

## **Central Valley sprawl bill has perfect timing**

### **State incentives would tie in to Blueprint planning for growth in the Valley**

By Russell Clemings, The Fresno Bee

In the Merced Sun-Star, Saturday, Sept. 6, 2008

Efforts to control sprawl in the San Joaquin Valley could get a boost from a bill now awaiting Gov. Schwarzenegger's signature.

Senate Bill 375 would set up incentives for regions throughout the state to draw up broad new visions for future development patterns.

That's something that local leaders have been trying to do for the past two years in the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint process.

Neither the Blueprint nor the Senate bill would be binding on the local government agencies that make most land-use decisions.

But if it becomes law, the bill would steer billions in state-controlled transportation funds toward projects that support those broad visions -- and away from those that don't.

"There isn't going to be a prohibition on development that doesn't follow it, but there will be carrots," said Rusty Selix, executive director of California Association of Councils of Governments.

Valley leaders are preparing to reconvene their Blueprint steering committee later this month as the process enters its final stage, in which visions from the eight Valley counties are supposed to be melded into a unified plan.

Fresno County's plan, approved in May, calls for doubling the number of homes on each acre of future development and concentrating "nodes" of heavy development along highways and transit routes, with open space in between.

The Senate bill isn't as specific as that. But it calls for the state Air Resource Board to set targets for cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, and for regional transportation planning agencies to come up with strategies for meeting those targets. Denser development and shorter commutes are likely to play a big part in that.

The timing couldn't be better, local leaders say.

"The beauty for us in the Valley is that we're right in the middle of our Blueprint planning," said Barbara Steck, deputy director of the Council of Fresno County Governments, which oversees the county's Blueprint process.

The Senate bill's fate remains uncertain. The governor has threatened not to sign any bills until the Legislature approves a new state budget, now more than two months overdue.

Regardless, the Blueprint process moves forward this fall.

A team at the University of California at Davis has spent the summer melding the eight county visions.

Early next year the unified vision will undergo review by citizens and policymakers in each county. The final product is supposed to guide the region's development through the middle of this century.

## **West Park review: No stone unturned**

### **Concerns range from water to old pioneer cemetery**

By TIM MORAN

Modesto Bee, Monday, September 8, 2008

The environmental review of the PCCP West Park LLC business park on Stanislaus County's West Side is under way, and residents, groups and agencies have weighed in on a variety of concerns.

Everyone from the county's League of Women Voters to the Native American Heritage Commission has suggested issues the review should consider. They range from the expected concerns about water supply, traffic and [air quality](#), to avoiding disruption of an almost forgotten pioneer cemetery on the site of the proposed development.

The review, called an environmental impact report, is part of the California Environmental Quality Act process, which requires thorough vetting of projects that may significantly affect the environment.

Those "environmental impacts" must be alleviated in some way. Issues that can't be alleviated can cause the rejection of the project, unless the county Board of Supervisors finds an overriding consideration — that the project's benefits outweigh the environmental problem.

The proposed 4,800-acre business and industrial park would be located in and around the 1,527-acre former Crows Landing Naval Air Station, now owned by the county. West Park developer Gerry Kamilos wants to create an inland port by linking the site by rail with the Port of Oakland.

The project has drawn opposition from the Farm Bureau, West Side cities, and school, fire and health districts. The city of Patterson sued the county, contending that the environmental review should have been done before the board chose Kamilos as the master developer last April. A citizens group, WS-PACE.org (West Side-Patterson Alliance for Community Environment), formed to fight West Park.

Most of those groups, along with a number of state agencies, county departments and private citizens, registered concerns at the outset of the review.

That's good, county officials and Kamilos say. They want all issues on the table to be dealt with, rather than fielding legal challenges afterward. "It's pretty good, the comments are pretty detailed," Kamilos said. "Many folks are giving a lot of thought about what should be analyzed in the EIR process."

County Deputy Executive Officer for Economic Development Keith Boggs agreed. "The comments are thorough and appropriate," he said.

The issue of the old cemetery came as a bit of a surprise, Boggs said. It came up a few years ago when the county took possession of the property, he said, but the county had been unable to find any information about it.

"I'd forgotten about that. No one could nail down where it was. This was decades and decades before the military took over the property in the late 1930s," he said.

The cemetery issue, along with all other comments and concerns, has been turned over to the consulting team preparing the environmental review, Boggs said.

A draft public review document should be out by May, allowing the public another chance to comment before a final environmental impact report is issued. Each of the public comments must be addressed in the final document, Boggs said.

It should be out by the end of next year and will cost several million dollars, which comes from the developer. The review is coordinated by the county and carried out by consultants. "I don't see any fatal flaws or issues that can't be addressed," Kamilos said. "Everything is moving full steam ahead."

WS-PACE.org president Ron Swift said he was taking a wait-and-see attitude on the environmental review, and keeping all options open if the project is approved by county supervisors.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

A sampling of the issues raised in the environmental impact report for the West Park development near Crows Landing:

- Loss of farmland and the problems the development will cause to surrounding farmland in terms of traffic, water quality and supply.
- Deteriorating air quality and long-term health risks for surrounding residents, nuisance odors and greenhouse emissions.
- Adverse effects on wildlife and habitat for native and endangered species in areas surrounding the project.
- Growth fueled by the project causing overcrowding in schools, and problems growth could have on towns such as Gustine, Delhi, Hilmar and Stevinson.
- Water sourcing and whether it will affect surrounding agriculture or contaminate water supplies.
- Potential noise pollution from the airport at the site as well as vehicles and trains.
- The need for new health and medical facilities, a school and fire station, and the need to maintain the Sheriff's Department emergency vehicle course on the site.
- Traffic and safety concerns at rail crossings, and problems caused by increased traffic in the region.

### **Los Angeles port, truckers group head for court**

**National association is seeking an injunction to block the clean truck program on grounds it imposes intrusive regulatory systems' on motor carrier rates and services.**

By Louis Sahagun and Ronald D. White, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers  
L.A. Times, Monday, September 8, 2008

The nation's busiest port complex and the largest trucking association are expected to face off in federal court today to resolve a vexing question:

Who would suffer more from the landmark clean trucks program set to begin Oct. 1: the trucking industry or residents affected by toxic diesel emissions?

The answer could determine whether the program will launch on time -- and whether massive expansion projects will proceed at the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex, already the gateway for 40% of the nation's imported goods.

The \$1.6-billion program aims to improve air quality by replacing a fleet of 16,800 old, exhaust-spewing trucks with newer, cleaner models.

Beginning Oct. 1, pre-1989 trucks will be banned from the adjacent ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. By 2012, only trucks that meet or exceed 2007 standards will be allowed entry. The goal is to rid local skies of tons of carcinogenic pollution and particulates linked to thousands of premature deaths and respiratory ailments. Port officials hope the program's launch will persuade environmentalists to stop raising legal objections to expansion projects designed to meet future growth at the ports.

The 2007 clean trucks program was crafted by environmentalists, drivers, shippers, city officials, community leaders and the ports after years of often contentious debate.

But now the American Trucking Assn. says it has discovered serious flaws with the proposal.

In an interview, Curtis Whalen, head of the association that represents 37,000 trucking companies nationwide, said his group was seeking an injunction to block the program on grounds it imposes "intrusive regulatory systems" on motor carrier rates and services. He also argued that the program would "result in far fewer trucking companies being able to serve" the ports.

Of particular concern to truckers is a Port of Los Angeles plan that would require formation of concessions, companies that would employ some of the thousands of drivers who currently operate as independent owner-operators.

Concession requirements are designed to give the ports -- as landlords -- enforcement powers over big rigs entering the harbor area. This, in turn, would give the ports influence over hiring decisions, truck maintenance and driver health insurance, among other issues.

"Let's be clear: We are not against clean trucks," Whalen said. "We are objecting to concession plans that are going to squeeze out a lot of existing motor carriers and thousands of independent owner-operators."

A ruling from U.S. District Judge Christina Snyder, which could come as early as today, would have a direct effect on the communities of San Pedro and Wilmington, where residents have coped for years with thousands of big rigs rumbling through neighborhood streets and local freeways.

"The trucking industry believes the status quo works fine," said Los Angeles Councilwoman Janice Hahn, whose district includes the Port of Los Angeles. "But for us, this is all about making sure that the dirtiest trucks calling at the ports are forever banned, and the creation of a stable workforce of drivers with health benefits and decent wages and well-maintained trucks."

Janet Schaaf-Gunter, a member of the executive board of the San Pedro and Peninsula Homeowners Coalition, agreed.

"This much is guaranteed," she said. "Each day we move forward without a change in the number of clean trucks on the road, we are killing additional people."

However, the National Retail Federation, which supports the trucking group, worries that the concessions requirement and new fees will add more than \$1 billion per year to cargo container costs for goods moved through the complex. These costs would come at a time, the federation says, that the retailing industry is ill-equipped to bear them.

For example, motor vehicle and parts dealer sales are down 5.8%, according to the federation's monthly figures comparing this July to July 2007. Home furniture stores' sales are down 4.7%, and department stores have seen their sales fall 2.6% during the same period.

The trucking association "raises very important questions about the port plans' lack of consistency with U.S. statutes that also deal with the regulation of the pricing routes and services of trucking companies," said Erik Autor, vice president and international counsel for the federation. "These are important issues for many of our members who are concerned about both [clean truck] plans and, of course, about the rates they will have to pay."

Environmental and health advocates contend that financial losses should not supersede efforts to battle the ongoing health crisis fueled by diesel pollution. State air quality authorities have linked 3,700 premature deaths each year in California to pollution from the transportation of goods -- more than the number of people who die from homicide.

Martha Cota, 45, who lives less than two miles from the Port of Long Beach and who, along with two of her four children, suffers from asthma, hopes the association's legal challenge is swiftly defeated.

"Environmental rules should be very well designed," she said, "and they must be delivered on time so that we really do improve our air."

## **L.A. residents ferret out toxic sites for researchers**

**The effort is part of an ambitious project devised by environmental justice researchers and a local nonprofit group.**

By Jennifer Oldham, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

L.A. Times, Sunday, September 7, 2008

Marcela Herrera wiped sweat from her nose as the screeching sound of a saw cutting lumber mixed with mariachi music blaring from a house across the street. Clipboard in hand, Herrera jotted down addresses in this Pacoima neighborhood where lumber, steel, ironworks and heavy equipment rental shops operate near homes.

A few blocks away she noted a child care center, where youngsters played outside in air that reeked of a chemical.

"There are a lot of hazardous waste sites around my house," Herrera said in Spanish through an interpreter. "I wanted to do something to help out."

Frustrated because she must keep her asthma- and bronchitis-suffering daughters indoors to protect their health, Herrera recently joined a cadre of northeastern San Fernando Valley residents to catalog the location of industrial businesses and their proximity to gathering places for young and elderly residents, who could be most affected by contaminated air and water.

The effort, known as "ground truthing," is part of an ambitious project devised by environmental justice researchers and a local nonprofit group to compile an accurate picture of where toxic and hazardous sites are located in Southern California and how they affect the health of nearby communities.

"The idea is to try to find the truth on the ground, and we thought, 'Who better than the residents?'" said Michele Prichard, director of change initiatives at the Liberty Hill Foundation. The organization paid residents this summer, in communities including Pacoima, Van Nuys, South L.A., the Figueroa corridor downtown, Boyle Heights, Maywood, Commerce and Wilmington, to walk select neighborhoods and write down what they saw.

Updated information is necessary because state and federal environmental databases that track industrial uses by location or type of pollution they emit are incomplete, said James Sadd, a professor of environmental science at Occidental College.

Without data that show the full picture, lawmakers have a hard time drafting laws to protect neighborhoods and can't accurately target cleanup efforts, residents and researchers said.

"It is a challenge to look at cumulative risk," said Alvaro Alvarado, an air pollution specialist with the California Air Resources Board, which funded similar research by Sadd and others in Oakland.

State officials said they will use the Oakland data -- which showed significantly more hazards near places where children or the elderly congregate than were recorded in state databases -- to determine whether they should rework their database, Alvarado said.

In Los Angeles, preliminary results from the surveys show that state databases also significantly understate the number of automotive businesses in Wilmington and Boyle Heights.

Sadd, working with Manuel Pastor, a professor of geography at USC, and Rachel Morello-Frosch,

a professor of community health at UC Berkeley, uses a computerized system that combines census and socioeconomic data with state and federal information that documents where industrial sites are located. The system generates color-coded maps showing that pollution hot spots are typically concentrated in minority neighborhoods throughout the Southland.

State regulators said they are also interested in comparing the Southern California research to their databases. Los Angeles officials hope to use the results to identify hot spots where industrial sites abut homes. The data can be used to help community planners work out neighborhood zoning issues, such as what type of businesses can open or whether housing should be allowed on a particular street.

"Some communities suffer more pollution because city officials have historically relied on poorly written community plans that allowed incompatible use," such as an industrial shop that uses toxic substances operating near homes, said Regina Freer, a Los Angeles planning commissioner.

"There are some places where there are some horrible incompatible uses that won't be rectified, even with new community plans," said Freer, adding that the planning department hopes to use the data in policy decisions.

Residents say the Los Angeles effort comes at a crucial time for many communities, as large lots adjacent to industrial centers are awaiting redevelopment.

On a recent walk in Boyle Heights, a block bounded by South Evergreen Avenue on the west, 11th Street on the south, Dacotah Street on the east and Olympic Boulevard to the north, members of Union de Vecinos, a local grass-roots tenant advocacy group, wrote down what they saw:

- \* An alley used by diesel-powered freight trucks hauling goods to and from Vernon.
- \* A warehouse where a husband and wife pieced together cloth for nearby garment factories.
- \* A storefront where workers in knee-high rubber boots wheeled a container of raw poultry onto a truck.
- \* An auto parts center that's 300 feet from the neighborhood's only public park.

"What's on record and what is in real life is problematic -- every site is started on its own terms and there's no analysis of the impact on communities surrounding it," said Leonardo Vilchis, director for Union de Vecinos, whose group wore bright orange T-shirts during their survey. "We picked this area so the families who will be moving in will know the impacts."

The local results, researchers said, are likely to echo those nationwide. In several studies in the last 30 years, researchers across the country found that African Americans and Latinos were far more likely than whites to live near hazardous waste disposal sites, polluting power plants or industrial parks. In 1993 President Clinton issued an "environmental justice" order requiring federal agencies to ensure that minorities and the poor aren't exposed to more pollution.

A 2007 study commissioned by the United Church of Christ found that polluting industries are still routinely located closer to minority neighborhoods and that people of color are not equally protected by environmental laws. The report ranked Greater Los Angeles first among major urban areas with the most people living near hazardous waste facilities. About 1.2 million people -- 91% of them minorities -- live less than two miles from 17 such facilities, authors found.

From research they've generated over the last decade, Sadd and his colleagues found that African Americans, Latinos and Asians in Southern California generally face up to a 25% higher

risk of cancer from airborne toxic substances. This exposure creates more health problems for minority children, causing them to miss more school and leading to lower test scores in schools in communities including Pacoima, they found.

## **Emissions Standards Tightened**

### **EPA Sets New Limits for Lawn Equipment, Boat Motors**

By Juliet Eilperin

Washington Post, Friday, September 5, 2008; A04

The Environmental Protection Agency yesterday tightened emissions standards for new gasoline-powered lawn mowers, weed trimmers and boat engines, reducing the amount of smog-causing pollution these motors will be allowed to emit.

In adopting long-delayed rules that will require small gas engines to have catalytic converters like those that have been installed in cars since 1975, the Bush administration overruled the initial objections of both engine manufacturers and their GOP allies in Congress, who argued that installing the devices in small engines could pose a fire threat.

"EPA's new small engine standards will allow Americans to cut air pollution as well as grass," EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson said in a statement. "These standards help fight smog in our neighborhoods and waterways as we continue to improve the environmental landscape."

The new regulations will take effect in 2010 and 2011. Once fully implemented, they will annually eliminate emissions totaling 600,000 tons of hydrocarbons, 130,000 tons of nitrogen oxide and 1.5 million tons of carbon monoxide. Both hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxide contribute to ground-level ozone, or smog, which is linked to respiratory illnesses as well as premature deaths.

Ground-level ozone also contributes to global warming, ranking as the third-biggest greenhouse gas generated by human activity, behind carbon dioxide and methane.

The EPA -- which concluded that it is "safe and feasible" to install catalytic converters in small engines -- estimates the rule's public health benefits will outweigh its costs by a ratio of at least 8 to 1, producing public health benefits valued at between \$1.6 billion and \$4.4 billion annually by 2030. The reduced emissions are estimated to prevent more than 300 premature deaths, 1,700 hospitalizations and 23,000 lost workdays each year.

Environmentalists, who noted that one riding lawn mower emits as much pollution in an hour as 34 cars, said the move would protect the environment and promote energy efficiency. Because spark-ignition engines release as much as 25 percent of their gas unburned in their exhaust, the EPA also estimates that the regulations, when fully implemented, will lead to a more efficient combustion process that will save about 190 million gallons of gasoline each year.

"Cleaner lawn mowers means less summertime smog and healthier air for millions of kids," said Vickie Patton, deputy general counsel of the Environmental Defense Fund. "These new clean-air standards will reduce dangerous smog pollution from high-emitting gasoline engines while helping to cut costs at the gas pump."

The regulations, which were originally scheduled to come out by the end of 2005, apply to lawn and garden equipment of 25 horsepower or less, as well as to golf carts and all gas-powered personal watercraft and inboard and outboard boat engines.

Several small-engine manufacturers, including Wisconsin-based Briggs & Stratton, originally opposed the stricter emissions standards, and when California enacted similar restrictions a few years ago, Sen. Christopher S. Bond (R-Mo.) inserted language into a federal spending bill prohibiting other states from adopting the California rules, which took effect last year.

Now, however, these manufacturers say they have worked with the EPA and can meet the new targets.

"Although challenging, we believe the new exhaust standards to be fair and achievable," said Kris Kiser, a spokesman for the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, a trade association.

Frank O'Donnell, who directs the advocacy group Clean Air Watch, said the only downside to the federal regulations is that the administration did not unveil them sooner: "This is one of the rare instances in which we're saying, 'Hey, the Bush administration is doing something really positive for the environment, just a little late.' "

[The Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Sunday, Sept. 7, 2008:](#)

### **Appointments stall, valley air still polluted**

Eleven months ago, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed legislation into law that expanded the valley's air-quality board from 11 to 15 members.

These new members were not to be political cronies or retired legislators looking for plum review-board assignments, but people with either specific expertise in relevant fields or a vested interest in the health of their community's lungs.

We're still waiting. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, charged with making our air more breathable, still isn't fully staffed as the law's one-year anniversary approaches. Not even close.

Two of the new positions are supposed to belong to representatives of valley cities, additions that would bring the total city representation to five members. But those positions still haven't been filled, and with the May 2008 resignation of Raji Brar, who stepped down from the Arvin City Council and consequently also the air board, there are now three such vacancies. The term of a fourth city representative, from Fresno, expires in February.

Schwarzenegger was also supposed to have appointed a doctor and a scientist to the valley air board. He finally got around to appointing Dr. John Telles, a Fresno cardiologist, in April -- six months after signing the legislation that called upon him to do so.

But the governor has yet to appoint a scientist, even though qualified valley residents have expressed an interest in the non-salaried appointment.

When might we expect some attention to the people's business in this area, Governor? Not soon, by the sound of things.

"We are currently working to fill the position with the best and most qualified representative to serve the people of California," spokeswoman Rachel Cameron said last week.

The delay concerns the Fresno-based Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, as it should.

"We have not heard anything," said CVAQ coordinator Liza Bolaños. "We do know there are a couple of scientists who have applied who are qualified. But we haven't heard any solid answers.

"Every month the air district takes up very technical matters, and not having someone there with that expertise is not helping."

The absence of three city representatives is just as troubling. Earlier this year, the California League of Cities, faced with legal threats over the alleged politicization of the appointment process, stepped away from the seat-designation role it has played since the air board's inception in 1992.

In response, state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, stepped in with SB 1548, which would create a city selection committee made up of local city council members to appoint representatives to the air board.

Florez's bill "is a good idea," said air board spokeswoman Brenda Turner. "It at least offers a solution. It's difficult for us not having a full board."

The board can't get things done without a quorum of eight members, and it'll be down to 10 members by early next year unless vacancies are filled quickly.

Schwarzenegger must appoint a scientist to the board with all due haste and sign Florez's bill, which is now on his desk -- along with dozens of others delayed by the budget impasse.

"Florez's bill makes sure representatives are chosen with public input, through public participation, and without any smoke-filled rooms," Bolaños said. "The problem is huge, and we're not going to be able to fix it without regional input."

Indeed, we will not.

[The Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Sept. 7, 2008:](#)

### **Get rid of petroleum**

I agree with the people who want to have America and the world go green. Apparently their greatest demon is petroleum.

I think we should definitely get rid of all petroleum. It is obviously polluting our atmosphere and it is a drag on our economy that cannot be tolerated.

Can you imagine what a paradise we would have if there were no smog-belching vehicles running up and down our streets? Imagine how quiet it would be if we had no internal combustion engines bellowing in our neighborhoods.

I say let's quit drilling for petroleum as soon as possible. I say let's eliminate the other non-essentials that come from petroleum things like computers, calculators, disposable diapers, flooring, telephones, hand lotion, tapes, shampoo, nylon, fertilizers.

There are about 4,000 petrochemical products we can obviously do without, so let's get rid of them. I don't care if we have to suffer a little. After all, what we want is a pristine environment much like the cavemen had. I say let's do it!

JAMES R. DOTY, Bakersfield

[Tracy Press, Guest Commentary, Friday, September 5, 2008](#)

### **Prop. 1A – a train wreck in the making**

By Craig Saalwaechter/Town Crier

If you think hurricanes in the gulf are bad, wait until Proposition 1A makes landfall in California. This high-speed rail bond scheme would be the biggest Category 5 financial disaster in U.S. history. This would make "The Big Dig" fiasco in Boston look like a small scoop.

Prop. 1A is a nearly \$10 billion bond with \$9 billion for implementing the high-speed rail system and \$1 billion for other rail services that connect to the high-speed rail lines. The first set of tracks would start in San Francisco, go through San Jose and Gilroy, over the Pacheco Pass and down the valley to Los Angeles. The second phase would connect, in a route similar to Highway 99, Sacramento to LA and eventually to San Diego.

Think of it as a big Y placed smack dab in the middle of California.

No, think of it as a big WHY?

Proponents tout its ability to eliminate commuter congestion, reduce air pollution and provide an alternate mode of transportation.

At last week's transit forum sponsored by the city, I didn't meet any Tracy-to-LA commuters, just Tracy-toward-the-bay commuters.

High-speed rail won't help reduce their congestion along the Interstate 580-205-120 corridor.

Supporters of the bond reluctantly claim that the total cost of the high-speed rail system could reach \$40 billion. They expect \$10 billion from the feds and the rest from "private investments." Bet you can't wait to see the shenanigans and shady deals that are put together by our bureaucrats in Sacramento.

And have you noticed that as projects grow from city to county to state, they get worse? Just look in our own backyard at the multi-county San Joaquin Delta College disaster. Gee, what a shocker that the big city of Stockton gets all the goodies and the neighboring towns get shafted.

But back to Prop. 1A and its cost estimates. It's a huge underestimate comparison, but let's use recent and planned BART extensions as a template. The almost \$2 billion Millbrae-to-SFO connection and the now estimated \$7 billion Milpitas-to-Santa Clara line will be a total of less than 40 miles of 1960s technology. Total cost: \$9 billion. Does that number sound familiar? Can you imagine the higher cost of a state-of-the-art bullet train?

Like a giant vacuum cleaner, the bigger cities will suck the green out of the bond money with the desire for bigger and more grandiose train stations. Delta College, all over again?

So picture this: You drive over to San Francisco, and after waiting through long Homeland Security lines, you start your Southern California trip from the marble-laden San Francisco station, with your hair figuratively whipped by 200 mph winds. You race down the peninsula watching blue "Your Tax Dollars at Work" signs whiz by. You roar into the polished granite San Jose station and literally fly off toward Gilroy.

Oh, no, the train is slowing, and you see a "Track Closed" barrier ahead. As the train grinds to a halt, you notice there is no Gilroy station, just a retired garlic worker wearing a conductor's hat sitting in the sun at a card table! Off in the distance, you faintly hear, "Sorry folks, we ran out of HSR money."

It's the words of politicians in Sacramento.

Recently it was written (Our Voice, Aug. 30) that this 800-pound gorilla of a proposition may generate \$11 million for the Altamont corridor. It could improve the ACE tracks or lead to building a separate rail line. With the costs of land acquisition, planning, designing and environmental impact studies, that money would be burned up before the first spike is driven.

Even with some nebulous matching-fund scheme, the current cost of rail track construction would net Tracy about 3 miles of track. Well, if Alaska can have a bridge to nowhere, we can a track to nowhere.

Prop. 1A would do absolutely nothing to improve our commuter problems. So why would we saddle our residents with this massive state bond debt?

Furthermore, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is floating a 1-cent increase in sales tax to close the current \$15 billion deficit. If BART costs are any indication, expect the true cost to put in the stations and 800 miles of track to easily exceed \$100 billion. So expect repeated massive income and sales tax increases in the future. Do we really need this debacle?

A better choice for Tracy commuters is to push for more high-paying local jobs, give incentives to attract business and work on the commuter problems locally. Last week's transit forum was a start.

Don't hold your breath. Hold your wallet. Vote no on Prop. 1A, the biggest boondoggle and waste of your taxpayer money in history.

*Craig Saalwaechter, a community volunteer and 23-year resident of Tracy, is among a select group of local residents with columns in the Tracy Press.*

[L.A. Times commentary, Monday, Sept. 8, 2008:](#)

## **Seeding the future with 'podcars'**

**Bringing convenience, efficiency and safety to mass transit.**

By Catherine G. Burke

Today, everyone wants to get out of the foreign oil money pit. We talk about reducing the use of petroleum through conservation, building cars with better mileage or developing alternative fuels that will not pollute or at least produce less pollution.

That's good, but the cost of oil and emissions are not the only problems with automobiles. We have congestion; accidents with injuries and deaths, and courts tied up with the resultant lawsuits; acres of land devoted to roads and parking; high costs to buy, insure and maintain a car; and lack of mobility for those who are unable or unwilling to drive.

In the near future, 70 million of us will enter retirement, and inevitably some of us will lose the ability to drive a car, whether from physical disability, poverty or denial of insurance. We will need something better than the auto -- and better is here, now.

It's a "podcar," also called "personal rapid transit" -- a system of vehicles that provide on-demand, private, nonstop travel. These vehicles can carry people or light freight. They ride on small, overhead guideways -- like a monorail or people mover -- above existing roads, and are powered entirely by electricity. Picture the car as an elevated, driverless taxi. It's under computer control, so there would be no accidents, thereby saving lives and lowering insurance costs.

Podcars operate on demand, waiting at off-line stations; they can be summoned if one is not available when you arrive at the station. Each vehicle can hold four people, yet the system can be cost-effective even with a single rider for each trip.

The capital cost is low, about \$25 million to \$40 million a mile for the first systems, which include guideways, vehicles and stations, compared to \$100 million to \$300 million a mile for light-rail or subway systems. Because it operates over existing streets and sidewalks, there are few costs for rights of way or taking of private property. It is also inexpensive to operate and thus can be available 24/7 and still make an operating profit, depending on pricing policies.

Detractors say it can't be done: That to be cost-effective, public transit must mass large groups of people together to travel to the same place; that a podcar system would be too complex and expensive; that an elevated guideway would be ugly.

The naysayers haven't done their homework. A podcar system called ULTra is being built at London's Heathrow airport. Vectus, a Korean podcar, is being tested in Uppsala, Sweden. One or both of these systems may be used in the Masdar eco-city in the United Arab Emirates that is being planned as the world's first auto-free, carbon-free new town.

This indicates that those who are buying the systems believe they are cost-effective even in the more costly early stages of development. Visual intrusion is in the eye of the beholder, but the small scale of podcar guideways makes them unobtrusive over city streets and sidewalks. Existing wires and street lighting also could be run through the guideway, reducing visual clutter.

Although the ultimate goal would be a network connected to serve most of the urbanized population of an area such as Los Angeles, the first small podcar networks could enhance existing rail and bus systems by providing an easy and convenient way for passengers to get to their final destination when they leave the larger system. The existing rail system might be better patronized if passengers had a podcar system connecting Union Station with the rest of

downtown. Another system could link the Green Line, hotels, airport parking and car rentals with LAX.

Such connections could be created rapidly as guideways are built in factories and then bolted onto pre-staged footings. A city block can be completed in a day and an entire network completed in a few weeks or months, not years, as with rails.

Private developers, shopping malls, universities and industrial complexes also could build internal networks and connect them to the public network.

Current public transit can only serve those who live near stations or bus lines and who want to travel where and when the system operates. That's why most people prefer a car that's available 24/7, if we can drive and can afford the gas.

There have been no significant service innovations in public transit in more than 100 years. Streetcar, subway and rail systems were introduced in the 19th century. Even the monorail, often seen as something new, was first used in Germany in 1901. Buses were introduced in London in 1905, and automobile use became widespread in the U.S. in the 1920s.

Podcars offer a new kind of service, providing the convenience of an auto without the negatives for the individual -- costly to purchase plus high costs for gasoline, insurance, maintenance and parking. For society, podcars would reduce the use of petroleum as well as pollution, congestion, accidents, injuries and deaths.

With governments in Europe and South Korea already supporting this development, the U.S. needs to get onboard and begin test runs on the podcar designs being created in this country.

*Catherine G. Burke is an associate professor at USC's School of Policy, Planning and Development.*

[Editorial, La Daily News, Saturday, September 6, 2008](#)

### **Good and green**

When it comes to traffic reduction, California needs all the help it can get. And sometimes the only thing to finally get people out of their cars is to offer them cold, hard cash.

The proposal for a voluntary pay-as-you-drive, or PAYD, insurance program for California drivers, being pushed by Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner, might be one of the carrots that actually works. The draft proposal would let drivers have the option of buying auto insurance plans that are based on the number of miles they drive.

His plan has received rave reviews from economists and environmentalists alike for providing a solution to our state's most pressing problems: clogged roads, air pollution, high fuel prices. But it is Poizner's emphasis on reporting mileage while maintaining driver privacy that is especially appealing to consumers.

The PAYD model would allow drivers to document their annual mileage in three ways: They could submit maintenance records; they could have an insurance company representative check their car's odometer; or they could have an electronic mileage-tracking device installed on their vehicle.

The latter option has been a source of debate among groups such as Consumer Watchdog. Former mileage-tracking technologies relied on a GPS device, which ignited privacy concerns. The idea of giving auto insurance companies access to drivers' location data was a bit too "Big Brother" for consumers.

That said, Poizner has said he will not approve such devices.

Instead, electronic monitoring would simply track total miles driven, not a driver's destination or time of location. These improved trackers are currently used by insurance companies in other states and countries.

Poizner's plan seems like the ultimate solution for a combination of California's economic and environmental woes.

And there's research to back it up. In July, the Brookings Institution released a study on PAYD and its predicted impact on Californians. The study found that up to 64 percent of California households would have lower premiums under PAYD, with an average savings of \$276 annually per vehicle.

Savings are expected to be greater for lower-income households.

Furthermore, GMAC Insurance Group, which runs a PAYD program through General Motor Corp.'s OnStar system, has reduced customer premiums in other states by 13 percent to 54 percent.

PAYD supporters argue that a savings-incentive system would encourage motorists to drive less - and thus relieve traffic congestion.

The overarching future effects of PAYD on California are dramatic. Californians would save billions of dollars on gasoline, thereby decreasing the strain on our current energy crisis and contributing to the fight against global warming.

The Brookings Institute study also found that PAYD could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2 percent.

While that's reason enough, the individual savings could be substantial as well. The Environmental Defense Fund predicts Californians could save about \$40billion in car-related costs from 2009 to 2020 - and that's if just 8.5million drivers sign up for the new per-mile model.

It's such a good idea that it begs the question of why it took so long to think up. The answer is that economic analysts and green-friendly proponents have long encouraged some sort of plan that charges by the distance. It just made more sense. But the idea was fiercely resisted by insurance companies that feared a drop in profits.

Yet, insurance company financial concerns can be deflated by simple logic: With fewer drivers on the road, there will be fewer accidents and, thus, fewer filed accident claims.

Pay as you drive might not be the answer to all the state's traffic ills. But it is one good policy that, if followed by many more, can have a lasting and positive impact on California's prolonged environmental stresses and economic woes.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sat., Sept. 6, 2008:](#)

### **Time for nukes to fill nation's energy needs**

Sometimes environmentalists cut off their noses to spite their faces. Nuclear plants to generate electricity are reliable, produce a huge amount of power and are safe. They also do not pollute our air.

We could stop burning coal and natural gas to generate more than 70% of our electricity. We would then stop spewing millions of tons of carbon monoxide into the atmosphere. It would be the biggest cleanup in the shortest time of anything else that has been proposed.

Italy is building 50 new nuclear plants. The Chernobyl tragedy was a long time ago, and a great amount of technology has come about since that time. In response to Marjorie Jauron (letter Aug. 28): More than 90% of the nuclear waste is reusable, and the small amount left can be safely handled.

Environmentalists, please help us clean the air we breathe.

*Darrell V. Imperatrice, Fresno*

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses a field hearing where Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-San Francisco, heard from a long list of Southern California politicians and government officials who said they need more money for roads and mass transit.

### **Demanda California fondos para mejorar infraestructura y eliminar embotellamientos**

**El sur de California, dijo Boxer, duplicará su actual número de camiones de carga en carreteras para el año 2035**

Manuel Flores, Noticiero Latino  
Radio Bilingüe, Friday, September 5, 2008

Funcionarios de todo el sur de California, la región con el aire más enrarecido en el país, demandaron en audiencia con la senadora Barbara Boxer fondos para mejorar la infraestructura carretera y eliminar embotellamientos.

Boxer, presidenta el Comité de Medio Ambiente y Obras Públicas sostiene que analiza dónde invertir en el país unos 200 mil millones de dólares para obras que se adelanten a las necesidades futuras.

El sur de California, dijo Boxer, duplicará su actual número de camiones de carga en carreteras para el año 2035.