

Council rejects animal-shelter sites

\$30,000 consultant's report blasted by City Council members

BY GERALD CARROLL

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, August 5, 2008

Visalia City Council members Monday rejected a \$30,000 consultant's study describing nine possible sites for a new animal-control facility for the city.

A committee consisting of principal planner Paul Scheibel, civil engineer Adam Ennis, airport director Mario Cifuentez and engineer Rebecca Keenan - who had been told to "think outside the box" - presented the results. Five of those prospective sites are in the area near Visalia Municipal Airport - including one that had already been chosen, but was thwarted by a lawsuit from a neighboring landowner protesting the new location southeast of the airport.

Here's how various council members responded to their report during a council work session Monday afternoon:

- Greg Collins - Collins rejected all nine site options, recommending instead the old Caltrans site and present-day Visalia Corporate Yard between Ben Maddox Way and Cain Street along Goshen Avenue.

"This [facility] needs to be located near the core [of Visalia]," Collins said.

- Don Landers - Landers blasted two non-airport-area sites in and near the new Visalia Riverway Sports Park, calling them "an insult." The city and Sports Park designers and users "fought long and hard for those 83 acres" and will not give an inch, he said.
- Amy Shuklian - Shuklian spoke not only as a councilwoman but as a board member of the Valley Oak Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which would occupy the facility under its ongoing agreement to provide animal-control services to the city.

She rejected a proposal to carve a new facility into part of Plaza Park near the present Bark Park, which is designed to accommodate park visitors and their pets.

- Bob Link - In contrast to Shuklian, Link embraced the Plaza Park site.

"The dog park can be moved," he said.

The Plaza Park site would provide "visibility and accessibility" called for in the consultant's report, Link said.

- Jesus Gamboa - The mayor said he liked some of the sites but is less enthusiastic about others.

"I'm not too happy or appreciative of how we got here," Gamboa said. "We spent a lot of money getting here - and now, we don't like any of it."

Gamboa and the rest of the council voted to have the committee revisit the long-delayed Valley Oak SPCA and animal-control relocation effort and return with a more viable proposal.

In other action, the council:

- Heard from a group of area students, led by Councilman and Vice Mayor Bob Link, who recently completed a trip to Visalia's sister city in Japan, Miki City.

The trip was a "learning experience," Link said, enhancing a 40-year sister-city relationship.

- Listened to a report from Rick McVaigh, deputy air pollution control officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, on upcoming state regulations.

The actions will limit composting or force composting companies to employ expensive "digesting" processes to keep poisonous gases from escaping into the air.

UC Davis researcher tests Beijing's pollution curbs

Will fewer cars mean cleaner air?

By Carrie Peyton Dahlberg

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, August 5, 2008

When China pledged to sharply reduce air pollution during the 2008 Olympics, it caught the eye of a UC Davis researcher who saw the effort as a potential living laboratory.

Just what kind of impact would there be downwind of Beijing after China shut down factories and kept some cars, trucks and buses off the roads?

"Those of us in the emission analysis business immediately said, 'Wow, it would be interesting if we could sample that and see any reductions,' " said Steven Cliff, a UC Davis atmospheric scientist who works with the California Air Resources Board.

The sampling effort he is overseeing began in mid-July, when measuring equipment was set up at a site about 30 miles southeast of Beijing.

Researchers started a little later than they had hoped, but still plan to measure before, during and after the Olympics, wrapping up in October.

The work, funded by NASA and the Naval Research Laboratory in Monterey, could help China evaluate the effectiveness of long-term steps it might take to fight pollution, Cliff said.

Results could be available in January.

Bush rules on fuel economy hit from 2 sides

Zachary Coile, Washington bureau

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, August 5, 2008

Washington -- President Bush drew rare praise from environmentalists last year when he signed into law the biggest increase in fuel economy in three decades. But consumer groups and environmentalists now warn that the administration's new rules to implement the law are too weak to shift the country from gas-guzzling to gas-sipping cars and trucks.

At the first public hearing on the rules Monday, critics accused the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration of using false assumptions about gas prices and environmental impacts when it set the proposed fuel economy standards. For their part, auto industry officials insisted that the standards are so aggressive, they might be tough for some automakers to meet.

The administration is proposing that automakers meet a fleetwide average of 31.6 miles per gallon starting in the 2011 model year, including 35.7 mpg for passenger cars and 28.6 mpg for light trucks. With consumers demanding greater fuel efficiency in response to \$4-a-gallon gas prices, some advocates say the industry should deliver more fuel savings more quickly.

Adam Lee, president of Lee Auto Malls, a dealership with 12 new and used car lots in Maine, said at the hearing that his customers come to him with the same questions over and over: How long is the wait for a Toyota Prius? Can I trade in my SUV for a hybrid?

"Consumers want to buy vehicles that get more than 30 miles per gallon," said Lee, who believes the new rules won't push automakers to produce more hybrids, electric vehicles or other efficient vehicles. The administration "could have and should have done more," he said.

Others warn that the proposed standards might already be too much of a burden on an industry that is reeling.

David Westcott, a Buick and Pontiac dealer from North Carolina who spoke on behalf of the National Automobile Dealers Association, noted that new vehicle sales have plummeted to a two-decade low as cash-strapped consumers are having trouble getting the credit needed to make a purchase. He warned that if adding new fuel-saving technologies increases the price of vehicles, it could keep many Americans from trading in their older, less efficient cars and trucks.

Regulators "need to look at fleet turnover," Westcott said.

Energy act requirements

The Energy Independence and Security Act, passed by Congress last year, required that automakers meet a fleetwide average of at least 35 miles per gallon by 2020 but left it up to regulators to set the year-by-year targets that companies will have to meet. The law required that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration set the "maximum feasible" fuel economy in each year, starting in 2011.

Environmentalists and consumer groups criticized the agency for basing the new standards on what they consider a ludicrous assumption - that gas prices will be \$2.25 a gallon in 2015, some 40 percent lower than today's prices. Advocates said that using a more realistic price would have changed the calculations, making it economically feasible to demand that automakers install fuel-saving technologies even sooner.

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., a critic of the agency's rules, has said that using the Energy Information Administration's estimate for fuel prices - \$3.14 in 2016 - would have allowed the agency to require nearly 35 mpg by 2015.

Mark Cooper, research director for the Consumer Federation of America, said Monday that the agency's analysis was also flawed because it failed to account for the fact that consumers are now making fuel economy a primary factor in choosing a new car.

Appeal of fuel efficiency

"If you don't think consumers will buy and drive more fuel efficient cars, you must be living under a rock," he said.

Environmental groups believe the agency may also be short-changing the environmental benefits of increasing fuel economy. In the agency's 414-page draft environmental impact statement, it suggests that the new rules would only have a modest effect on reducing predicted global sea level rises by 2100.

Environmentalists said the analysis assumes that no other actions would be taken by the United States or other countries to combat global warming. A better assessment, they said, would look at how the new rules would cut emissions from the U.S. transportation sector. Ann Mesnikoff, Washington representative of the Sierra Club's global warming and energy program, said, "Fuel economy is only one policy in the tool bag."

Concerns of automakers

Automakers, who ultimately supported last year's law, also have concerns about the new rules. The standards are based on the "footprint" of an automaker's fleet - calculated as wheelbase multiplied by track width. That allows larger vehicles, like SUVs, to get significantly lower mileage than smaller passenger cars.

So foreign automakers like Porsche and BMW, which sell a lot of similar-size sedans, face a more difficult task. Porsche would need to meet a fleetwide average of 41.3 mpg by 2015, BMW would need to reach 37.7 mpg and Volkswagen would need to achieve 39.5 mpg. American

automakers, which sell more large vehicles and also sell a wider mix of vehicles, would fare better: General Motors would need to meet an average of 34.7 mpg, Ford would need to reach 35.5 mpg and Chrysler would have to meet 33.6 mpg.

Charles Territo, spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, noted that the shift of consumers toward more efficient cars is still a new phenomenon. Prior to this March, Americans bought more light trucks than passenger cars for 71 out of 72 months.

"The price of gas is allowing us to introduce consumers to vehicles they may not have considered before," Territo said. "These standards are still very aggressive and will take billions of dollars of research and technology to make a reality."

SUVs most profitable

Barry Bernstein, president of BG Automotive Group, one of a host of new startups that are selling electric cars, said the automakers are opposing higher fuel economy standards because they don't want to stop selling SUVs, which produce the industry's biggest profit margins.

"This is all being negotiated with the automotive industry and the automotive lobbyists," Bernstein said of the new rules. "We keep trying to pacify the industry because we're concerned about losing jobs. But we can't lose any more jobs than we've already lost because of the industry's own mismanagement."

IOC official says pollution should pose no risks

By STEPHEN WILSON AP Sports Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Modesto Bee, Sacramento Bee and other papers, Tuesday, August 5, 2008

BEIJING—The International Olympic Committee's chief medical official expressed confidence Tuesday that air pollution will not pose a major risk to athletes and visitors at the Beijing Games.

Arne Ljungqvist, chairman of the IOC medical commission, said the committee is evaluating the city's air quality based on standards set by the World Health Organization.

"Those standards are fairly tough to meet, but in many respects the Beijing area does so," Ljungqvist said on the opening day of the IOC's three-day session. "I'm sure, I'm confident the air quality will not prove to pose major problems to the athletes and to the visitors in Beijing."

Still some American track cycling athletes arrived in China's capital on Tuesday wearing face masks.

"You got to take every chance you have just to protect the airways," Michael Friedman said. "It's really just taking every precaution necessary. Who knows how bad it's going to be in a few days so if you can resist any air pollution, any contaminants, then you know it's better performance hopefully."

But Ljungqvist stressed there was no need for athletes to wear anti-smog masks unless they suffer from asthma or similar respiratory ailments.

Beijing's polluted air has been one of the biggest worries for Olympic organizers and prompted drastic measures earlier this month that included pulling half the city's 3.3 million vehicles off the road, halting most construction and closing some factories in the capital and surrounding provinces.

The IOC will receive data every hour to monitor the situation throughout the Aug. 8-24 games.

"We will evaluate those and, should problems arise, we may have to take some action," Ljungqvist said.

The IOC has said outdoor endurance events, such as the marathon and road cycling race, could be postponed and rescheduled should smog levels be too high.

On Tuesday, Beijing was shrouded in a light gray haze.

Ljungqvist said he met with the WHO's local representative three days ago who expressed concern over the "exaggeration of the problem that has been seen in the media."

Ljungqvist said the WHO standard was meant only as a guideline for protecting the long-term health of local residents, not for temporary visitors such as Olympic athletes and visitors.

"That is a totally different matter," he said. "To come to a city even though the air quality (might be) inferior, the long-term effects should no longer be feared by temporary visitors."

Ljungqvist said the WHO has three standards for measuring air quality, and Beijing comes under the interim target for developing cities and countries.

He said athletes in Beijing will face the same conditions of high heat and humidity that were prevalent in Atlanta in 1996 and Athens in 2004.

"The mist in the air that we see in those places, including here, is not a feature of pollution primarily but a feature of evaporation and humidity," Ljungqvist said. "We do have a communication problem here. Once the misconception has become sort of established in the minds of people, it's not that easy to get the right message through."

At a separate news conference, Ljungqvist said air-quality readings from 27 measurement sites around Beijing since July 27 offered "encouraging" results.

"Although the two first days suggested some measurements a little above the interim target, they have now gone down, and we are steadily below the interim target," he said.

2008 Summer Olympics: U.S. cyclists wear masks upon arrival in Beijing

USA TODAY, Tuesday, August 05, 2008

Some American cyclists were wearing black masks when they arrived today at the airport in Beijing.

"I suspect it was their choice, you would have to talk to them as to what prompted them to do this," Darryl Seibel, a spokesman for the U.S. Olympic Committee tells Reuters. "I will say this: I am not a scientist, but in my view that was unnecessary."

The level of pollutants in the air was particularly bad yesterday. Right now, Beijing is "shrouded in a light gray haze," according to the Associated Press.

The International Olympic Committee will receive hourly updates about air pollution when the games begin Aug. 8, but one official says he's "confident the air quality will not prove to pose major problems."

Arne Ljungqvist, head of the IOC medical commission, tells AP that public perceptions are part of the problem.

"The mist in the air that we see in those places, including here, is not a feature of pollution primarily but a feature of evaporation and humidity," Ljungqvist said. "We do have a communication problem here. Once the misconception has become sort of established in the minds of people, it's not that easy to get the right message through."

2008 Olympic host does an about-face to prepare for Games

By Kevin Johnson

USA TODAY, Tuesday, August 05, 2008

BEIJING — The gleaming marble floors, mirrored steel fixtures and soaring atrium at the new Capital International Airport terminal offer a jolting futuristic welcome for thousands of bleary-eyed visitors arriving in advance of the Summer Olympic Games.

Completed last year, the terminal is the capstone of an enormous transportation overhaul that began more than four years ago. But the airport marks only part of an effort — separate from the world-class athletic events — to create a longstanding legacy to the 2008 Olympic Games.

Greece established the benchmark for Olympic-fueled urban renewal for the 2004 Athens Games. But the scale of China's makeover is extraordinary by any measure.

Consider:

- A high-speed train now whisks passengers between Beijing and neighboring Tianjin.
- Three new lines have been added to the city's subway system, including an express route to the airport.

Ultra-modern sports venues now dot the city. Among them: the new aquatics center, known as the "Water Cube" for its distinctive design and dramatic lighting; and the \$450 million national stadium.

Even before its completion, the stadium's thatched-steel design became an instant landmark known as the "Bird Nest."

Since 2001 when China was selected to host the Games, Beijing Municipal Government spokesman Lui Zhi said an estimated \$40 billion has been spent to upgrade the city's strained infrastructure, including \$26 billion on transportation projects. (By comparison, Greece spent an estimated \$13 billion for Olympic-related projects.)

Although sparked by Beijing's selection as the host city, Zhi said the development frenzy was planned to support the city well after closing ceremonies as its economy continues to accelerate.

"We will fulfill the promises we made for the Olympics," Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said during a weekend visit with athletes at the Olympic Village.

"We will not only host a quality and unique Games, but build a more scenic, greener and more civilized city in a sustainable manner," he said, as reported by the Xinhua News Agency.

Cheng Li, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute who has authored books on U.S.-China relations, suggested that Beijing's rapid development may have been necessary just to keep up China's economic expansion apart from the Olympics.

With the Olympics, Li said, the "world is going to be able to see the frontier in modern urban construction."

"This will really change the cultural fabric of Chinese urban society," he said.

Separate from the material legacy, Xu Guoqi, author of *Olympic Dreams: China and Sports, 1895-2008*, said the Olympics will open the Chinese to increased interaction with the world and perhaps force the country to deal with "criticism and close scrutiny."

Along with opportunity, Guoqi said the Games also pose substantial risks.

The forced relocation of hundreds to make room for redevelopment has sparked protests. Factories have been closed in an effort to improve air quality and car owners have been restricted to partial use of their vehicles to clear congestion and cut down on pollution.

"It is difficult to tell how significant these social and economic costs will be at this time," Guoqi said. "But one thing is for sure — the impact is widespread and long-lasting."

2008 Summer Olympics: Shroud of smog envelops Chinese capital

As you can see, Beijing is once again shrouded in thick smog. The top photo was taken today. The bottom one was taken on Saturday.

The Beijing Municipal Bureau of Environmental Protection classified today's pollution level as "fairly good."

"Car restrictions and other pollution-reduction measures are paying off, and the air quality in July has improved compared with last year. Traffic-related pollution had dropped significantly since July 20," deputy director Du Shaozhong tells reporters, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency.

BBC News says its tests -- here's a chart -- show that the level of particulate matter in the city is "almost six times higher than the recommended level." "The International Olympic Committee has said endurance events lasting more than one hour could be delayed if the pollution is too bad," the broadcaster reports. "But it remains unclear how bad the pollution has to be before an event is postponed."

In addition to air testing machines, CTV says the Chinese government is using "human sniffers" to track the source of bad smells.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Aug. 5, 2008:](#)

State can't become divided over routes for rail

The continued warring between supporters of high-speed rail will result in just one outcome if they don't regain their focus: Everyone will lose. It's imperative to agree on a good system now, and keep working to make the system great later.

The debate that's hung on for years is whether the small section of the rail line taking passengers from the Valley to the Bay Area should go over the Altamont or Pacheco passes. It's not going to matter if the system doesn't get started.

The groups that should be partners keep lobbing burning arrows at each other, and if they don't watch out, they may find they have torched the enthusiasm of supporters caught in the crossfire.

In time, the exciting high-speed rail system will serve all the state very well, but for now, supporters need to steel their points of agreement, band together and get this project started. That begins with a united front to pass Proposition 1, which will be on the November ballot. This proposal will authorize \$9.9 billion in state borrowing to jump-start the 800-mile rail.

High gas prices and concerns about air quality are stimulating even car-loving voters to view mass transit in a new way, providing an excellent opportunity for passage of the measure. A recent Field Poll showed Proposition 1 leading 56% to 30%, with 14% undecided. The initiative requires a simple majority to pass.

This is clearly a moment in time where Californians are believing that uncommon times call for uncommon solutions, and the supporters of high-speed rail should be gleeful. Right now, voters are eager to try something new if it means loosening the noose foreign oil dependence has looped around their necks. High-speed rail touches all of our hot political spots right now: It would improve the environment, our national security and our economy by providing thousands of well-paying jobs -- just what California needs during such dire economic times.

This is not risky business, but a proven strategy for success. During the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration built thousands of miles of roads, nearly 1,000 airports, 124,000

bridges, parks, schools and government buildings, and employed millions of Americans in that devastating economic time. California doesn't have to wait for the feds to tell us what to do; we are wise enough to stimulate our own economy.

There will be enough resistance to rail coming from people getting rich off competing industries; those who stand to profit if high-speed rail dies. And there will always be negative people whose imaginations cannot fathom such a forward-thinking amenity for California -- even though it's being done beautifully and successfully elsewhere.

This is not the time for partners to fight each other -- it's time to charge ahead together.