northeast border.

Tivoli, the 454-acre project backed in part by Modesto real estate magnate Mike Zagaris, is heading toward a groundbreaking sometime next year. It could be finished by 2017.

Before then, the city expects Tivoli's backers to cut checks for everything from widening roads to wetlands preservation.

One of the goals is to avoid the kind of planning mistakes that came to characterize Village I, a development adjacent to Tivoli plagued by delayed improvements for roads and scrapped designs for commercial centers.

Tivoli designates 67 acres for regional commercial projects, including big-box stores. The environmental report, however, discourages large discount stores, such as a Super Wal-Mart.

The proposal includes 30 acres for parks, 14 acres for neighborhood retail sites and two acres of office space.

As is, Tivoli requires a zoning change because the area's land-use designations would limit the project to about 900 fewer homes. The city's zoning restrictions also would permit less space for commercial development.

Dave Romano, an engineer leading the project, did not return calls for comment.

Annexations could add 9,000 homes in Modesto

Tivoli is one of four major residential annexations working through the city's Planning Department. Together, they represent more than 9,000 potential homes on Modesto's outskirts.

The initial environmental report urges city leaders to require that developers:

Set aside money for farmland preservation by contributing to an agricultural resource fund.

Designate land for a new fire station and give the city money to build it.

Pay their share of a series of road improvements, including projects to extend and widen Claratina Avenue, expand three McHenry Avenue intersections and add lanes to Briggsmore Avenue.

Take steps to limit air pollution during construction by refraining from idling trucks, using new technology and building wind barriers.

Encourage alternative transportation options by installing bike lanes and reserving space for bus routes.

Dig two new wells to maintain water pressure.

People have 45 days to comment on the environmental report before the city begins revising it. Senior Planner Paul Liu said it could go to the Planning Commission and City Council for a vote by early 2007.

Liu said the city sent copies to groups that would be affected by the plan, including school districts and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Modesto City Schools Planning Director Miguel Galvez said high school students in Tivoli homes would attend newly opened Enochs High School.

Sylvan Union School District Business Manager Ronald Lebs said Tivoli's construction would require a new school. The proposal includes 14 acres for an elementary school.

Air district invites public comment

Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, Oct. 13, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will host a public workshop Tuesday to gather input on a draft plan to reduce smog-forming emissions in the Valley.

The workshop will begin at 2 p.m. at the district's central office at 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave. in Fresno.

The plan, designed to reduce emissions that create ozone, will undergo several months of public review before it is presented to the district's governing board in Spring 2007 for approval.

The draft plan is available online at www.valleyair.org or by calling 230-6000.

Local Events

Fresno Bee, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006, 6:12 AM)

The Body and the Air We Breathe: Impacts, Challenges and Solutions to Valley Air Pollution - 1 to 3:30 p.m., UCSF Fresno Auditorium, 155 N. Fresno St., Fresno. Free. Reservations are required. Contact Kim Thompson at airquality@fmms.org <<mailto:airquality@fmms.org>> or call (559) 224-4224, ext. 110.

The Body and the Air We Breathe: Impacts, Challenges and Solutions to Valley Air Pollution - 6 to 8:30 p.m., Piccadilly Inn University, 4961 N. Cedar Ave., Fresno. Free. Reservations are required. Contact Kim Thompson at airquality@fmms.org <<mailto:airquality@fmms.org>> or call (559) 224-4224, ext. 110.

Briefs

Fresno Bee, Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006

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Mayor Tom Holden encouraged the protesters to direct their ire at Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has the power to veto the plan.

Hispanics show growing clout in environmental debate

By Gillian Flaccus, Associated Press Writer

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, (Updated Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006, 9:30 AM)

EL MONTE, Calif. (AP) - Maria Valdez didn't consider herself an environmentalist when she pressed this city east of Los Angeles to buy land ringed with factories and railroad tracks for a new neighborhood park.

The trash lot is now on its way to becoming a green oasis with a butterfly sanctuary and community garden - and Valdez is undergoing a transformation of her own. Next month she will be sworn in as president of the El Monte chapter of Mujeres de la Tierra, a two-year-old environmental group that caters to Hispanic immigrants and translates as "Women of the Earth."

"When you get involved and you know that you could make it happen, it feels good," said Valdez, a stay-at-home mother of six. "I'm interested in the water, the air - for our kids."

Spurred by high rates of asthma and lead poisoning among their children, Hispanic immigrants such as Valdez, a U.S. citizen who left Mexico as a child, are embracing green values like never before - on their own terms.

Hispanic activists and politicians talk openly about building a unique green movement that distances itself from mainstream environmental groups, even as those organizations hope to tap into newfound Hispanic political clout.

Those involved in the nascent movement cite a gap between the priorities of traditional environmentalists, who may focus on saving endangered species and preserving roadless areas, and the practical concerns of many Hispanic immigrants, who confront thick smog and lead-laced water every day in inner-city neighborhoods. Many also are wary of groups like the Sierra Club, which has debated whether to make U.S. immigration control part of its platform.

"If you ask a Latino, 'Are you an environmentalist?' they'll say 'No' because it boxes you in," said Irma Munoz, founder of Mujeres de la Tierra. "Environmentalists blame Latinos for all the problems."

The newly defined movement is strongest in Southern California.

Last month, more than 1,200 Hispanic community leaders, activists and politicians gathered in Los Angeles for the first meeting of its kind in decades. Participants in the National Latino Congreso drafted resolutions on issues ranging from emissions reductions to mercury pollution, hoping Hispanic voters will use those as a litmus test for candidates in the 2008 presidential campaign.

Some high-profile Hispanic politicians also are intent on being green.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, co-sponsored a groundbreaking law that makes California the first state to put a cap on greenhouse gas emissions, including those from industrial plants. He said his interest grew partly out of his concern for the effect that poor air quality has on Hispanic children.

"For a long time, the image of an environmentalist in California was a stereotypical, brie-eating, chardonnay-sipping, Volvo-driving Marin County-ite," Nunez said at a speech at the Los Angeles gathering. "But there were other issues that affected people who wouldn't commonly be known as environmentalists."

In the heavily Hispanic cities of Maywood and Bell Gardens, also just outside Los Angeles, local politicians got elected last year by focusing on industrial pollution, lingering Superfund sites and water contamination.

A 2004 study by the Natural Resources Defense Council found that nearly 70 percent of Hispanics live in areas that violate federal air quality standards and Hispanic children are twice as likely as non-Hispanic white children to have lead in their blood.

Traditional environmental groups have catered to the Hispanic green movement by hiring Spanish-speaking outreach coordinators, starting Spanish-language Web sites and running ads on Spanish TV and radio. Some, such as the Earth Day Network and Sierra Club, helped sponsor the National Latino Congreso and work with activists on local projects.

Oliver Bernstein, deputy press secretary for Sierra Club's diversity programs, said his organization has been doing environmental justice work with grassroots Hispanic groups since 1992. At the Latino Congreso, Bernstein said many Hispanic leaders were "pleased that Sierra Club was working hand in hand with them."

Some Hispanic environmentalists say they want to do it their way.

For Hispanic immigrants, environmentalism can mean building a park, getting rid of a smoke-belching factory or persuading railroads to run freight trains less often - not protecting an endangered species

"We're not the tree-huggers," said Laura Rodriguez, a spokeswoman for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. "We have to deal with high numbers of asthma patients and Superfund sites and how it affects communities."

Mainstream environmental groups recognize that they are shadowed by past mistakes - but say they are ready to move forward.

Adrianna Quintero, the director of Latino advocacy and outreach at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the organization created her position to reach out to local activists. The group's work with Hispanic environmentalists on Nunez's emissions cap bill was a watershed moment for both sides, Quintero said.

"From now on, going forward, we hope that everything will be like that," she said. "The reality of it is that we have so much in common. Our goals are the same, which is to make a better planet for everyone."

U.S. Coal Plant Boom Poses Big Questions

By Steve Quinn, AP Business Writer

In the L.A. Times, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006

DALLAS (AP) -- A building boom that would add scores of new coal-fired power plants to the nation's power grid is creating a new dilemma for politicians, environmentalists and utility companies across the United States.

Should power companies be permitted to build new plants that pollute more but are reliable and less expensive? Or should regulators push utilities toward cleaner burning coal plants, even if it means they will cost more and are based on newer, yet still unproven, technology?

How those questions are answered will have huge implications over the next few decades. It could determine how Americans light, heat and cool their homes and business, the rate of return on utility investments and the potential environmental impact of the new plants.

Nowhere do these competing interests play out with such force as in Texas, where 16 new coal-fired plants are proposed - 11 of them by Dallas-based TXU Corp., the state's biggest power company.

The scope of TXU's 5-year, \$10 billion plan is considered bellwether and being closely watched by industry analysts, lawmakers, competitors and environmentalists across the U.S.

"TXU put its stake in the ground and said it will (build the plants) faster and cheaper than anyone else," said Daniele M. Seitz, analyst with investment firm Dahlman Rose. "So they have something to prove."

The company is hardly alone, however.

Some 154 new coal-fired plants are on the drawing board in 42 states. Texas and Illinois are the only states where 10 or more plants are planned, according to the National Energy Technology Laboratory.

Energy analysts say factors driving coal's resurgence are soaring power demands, volatile natural gas prices and a favorable investment market.

Coal now accounts for about 50 percent of the power generated in the U.S. By the year 2030, that share will increase to 57 percent, according to Energy Department forecasts.

The U.S. has the world's largest coal reserves, enough to last for the next 200 to 250 years, analysts believe.

Larry Makovich, managing director for consulting group Cambridge Energy Research Associates, said the urgency to bring more power-generating plants online cannot be understated.

"A fundamental reality of the power business is there is no single fuel of choice, so if you are going to survive in the long run, you need to have a good mix of fuels and technologies," he said. "If we are going to keep supply and demand in balance, you're looking at a five-year lead time, so you have to get started building these plants now."

The argument over how TXU should build power-generating plants plays out almost daily with critics and proponents weighing in on the potential merits and drawbacks of the company's plans.

TXU says the proposed plants will meet the state's growing demand for power, give a sorely needed economic boost to nearby small towns and will reduce toxic emissions by replacing older, less efficient plants.

"The coal plant of today is so much cleaner; it makes so much less emissions than what most Americans and Texans can conjure," said Mike McCall, chief executive of TXU's wholesale division. "It can be a good viable resource without really harming the environment."

Critics, however, counter the company is driven by profits and is rushing to beat more stringent federal restrictions on carbon dioxide emissions in an era of escalating concerns over global warming. Texas already produces more carbon dioxide than any other state, a fact that worries big city mayors downwind of the proposed plants.

The debate soon could end up in federal court. Dallas attorney Rick Addison recently announced plans to sue TXU, alleging potential violations of the federal Clean Air Act.

"It's remarkable and unnecessary the amount of pollutants they are going to put in the air," said Addison, a member of the Houston-based Locke Liddell and Sapp law firm. "The only way to get these issues resolved is at the highest level and reviewed under the appropriate law."

The battle lines were drawn April 20, when TXU Chief Executive John Wilder announced the company's plans shortly after much of Texas underwent a rolling power blackout. Since then, each side has assembled a team of backers comprised of affected residents, lawmakers, and lawyers.

In Colorado City, Texas, a town of 4,100 about 10 miles from where TXU wants to place one of the plants, civic leaders and lawmakers support the venture. They believe it will be an economic boon to the sleepy West Texas town, said Mayor Jim Baum.

But Dallas Mayor Laura Miller and Houston Mayor Bill White recently formed a coalition of 17 mayors opposing the TXU's 11 proposed plants and five others being considered by other Texas companies. The group has lined up law firms statewide bracing for a courtroom battle.

Miller recently spent a week visiting existing TXU plants, as well as a coal gasification plant in Tampa, Fla., that turns coal into gas and removes the pollutants before the fuel is burned.

Coal gasification plants can cost up to 20 percent more to build than a conventional plant. But they also can be more efficient to operate and save utilities the hassle and expense of adding pollution-control devices.

Already, American Electric Power, of Columbus, Ohio, Minneapolis-based Xcel Energy Inc. and Charlotte-based Duke Energy Corp, are reviewing plans to implement this technology.

Mike Morris, chairman for American Electric Power, said the pressures on power companies to burn fuel in the cleanest way possible will only gain momentum in coming years.

"From our vantage point we think the technology for clean coal is there," he said. "It can be done, but there is a challenge."

For its part, TXU says turning the coal into synthetic gas remains an unproven technology and not as reliable as burning pulverized coal - the process the company's new plants would be designed to use.

Several analysts agree.

"For purposes of generating electricity, a pulverized system is well-proven," said John Mead, who heads the Southern Illinois University Coal Research Center in Carbondale, Ill.

"Gasification has much more limited commercial experience," Mead said. "There are still some unknowns as to just what the operating costs would be and how reliable would such a system be."

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006:](#)

Road to Progress: Blaming developers for potholes is simply wrong

Some people believe that all of our area's road problems were caused by developers — so developers should fix them.

Or they believe the only people who truly benefit from better roads are developers — so they should pay for them.

Or, developers are making so much money that they can afford to fix all our road problems.

It would be nice if any of those sentiments were true, but they're not.

We can blame housing developers for seizing opportunities; for uncomfortably reducing our green space and for playing the game of politics just a little too well. But we can't blame developers for our badly maintained, overcrowded and largely inadequate roads.

For a variety of reasons, our existing roads have been allowed to deteriorate for years. It's well past time to fix them, and Measure K offers the best opportunity to do it.

The roads most in need of repair are nowhere near newer developments. The roads with the most potholes and the most cars are those that have existed the longest. State highways are crowded with newcomers and old-timers alike.

Sometimes, developers do improve inadequate existing roads. When new homes are proposed near existing "collector" roads, developers are often required to improve them. For instance, the city of Modesto has told builders that they must extend and widen Claratina Avenue and improve several McHenry Avenue intersections before the 454-acre Tivoli project can proceed. Such expensive improvements will help longtime residents as much as it will help those moving into the new homes.

But who will actually pay those costs?

Fair or not, it won't be developers. Like the costs of sinks, carpeting and electrical wiring, they build the costs of permits and fees into the price of their homes. Their actual profits are tied to the market, not the cost of 2-by-4s. When the market falls, as it is now, they make less and complain more about higher fees.

How much do the fees from each new home contribute to road improvements? The answer is tied up in red tape. A variety of permits from a broad array of governmental entities — city, county and school districts — is required to build any new home. Most new neighborhoods also have one or more special-fee districts to cover streetlights, medians or even to pay more police officers.

A "typical" 2,200 square-foot home costing around \$400,000 in Modesto now carries around \$26,000 in fees — not counting school or specialassessment district fees, which can vary dramatically.

The biggest portion is \$20,000 in capital facilities fees from the city of Modesto. All area cities have comparable fees. This fee covers a wide variety of costs, but nearly half of it — or \$9,800 for that typical home — goes to city roads and streets.

The next largest chunk, around \$5,700, goes to the county for its public facilities fees. Within that is \$2,030 for the regional transportation impact fee. This money is used to improve and maintain roads between the cities. The county raised \$6.8 million in regional transportation fees from February 2005 to February 2006.

But there's more.

For homes built outside the city limits but within the sphere of influence of Oakdale, Riverbank, Hughson or Patterson, there is an additional city-county road fee of \$2,278. Over the past two years, the county has averaged around \$1.6 million in collections for this fee.

Some tax critics ask, "With so many new homes, why not just double or triple the road fees and pay for them that way?"

Because there's a law against it.

Any fee must have a direct correlation to the service it provides. This keeps cities and counties from saddling residents of new homes with the cost of fixing old problems.

"We can only charge new development the estimated cost of the impact" of that development, explains Stanislaus County Chief Executive Officer Rick Robinson. "The law requires that we tie the transportation fee ... to an expected impact."

To Steve Madison, who represents the building industry, it's a matter of fairness.

"New home owners are already paying more," said Madison. "They're paying the (permit) fees; they have a higher property tax assessment and, in certain areas, they have capital facilities district fees."

There are even more fees — for bike lanes, sidewalks and transit systems. Most recently, the air district added a fee to mitigate the impacts of air pollution.

Whether developers are paying their fair share to fix our roads is still open to debate. What's not debateable is that our roads are crowded and falling apart, and we don't have enough money to fix them.

Measure K offers the best solution.

[Hanford Sentinel, Commentary, Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006:](#)

Commentary: Is cleaner energy on the horizon?

By Anthony Cicale, For the Sentinel

Have no fear, the polluting march of progress has ended and all is well. You may be surprised to learn that we have the French to thank for saving the world with a revolutionary type of car and that they are starting out with a production run of 200.

That might not seem much but when you consider that they produced only one Statue of Liberty and had to give that away to make room for producing one Eiffel Tower - which they had to keep - their caution about overstocking is not so surprising.

Even the French concede that this new non-polluting vehicle called the Venturi Eclectic is not cool. Well, it's cool in the sense that it has no doors. And even if it had doors you would have to put them on the backseat because it has no sides to put them on - or no sides on which to put them - depending on whether you want to be an English professor or help save the world.

It seats three in a one-plus-two configuration. What this means is that it has only one seat in the front and room for two Hobbits in the back. The steering wheel is in the middle to prevent the driver of the car with no sides from falling out on the bends - which can be taken as fast as 31 miles an hour. Scary huh? But, of course, that's its top speed and no one is going to drive as crazily as that, are they?

It's just a bit uglier and smaller than a golf cart and, seen from the side, there is virtually no car there at all. It looks like a picture frame for whatever is on the other side of it.

You would need to have your front and side-impact air bags sewn into your clothes since the windshield goes all the way down to the floor and there are no sides to put them on - or, no sides on which - well, OK, we've already been there, right?

Now let's get to the non-polluting-fuel bit. The vehicle's battery packs take five hours to charge on outlet power (well what do you expect when you insist on hurtling along at 31 miles an hour?)

But, it seems to me this only means that instead of putting fuel in the car and polluting the atmosphere you put the polluting fuel in the electric power station and let them do it for you.

Strangely enough the tiny car looks a little like a carriage without the horse - which, I'll admit, does seem to be heading in the opposite direction of the dreaded march of progress. But I think that maybe they have gone a little too far back. Now they need to come forward in time to when we actually put a horse in front to pull the darn thing. This could well turn out to be perfect. OK, you park the horse and carriage in the garage and feed the horse on hay and other vegetation that some are proposing we should use to make fuel for cars.

I mean, it's a win-win situation. For a start, no matter how much non-polluting fuel we feed the horse, we will still have it. It stays right there in the garage ready to be shoveled out in the morning and spread on the fields to help grow more non-polluting fuel to feed the horse. Talk about renewable energy!

The importance of the horse is underestimated. I mean there were no horses in America until the Spaniards brought them over in little boats - which, by the way, ran on wind power. I mean before horses happened, no one in America even bothered to invent the wheel - which, ironically, led to the car, which got rid of the horse.

But to be fair, the Venturi Eclectic does have solar panels on the roof, which can add four miles a day when it's bright enough. Also a small wind turbine can be attached to the roof while Eclectic is parked, adding up to 9 miles a day on windy days - which can be a lot of fun on a winter's day in a car with no sides. And listen to this: they say that if you don't drive it at all you may be able to eliminate fuel bills altogether. That sounds like the best suggestion yet. Now where's old Dobbin? Come on boy, come on; it's my turn to carriage pool today - and this time, don't do any polluting till we get back to the garage where it can be recycled, okay?

(Anthony Cicale is a Lemoore resident.)

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Friday, Oct. 13, 2006:](#)

Vote for measure

For the first time in years we are noticing road work going on in our neighborhood, city and county. I know it is a source of frustration to those of you who are in a hurry to reach your destination, as it is to me at times.

This road work is something that has been delayed too long. We have potholes in our neighborhood that have been patched over the years. Each time, after it rains, and even when it hasn't, they come back. I cringe every time I have to drive my car over one of them.

When driving from one county to the next, it is obvious when you are leaving or entering Kern County, due to the definite line between the good road (other counties who have the one half cent tax) and bad road (Kern County, who does not).

One half cent more on your purchase will not be that much of a difference than what we are now paying. Bill Thomas has made a great start with our road needs; let us continue by passing Measure I. It will benefit our entire county, city and our neighborhoods.

This is our city. Let us be proud of it and show that pride with an improved transportation system, which Bakersfield and the county desperately needs. The new roads will help traffic flow, additional funding for buses will [help air quality](#) and traffic congestion.

Improved maintenance on these roads will finally address the pothole problem for good.

Vote yes on Measure I.

-- MELBA HARRIS, Bakersfield

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Oct. 16, 2006:](#)

'Against the grain'

It is a shame when an agenda, either hidden or public, conflicts with both logic and sound leadership. The recent article on the costs for reducing mobile source pollution is both disheartening and unfortunate.

Disheartening in the reality that for 10 years, as a traffic engineer, I tried and failed to synchronize the signal lights in Fresno, and unfortunate because the Valley air district appears to not fully understand the root causes of mobile source pollution. Simply put, it is vehicular acceleration that gives off the greatest amounts of ozone precursors.

Thus, our collective goal should be in reducing the overall amount of vehicular accelerations occurring, not just purchasing \$7.5 billion worth of old vehicles that are already scheduled to cycle out of service. It is perplexing that we are unwilling to read and understand the scientific facts behind mobile source pollution.

Those who wish to educate themselves should Google Dr. Chris Frey at North Carolina State University, a renowned expert in mobile source pollution. Our air problems cannot be solved by turning a blind eye to the scientific conclusions of competent experts, even if such science goes against the grain of our own deterministic agendas.

John Ennis, Fresno

[Letter to the Editor in the Merced Sun-Star, Oct. 13, 2006:](#)

City going wrong way

Editor: I write to comment on two of your recent editorials, ("Valley only going to get hotter," Sept. 30, and "Work still needed on our air," Oct. 4). You correctly point out that our air quality is still bad and that global warming is looming as a huge problem in the near future. You also make the connection to automobiles and trucks as major culprits. What is so perplexing is why you have so much difficulty connecting the dots to the kinds of economic development Merced County is pursuing.

The Riverside Motorsports Park and the Wal-Mart Distribution Center will only aggravate our air quality problems. The local air board has all but admitted we won't be able to meet the 2010 deadline for clean air. Why is this so complicated for the Sun-Star editors?

Economic development is important, but only within responsible parameters that protect the public health. Your editorial "Study underscores need for clean air," April 4, clearly shows the extent air pollution in the Valley is jeopardizing the public health. A free, independent press is essential for our democratic system to function properly by holding those in power accountable. It is past time for the editors to start connecting the dots on air quality issues.

JOHN S. HOLMES, M.D., Merced

[Letter to the L.A. Times, Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006:](#)

New development fees won't ease air pollution

Re "Region to Step Up War Against Smog," Oct. 11

The South Coast Air Quality Management District's goal of reducing air pollution in the region is laudable and supported by most. However, adding fees to new developments is counterproductive to regional goals.

Making homes even more expensive to build would result in even higher prices, pushing affordability further out of reach and further pushing home buyers to the cheaper, outlying areas of the region. The increased commute times and resulting increased smog is not what the AQMD or any of us wants.

While the mayor of Los Angeles and other regional leaders are working to improve housing affordability and reduce drive times, a fee on new development would accomplish just the opposite. More and better mass transit, and placing the burden of smog control on those who directly generate it, is sound policy. Further burdening developers and home buyers is not the way to go.

Robert J. Rondino, Pacific Palisades