

Stricter no-burn rules up for public comment

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2008

Valley air regulators will take comments Thursday on a proposal to increase the number of days when burning in residential fireplaces and wood stoves is prohibited. The changes aim to help the valley meet stricter federal clean air standards for particulate matter pollution, which is most severe in the valley during winter months. "This will help us make attainment," said Jessica Hafer, a senior air quality specialist with the district.

Under the proposed rule change, the threshold for when a no-burn day is called would be lowered. The change could result in up to 48 no-burn days a year in Kern County, according to the district's analysis. Last winter, 12 no-burn days were called in Kern County. The most no-burn days in one season was 16 during the 2005-06 season.

The revised rule would also eliminate an exemption for residences at higher elevations, such as Frazier Park. However, homes with no natural gas service or where wood-burning is the sole source of heat would remain exempt from the rule.

Another change would clarify that burning in outdoor fireplaces or chimineas is also prohibited on no-burn days. That was not specifically stated in the previous rule, Hafer said.

If adopted, the revised rules would take effect next month.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District implemented a wood-burning program in 2003. Under it, the district calls a no-burn day whenever fine particulates reach unhealthy levels from November through the end of February.

Ignoring the burn restriction can result in a first-time fine of \$50. After that, the fines increase.

In addition to helping the region meet clean air standards, air district officials say the wood burning rule keeps air quality from becoming worse during fine particulate episodes.

Fine particulate matter, also called PM 2.5, is considered the most harmful air pollutant. In addition to triggering asthma attacks and lung ailments, the tiny particles can pass through the lungs and into the bloodstream, where they can clog arteries. Doctors have documented trends that show an increase in deaths from lung diseases, heart attacks and strokes on days when fine particle pollution is high.

Fresno and Bakersfield have some of the highest levels of PM 2.5 pollution in the state.

HOW TO GO

WHAT: Public hearing on the revised no-burn rule

WHEN: 9 a.m. Thursday

WHERE: 2700 M St., Suite 275 in Bakersfield

MORE INFO: Visit valleyair.org or call 326-6900

Ethanol pump sites will break ground Thursday

Mark Glover
Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, October 15, 2008

Groundbreaking ceremonies for two local ethanol and alternative fuel stations will be held Thursday.

Ceremonies are set for 10 a.m. at the Carmichael 76 station site at 5103 Fair Oaks Blvd. in Carmichael, and 3 p.m. at the DB&S Shell site at 5551 Martin Luther King Blvd. in Sacramento.

San Diego-based Pearson Fuels and the Sacramento Clean Cities Coalition are co-hosting ceremonies as part of this year's "National AFV Day Odyssey" event.

The local stations are being built with financial support from the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District and the U.S. Department of Energy.

Both events – which will feature alternative fuel experts and currently available vehicles that run on the E85 ethanol-gasoline blend – are open to the public. Pre- groundbreaking ceremonies in Carmichael and Sacramento are set for 9 a.m. and 2 p.m., respectively.

Pearson has been installing its branded E85 pumps throughout the state. Alternative fuel station openings and groundbreaking events also are scheduled this month in Carlsbad, Concord, Hayward, San Jose, Perris and Beaumont.

Port offers truckers help to cut pollution emissions

San Diego Union-Tribune, Wednesday, October 15, 2008

SAN DIEGO: Commercial truck owners who do business with the San Diego Unified Port District can apply to have their older-model vehicles retrofitted or replaced to reduce air pollution emissions.

The Port District has \$3.4 million available to provide assistance through its Clean Truck Program. The deadline for submitting applications is Oct. 31.

Applications, as well as information and instructions on applying for funding, are available at portofsandiego.org/environment; click on "clean truck program update" at the bottom of the page. Applications must be addressed to the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District, attention: Chuck Spagnola, 10124 Old Grove Road, San Diego, 92131.

Truck owners who qualify for retrofitting could receive up to \$5,000 in state grant money, which would be matched by the port. Retrofitting a truck with a diesel particulate filter costs from \$10,000 to \$15,000. The program can provide up to \$100,000 for truck replacement, which can range from \$70,000 to \$250,000.

Easing winds aid firefighters' effort in San Fernando Valley blazes

LA Times, Wednesday, October 15, 2008

Calmer winds early today kept the largest of two San Fernando Valley wildfires from making a run toward the sea, averting a disaster scenario that has played out regularly over recent decades.

The blazes, which have claimed two lives, destroyed 49 structures and burned 18,000 acres, heralded the start of Southern California's Santa Ana season, when desert winds fan the most ferocious fires. By some measures, the region got off lightly.

"We were very, very fortunate we haven't had the damage you'd expect," said Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

The Sesnon fire, which started Monday in Porter Ranch, grew to 13,200 acres overnight. Light winds allowed firefighters to make headway Tuesday in cutting containment lines on the fire's eastern flank.

The Santa Ana winds are expected to dissipate today, allowing even more aggressive fire-suppression tactics. Although the turn of weather was heartening, it was tempered by the knowledge that as Santa Ana fires go, these blazes were small and the winds that drove them relatively moderate.

The path the fires sought through the network of canyons ringing the Valley is a historic and predictable fire funnel, channeling flame to areas that have burned time and again. And the Santa Anas that drive the flames strike regularly through the fall.

"This was a preview of coming attractions," said William Patzert, a climatologist at Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Cañada Flintridge. "Now we're in a race with Mother Nature. What comes first? More Santa Anas or rain?"

There are normally about 30 Santa Ana days a year, Patzert said, and Southern California burned through three of them.

"This is just the beginning. We're 10% through the season," he said. "People forget that Santa Anas are normal, natural and part of the history of Southern California."

The smaller 4,800-acre Marek fire in Lake View Terrace was 70% contained, according to the Los Angeles County Fire Department. In San Diego County, the Juliet fire at Camp Pendleton spread to 3,600 acres and was 60% contained. Close to the Mexican border east of San Diego the 200-acre Shockey fire broke out early Tuesday near Highway 94 but was 70% contained by evening. A fire in the Little Mountain area of San Bernardino County was contained at 100 acres.

The region's topography conspired with the wind to thwart fire-suppression efforts. Steep canyons were largely inaccessible to ground crews. As the blazes raced uphill, they grew more intense, consuming dense chaparral dried by drought. Flames as high as 80 feet, throwing off temperatures near 1,200 degrees, then ignited another typical Southern California fuel: canyon-top homes.

"That's where people want to live, and that's where the fire goes," said L.A. County Fire Chief Michael Freeman on Monday night, squinting up at hills obscured by smoke. "It's what we always see."

The Porter Ranch fire burned in an area that has repeatedly been scorched by wildfires driven by fierce Santa Ana winds.

"If they anchor themselves in the Santa Susana Mountains, they seek to cross the 118 Freeway. . . It is a historic path," said Los Angeles Fire Department spokesman Brian Humphrey. "The fire wants to go to the coast."

In the fall of 1993, 1982 and 1970, flames carved a path of destruction across the Santa Monica Mountains from the San Fernando Valley to the Pacific Ocean, just as fire officials feared they might again this week.

A history compiled by the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area shows a fire corridor running roughly from Santa Susana Pass near the 118 west of Chatsworth, down Malibu Canyon to the sea.

One spot has burned 12 times since 1925 and may have burned a 13th time this week, said Robert Taylor, who prepares fire maps for the recreation area.

Two UC researchers who are mapping Santa Ana wind corridors in Southern California say the Santa Susana Pass area experiences some of the fiercest gusts in the region.

"That's where the winds are the strongest," said Alex Hall, a UCLA associate professor of atmospheric and oceanic sciences.

Santa Anas blow when desert winds push down canyons over passes and low mountains, warming and gaining speed along the way.

Pollutants choking up residents

By Kerry Cavanaugh, Staff Writer

L.A. Daily News, Tuesday, October 14, 2008

Smoke blanketed much of the San Fernando Valley on Monday, forcing officials to close schools and move patients from at least one hospital, while choking residents living miles from the flames.

For the most sensitive - those with asthma and lung disease, heart problems, the elderly and children - the ash and fine particles in the smoky air can trigger serious breathing problems.

Olive View-UCLA Medical Center - in the path of the Marek Fire - moved four newborns and an adult patient on a ventilator to other county hospitals because of the smoke, officials said.

Emergency rooms throughout the region reported a big increase in patients suffering from respiratory distress.

"We are getting quite busy," said Dr. Jason Fisher, who works in the emergency room at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center in Mission Hills.

"We usually see a bump (in patients) with the Santa Ana winds. With the wildfires, it's just that much worse."

Even healthy individuals are advised to be cautious when they smell smoke or see dust and ash in the air. The microscopic particles in smoke irritate the mucus membranes in the airways, causing a scratchy throat and a stuffy nose.

"If you're in an area that is affected by smoke, you are better off not exercising or being outdoors, even if you're healthy," said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, Los Angeles County's public health officer.

"Those particles get deep down into your lungs. Why would you want to have that?"

Babies and children, in particular, should stay indoors, he added. Children inhale more rapidly and take in more oxygen per pound of body weight than adults, and are more susceptible to pollutants in the air.

The Los Angeles Unified School District closed 10 schools in the Northeast Valley and was evaluating whether to close other campuses today.

But teachers at other schools were troubled that Superintendent David Brewer III did not close additional schools in the smokiest areas.

"One of my sixth-graders said, 'Why is it snowing here?' I said, that's not snow; it's ash. It was really that bad," said Laura Tracy, an eighth-grade teacher and teachers union official at San Fernando Middle School.

"They should have canceled school."

Assistant Superintendent of School Operations Earl Perkins said the district had staffers monitoring air quality at the schools and felt that the students and staffers could be kept safely indoors.

"The last thing we want to do is close a school unless we have to," Perkins said.

For those in smoky areas, health officials recommend that residents stay indoors with the windows closed. Those who use air conditioning should make sure the unit recirculates indoor air without drawing in outside air. Those with air conditioners that do not have a recirculation option should consider going to a mall, a library or some other indoor air-conditioned location, health officials said.

Both sides debate clean energy initiative

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2008

Should the state borrow money to give rebates to people who purchase cleaner, more fuel-efficient vehicles? The campaigns for and against Proposition 10 argued their cases before *The Californian* editorial board Tuesday.

The measure calls for selling \$5 billion in state bonds to fund a variety of projects aimed at cleaner transportation and energy.

Nearly \$3 billion would provide cash rebates from \$2,000 to \$10,000 to consumers who buy cleaner, more efficient vehicles, such as hybrids or cars fueled by natural gas. Rebates of \$25,000 to \$50,000 would also be given out for the purchase of cleaner big rigs.

The remaining \$2 billion would be invested in research and production of renewable power and cleaner vehicles.

Supporters say the measure will create a new market for cleaner vehicles, cut air pollution and greenhouse gases and reduce the state's dependence on foreign oil.

"We have a history of relying on cheap oil. Prop 10 provides California with a plan to get out of the the current ditch we're in," said Todd Campbell, a former Burbank mayor and public policy director for Clean Energy, a natural gas fueling station company owned by Texas oilman turned clean energy advocate T. Boone Pickens.

Clean Energy has poured millions into campaigning for Proposition 10. In response, critics point out the company stands to benefit financially from the measure because the sale of more natural gas vehicles — which would qualify for a \$10,000 rebate compared to a \$2,000 rebate for a Prius hybrid — would require a network of natural gas stations to supply them.

Opponents of the plan — which include major environmental groups like the Sierra Club California, Natural Resources Defense Council and California League of Conservation Voters — also say the measure lacks some environmental assurances. Some of the vehicles that qualify for rebates don't have to be any cleaner than a gasoline-powered car, they say. In addition, the rebates aren't tied to any requirements for reductions in air pollution or carbon dioxide emissions.

On top of that, the state can't afford the program, other opponents say. The California Legislative Analyst's Office pegged bond repayment to total \$10 billion over 30 years. The payments would come from the state's general fund.

"We're going broke. We're not raising taxes and the only way to pay for Prop 10 is to cut services," said Richard Holober, executive director of the Consumer Federation of California.

Holober said state bonds are typically used to fund permanent projects, such as schools, bridges and roads. He called it "bad policy" to use them for payments to private individuals.

Supporters did not provide a direct answer when asked where the state would get the money to make the bond payments. Instead, they said the measure would fund two of the state's highest priorities: reducing dependence on foreign oil and spurring demand for clean alternative energy.

County to fight garbage-laden green waste

BY JAMES BURGER, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2008

Kern County supervisors launched a battle against trashy composting operations Tuesday.

They directed Resource Management Agency Director David Price III to develop a new ordinance controlling the amount of trash composting and land application companies can let slip into their green waste.

Price said he will begin the process and get input from industry and the public.

County regulators have struggled with numerous operations that bring in waste from Southern California, compost green waste and spread it on farmland.

The problem is that the compost, much of it from Los Angeles, has been mixed with plastic bags, chunks of plastic, glass and other trash.

"If you want to talk about Kern County being a dumping ground, that's what we are," said Supervisor Ray Watson.

Supervisor Michael Rubio said some composting farms have become simply trash sites.

"I've been out to some of these 'farming sites' and they're not farming sites. All they do is go out there and disk it and disk it," Rubio said. "I agree with Supervisor Watson. It needs to stop at the source, or at the very least when they bring it to these composting facilities."

One business that has had trouble with trash in its compost postponed a request for new permits Tuesday.

Community Recycling Inc. had asked supervisors to approve the use of new sources of raw material and the recycling of wallboard.

Company officials and the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment both asked for a postponement of the board's consideration.

Community Recycling officials wanted to talk to staff about a condition that would limit the number of trucks traveling to the business.

The Center wanted a community meeting to discuss the project's impacts.

Supervisors also heard that Grimmway Farms' controversial chicken manure composting operation in Arvin will be closed within 60 days.

The fate of a new composting operation near Mettler has not been decided, said Grimmway spokesman Roger McIntosh.

Health Highlights

Gas Stove Emissions Aggravate Children's Asthma

Washington Post Tues. Oct. 14, 2008

High indoor levels of emissions from unvented gas stoves can aggravate asthma among inner-city children, says a Johns Hopkins University study that included 150 Baltimore children, ages 2 to 6 years.

The researchers measured nitrogen dioxide levels in the children's homes and compared the intensity of coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath among the youngsters, United Press International reported.

Asthma flare-ups were directly associated with high concentrations of nitrogen dioxide in the homes. Each 20-point increase in nitrogen dioxide levels led to 10 percent more days of cough and 15 percent more days with limited speech due to wheezing, the researchers found.

The study was published in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives.

"Because using stoves as heat sources is a hallmark of urban poverty, our study tellingly points to how profound and direct the effects of purely social and environmental factors can be on a child's health," lead researcher Dr. Nadia Hansel said in a news release, UPI reported.

UN: crisis must not stop climate change action

By RYAN LUCAS - Associated Press Writer

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, October 15, 2008

WARSAW, Poland—Environment ministers agreed Tuesday that the world financial crisis must not halt efforts to combat global warming, a top United Nations climate official said.

Officials from the U.S., China, Canada, India, the European Union and more than 30 other countries met for two days of informal talks in Warsaw ahead of a climate conference in December.

"There was a very strong consensus that the current financial turmoil should not be an excuse to slow down action on climate change," Yvo de Boer, executive secretary for the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, told The Associated Press after the talks.

"Many ministers said that addressing climate change can deliver important economic benefits that are important in the light of the current financial situation as well," de Boer added.

Scientists say the emission of carbon and other greenhouse gases, mostly from fossil fuels, must peak within 10 to 15 years and then drop sharply to avoid potentially catastrophic changes in the climate.

The discussions in Warsaw were aimed at laying the groundwork for a major U.N. climate change conference in December in Poznan, Poland that will include delegates from more than 190 countries. The conference will work out the details of a climate change accord to succeed the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

The U.S. rejected the Kyoto accord, arguing it would harm American business and that it made no comparable demands on emerging economies. China, India and other large developing countries refused to accept a binding arrangement that they said would limit their development and their declared mission to ease poverty at home.

De Boer said a number of ministers at the Warsaw meeting pushed for industrialized nations to lead the way by setting specific targets for cutting emissions by 2020.

"That is the kind of clarity that the private sector also needs in terms of taking investment decisions in these difficult times," he said.

Just last week another U.N. expert expressed concern that the financial crisis would hamper efforts to stem global warming. Rajendra Pachauri, head of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said discussions about global warming solutions were "on the back burner."

"I'm absolutely sure that climate change will be the last thing people will think about at this point in time," said Pachauri, who shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with former Vice President Al Gore for their work on climate change. "Sooner or later, they will come back to it."

Pachauri's panel was formed to provide objective information about the issue to decision makers.

A debate similar to the one in Poland is also under way in the EU before its two-day summit beginning Wednesday. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso has urged EU leaders to keep their promise to cut greenhouse gas emissions, despite worries that the economic slowdown will make it harder for governments and businesses to shoulder the extra costs.

"Saving the planet does not disappear because of the financial crisis," Barroso said in Belgium on Tuesday.

The 27-nation bloc's year-old deal would reduce emissions by 20 percent by 2020. However, the package faces opposition from a number of members—including Poland—who fear it will curb economic growth.

Polish Environment Minister Maciej Nowicki called the plan "unacceptable" saying it was plagued by a "slew of shortcomings." He did not provide specifics, but said the problems could still be weeded out in further negotiations.

Nevertheless, he said Poland, which is heavily dependent on coal for its energy needs, "does not fear" cutting emissions by 20 percent by 2020. "We could even go beyond that level of emission reductions," Nowicki said.

A final deal to succeed the Kyoto Protocol is expected to be signed in Copenhagen at the end of 2009.

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, Tuesday, October 14, 2008:](#)

Our View: Propositions 7 and 10 won't clean up environment

Good intentions are never enough to fix a problem. But sometimes, good intentions can do more harm than good. That's the case with Propositions 7 and 10 -- both billed as pathways to a cleaner environment and less polluted future.

We're all for saving the environment and developing cleaner energy. But poorly conceived or even disingenuous proposals should not be written into state law. Voters should reject Propositions 7 and 10.

Environmentalists, industrialists, municipal and private utilities, labor unions and scientists all have linked arms to oppose this plan. Why would such a diverse group put aside their huge differences to gang up on a proposition that purports to help clean up bad air and reduce global warming? Because it is more likely to have the opposite effect.

The heart of Proposition 7 requires all electricity providers to get 50 percent of their power from renewable sources by 2025.

State law requires investor-owned utilities such as Pacific Gas and Electric Co. to get a portion of their power from renewable resources. Proposition 7 would extend the requirement to public utilities such as the Merced Irrigation District. That's unfair.

Why? Because the utility already generates a significant portion of its electricity through the most nonpolluting means possible -- hydroelectricity. But it gets no "green credit" for that power. Nor would they get any green credit for investing in additional hydro power.

It gets worse. Under the proposition, utilities would get credit only for green power generated at plants producing 30 megawatts or more. That would mean any help given to homeowners to install solar panels wouldn't count for green credit.

If it doesn't count, what incentive does any utility -- private or public -- have for helping to solarize homes or for creating biomass generation on farms?

This proposition has a host of similar problems. Worse yet, if passed, it would take a two-thirds vote to fix them.

Proposition 10

Texas businessman T. Boone Pickens has made a lot of money speculating on oil. Now he's speculating on the desire of voters to go green. He wants California to pony up \$5 billion in bonds (which will require \$10 billion to repay) to help him sell more natural gas.

You won't find that expressed in the proposition's language.

Instead, you'll find an enticement -- nearly \$3 billion in rebates -- to buy cars and trucks that use alternative energy. But there's a catch. This proposition would allocate the greatest proportion of those incentives to vehicles powered by natural gas. And where will the owners of these new vehicles get that gas?

Well, that's where Pickens' speculation pays off -- he owns a natural gas company.

There are other concerns.

Along with short-changing buyers of electric or hybrid cars, it provides much higher incentives to businesses than to those buying passenger vehicles.

And it has no provisions to keep people from getting rebates here, then driving to another state and selling the vehicle -- in effect negating any advantage.

Here in the Valley, where the air is frequently dangerous to breathe, we're keenly aware of the necessity to cut vehicle pollution.

We just think there are better ways to do it -- ways that will make winners of us all, and not just T. Boone Pickens.

[San Francisco Chronicle Commentary Wednesday, October 15, 2008](#)

Clean coal - a contradiction in terms

Michael Brune

If you are a politician running for national office - or a coal or utility executive -- the notion of "clean coal" is alluring, much like pledging to lower taxes without cutting services. Like other campaign promises, however, citizens are well advised to seek the truth before committing.

During their recent debates, neither the presidential nor the vice presidential candidates dared admit the truth: There is no such thing as clean coal. Despite years of research and billions in government subsidies, not a single commercial coal plant in the United States can capture and store its greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, many scientists and even coal utility executives say the technology is at least a decade away. For policymakers and others concerned about climate change, the real question is not whether coal can be made clean, but whether we should even try.

Clean coal can mean many things to many people. Until recently, the phrase was often used to describe various processes to reduce air and water pollution caused by mining and burning coal, such as installing scrubbers on smokestacks to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions that cause acid rain. But the industry's biggest problem is that coal is the country's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. So now clean coal usually refers to carbon capture and sequestration, an attempt to capture a plant's carbon emissions and store them underground, permanently, rather than releasing them into the atmosphere to contribute to global climate change.

The biggest challenges of carbon capture for the U.S. coal industry pertain to scale and cost, both of which are huge. Researchers at MIT estimate that if less than two-thirds of the carbon dioxide from U.S. coal plants were captured and compressed for storage, the collective volume to be stored underground "would about equal the total U.S. oil consumption of 20 million barrels per day."

Building an infrastructure to accomplish this would not be cheap. The Department of Energy's National Energy Technology Laboratory found that adding carbon capture to existing coal plants would increase the cost of electricity generation by 81 percent. This includes neither the rising cost of coal, nor the heightened cost of new coal plant construction, which has surged by more than 130 percent since 2000.

Assuming these challenges can be met, then what? Coal will still be dirty. The American Lung Association estimates that pollution from coal-fired power plants triggers 550,000 asthma attacks and 38,000 heart attacks annually, helping to cause an estimated 24,000 Americans to die prematurely each year. Coal combustion is also the country's largest source of mercury poisoning and releases more than five dozen different types of hazardous air pollutants.

And don't tell the residents of Appalachia that coal is clean. Mountaintop removal coal mining has flattened 450 mountains and buried more than 700 miles of rivers and streams in one of the country's most beautiful regions.

Rather than perpetuate our country's dependence on dirty energy, we can rejuvenate our economy with a transition to truly clean and renewable energy resources. Each year, the price of coal soars, while the costs of solar and wind decline. A report prepared for the California Public Utilities Commission earlier this year estimated that clean coal plants would cost \$17.32 per kilowatt hour, compared to \$12.65 for utility-scale solar power and just \$8.91 for wind. Moreover, an analysis of more than a dozen independent reports studying the impacts of clean energy on employment found that wind power produces up to three times as many jobs as coal per unit of power produced. Rooftop solar produces seven to 10 times as many jobs.

"Clean coal" is both an oxymoron and an excuse policymakers use to avoid developing a responsible energy policy. Every dollar spent on a clean coal infrastructure is a dollar better invested in energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Michael Brune is the executive director of Rainforest Action Network and the author of "Coming Clean - Breaking America's Addiction to Oil and Coal," (Sierra Club Books, 2008).

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2008:](#)

Public transit moves to the front of the bus

BY LOIS HENRY, Californian staff writer

I have a feeling Karen King is going to become my hero.

She's the new executive director of Golden Empire Transit, the bus lady.

And she's here to clean up this town. Or at least devise a smarter system that uses what resources we have to maximize ridership, help unclog our streets and de-foul (OK, I made that word up) our air, all in a single bound.

If I could sew, I'd make her a cape with a giant "T" on it for transit.

Perhaps you think I gush too much, but I truly believe public transit is one of the best ways to reduce our traffic congestion and improve air quality. Because it's been ignored, discounted and downright kicked to the curb in this town for so long, it now holds the greatest potential of any solutions on the horizon.

And King has been a shining star in the transit trenches.

Seriously, I was amazed we could lure King — most recently the head of the North County Public Transit District near San Diego. So I asked her, "How'd we lure you here?"

Turns out she loves a challenge.

Bakersfield is nothing if not a big ol' fat challenge.

"I don't have unrealistic expectations," she said of how fast and how much she can change things. "I'm a marathoner, not a sprinter."

For example, she had two marching orders when she took her last job: Redesign the bus system and get a new light rail line built.

The bus system was relatively quick and painless compared to the Sprinter light rail line, which she did get done after 10 long years and half a billion dollars. It now zips 7,600 riders a day along a 22-mile route between Oceanside and Escondido.

"GET is a diamond in the rough," she said, using words like "basic" and "solid" to describe the service. "But (Bakersfield) is changing. The future is changing."

You wouldn't know it from the way city and county officials continue to approve far-flung housing developments without even the hint of a thought toward public transit.

Hopefully, that'll start to change soon as planners adapt to the new law (SB 375) that requires more compact, transit-oriented development. Public transit holds a key position in that mandate.

Oh, and Attorney General Jerry Brown hasn't been shy about suing cities and counties when he feels their general plans aren't aligned with the state's goals for cutting greenhouse gases (AB 32), which puts a heavy emphasis on public transit. (That threat alone, I'm told, has pushed back the Kern/Bakersfield joint general plan by several months, maybe even a year.)

All of which puts King and GET in prime position to get transit back into the planning process.

If you've ever read environmental impact reports on housing developments in Bakersfield (great insomnia cure, by the way), you would see the same pattern I have over the years.

Such reports have to go to all affected agencies, including GET, for comments. Invariably, GET sends the same pathetic form letter stating that if the development is built as planned, it will be too far outside current service areas and won't have the density to allow bus service.

The letter goes in the back of the report and that's that.

Not anymore.

King will be right in there with the Kern Council of Governments helping create a new development plan for the region, as required by SB 375.

"I'm looking forward to GET formally becoming an integral part of the planning process," she said.

And she's already brimming with short-term ideas from just a quick look around the community.

Parking, for instance, in downtown and out at Cal State Bakersfield is dirt cheap. Maybe if costs went up, it would be incentive to get people on the bus, she suggested.

Of course, she acknowledged the bus has to be so convenient people won't just shrug and pay extra to park their cars.

On that score, she said, GET commissioned a service study last year, which was finished when she came on board in June. She was careful to tell me any service changes GET might make are up to the board of directors.

But she did mention there has been interest in an express route to downtown and said the system needs to focus on what areas it can best serve. I asked specifically if that meant cutting out routes to the northwest and southwest, but King was cagey.

Some longer term ideas, such as making sure new roads include dedicated bus/bike lanes and possibly even room for light rail, will take consensus from city and county planners. And by long term, King is looking 25 years into the future.

"Transit isn't the only answer," she said. "It's one of the pieces. And now with AB 32 and SB 375, it can't be ignored."

Hallelujah, sister!

[Bakersfield Californian, Editorial, Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2008:](#)

Vote NO on Proposition 10

T. Boone Pickens wants to pick your pocket. The Texas billionaire, listed by Forbes as the 131st wealthiest American, is going about it legally with Proposition 10, a scheme with something for almost everyone to dislike.

The so-called Alternative Fuel Vehicles and Renewable Energy Bonds Initiative hinges on voters' willingness to fund \$5 billion in bonds at a time when we can least afford to increase public indebtedness. That factor alone might be enough to disqualify Prop. 10 from consideration, but the cockeyed initiative's flawed policy cinches it.

Prop. 10 would dole out \$200 million for alternative energy demonstration programs in eight California cities, none of which have made any special fuss about the opportunity; create a pool of \$1.5 billion for grants and research incentives that venture capitalists are already exploring; and, among other things, set aside \$2.875 billion for rebates on vehicles that run on alternative fuels.

That last one sounds fine until you look closer -- and note that the lion's share of the rebate kitty goes primarily to vehicles that run on natural gas -- a fuel in which Pickens himself is deeply invested.

Perhaps the biggest problem with Prop. 10 is a loophole that would allow out-of-state trucking firms (and alert speculators) to collect \$50,000 per-vehicle rebates on new natural-gas trucks and use them in states with an adequate natural gas delivery infrastructure -- or, worse, resell them and keep most of those rebate checks as pure profit.

California voters who might have assumed they were doing the environmentally responsible thing for their state by passing Prop. 10 would take the loss.

Groups as diverse as unions, anti-tax organizations, consumer watchdogs, environmentalists and chambers of commerce have lined up to oppose Prop. 10, and for a variety of reasons.

Not the least of these reasons is the fact that those general-obligation bonds, over 30 years, would cost another \$5 billion in interest, draining nearly \$10 billion from the state's beleaguered general fund.

The initiative would create the need for sizable, new bureaucratic machinery. Three new sub-agencies within the existing state Board of Equalization, [Air Resources Board](#) and California Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission would be required -- but the sales taxes generated by Prop. 10 isn't expected to provide enough revenue to offset the administrative costs.

Prop. 10 attempts to address issues that are vital in California's quest to be a leader in promoting alternative sources of energy, but it's simply the wrong approach.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., Oct. 15, 2008:](#)

Doesn't clean the air

I read with disappointment Mayor Alan Autry's admission that he asked the governor to veto a bill that would have cleaned up port pollution. This bill would have raised new revenue to clean up the polluting trucks that crisscross the Valley on their way to and from California's ports. Funds would have helped Valley businesses who own and operate these trucks.

Every year 3,700 Californians die due to pollution from ports and freight transportation. If "the health and lives of the Valley's residents are just as precious as Southern California's," then why not do something? How does a veto help save those lives? By rejecting clean-air funding? By delaying the use of clean trucks?

Valley exporters can afford to pay their fair share. The fee equates to just 0.16% of the value of agricultural exports. This is only slightly higher than the 0.11% average of all California exports.

Meanwhile, some in the Valley asked that the port-related fee be spent on trucks that don't go to the ports, which would have encouraged industry opponents to sue.

Mayor Autry and the governor profess concern about air pollution in the Valley. Unfortunately, the governor's veto doesn't help clean it up.

*Laura Fultz Stout, campaign and outreach associate
Coalition for Clean Air
Fresno*

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses environmentalist consider the current economic situation will postpone many nationwide measures. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Consideran ambientalistas que la situación económica pospondrá medidas nacionales

Manuel Ocaño
Noticier Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, October 14, 2008

La crisis financiera en el país podría posponer planes nacionales de protección ambiental aún cuando el sobrecalentamiento terrestre es una seria amenaza, advirtió por lo menos uno de los grupos civiles más activos.

El director del grupo, Clan Air Watch, Frank O'Donnell dijo temer incluso que el Congreso tenga que sacrificar propuestas contra la contaminación para impulsar acciones que beneficien a la economía.

O'Donnell opinó que el próximo presidente tendría que oponerse a cualquier medida ambientalista que impidiera impulsar la economía nacional.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses air pollution in Mexico City is caused by the 4 million circulating automobiles.](#)

Contaminación en México DF causada por 4 millones de autos

Terra, Tuesday, October 14, 2008

México, 14 oct (EFE)- Cuatro millones de vehículos particulares, de carga y transporte público generan más del 80% de las emisiones contaminantes en la capital de México y su zona metropolitana, denunció hoy la ONG Presencia Ciudadana.

Según un comunicado de la entidad, su directora ejecutiva, Ana Romero, proporcionó estos datos al inaugurar el Segundo Foro sobre Movilidad Sustentable en la capital mexicana, que tiene una población de nueve millones de habitantes, unos veinte millones si se toma en cuenta los municipios colindantes.

El encuentro tiene como objetivo difundir a la sociedad antecedentes, estudios, investigaciones y tendencias de contaminación atmosférica, cambio climático y salud en las grandes ciudades.

Del total de vehículos que transitan por el Valle de México, casi todos son automóviles particulares y 100.000 taxis.

Sin embargo, estos vehículos "representan un rendimiento de traslado de pasajeros de sólo el 20 por ciento", dijo Romero.

Esta circunstancia genera no solamente problemas ambientales, como la mala calidad del aire, sino sociales, como el impacto negativo para la salud, los embotellamientos o las pérdidas económicas por el tiempo que deben emplear los ciudadanos en los traslados.

Según Romero, las partículas suspendidas y el ozono en el Valle de México se asocian con 4.000 muertes prematuras.

Además, la situación es causa también de 2,5 millones de días perdidos de trabajo al año en la ciudad, donde se registran cerca de 2.500 muertes anuales en accidentes automovilísticos.

Por su parte Martha Delgado, secretaria del Medio Ambiente del gobierno capitalino destacó la importancia de contar con un transporte público sustentable e invitó a la sociedad a incrementar el uso del que ahora existe.

También sugirió recuperar a los peatones en la ciudad y usar medios alternativos como la bicicleta.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses winds are causing more fires in Southern California.](#)

Vientos azuzan incendios en el sur de California

El Nuevo Herald, Wednesday, October 15, 2008

Vientos intensos que avivaron el martes tres furiosos focos de incendio en el sur de California destrozaron decenas de hogares, dejaron dos muertos y obligaron a unas 4,000 personas a abandonar sus viviendas.

Los incendios calcinaron unas 13.000 acres en un sector suburbano de Los Angeles y el norte del condado de San Diego en tres días, con particular furia en el valle de San Fernando.

Más de 2,000 bomberos y una flota de aviones capaces de lanzar agua y espuma de efecto retardante combatían el incendio de Sesnon, que abarcaba 5,000 acres y enviaba llamas al cielo por los cañones en el extremo oeste del valle, y el incendio Marek de 5,300 acres en el extremo nordeste. Combinados, han consumido más de 15 millas cuadradas.

Los investigadores buscan determinar el origen de los incendios.

Los fuertes vientos hicieron que un fuego en el lado oeste del Valle de San Fernando en la zona de Porter Ranch se duplicara de 5,000 acres a casi 10,000 acres de un día para otro, dijeron oficiales. Las llamas en esa zona redujeron a cenizas casi 4,000 hectáreas, con lo que se convirtió en el siniestro más poderoso de los que ardían el martes, según los bomberos.

Pero a sólo 10 millas de distancia, los erráticos vientos de Santa Ana cedieron, lo que permitió a los bomberos contener casi el 70 por ciento de un incendio que ardía en el extremo noreste del

valle. Horas antes, ese fuego había sido contenido en un 5 por ciento. Las autoridades dijeron que la extensión de ese fuego bajó a 4,800 acres, de 5,300.

Los vientos soplaban el martes hasta a 50 millas por hora en partes del valle por la mañana, dijeron funcionarios de los bomberos locales.

Otras 3,000 acres estaban calcinadas en Camp Pendleton, lo que obligó a evacuar más de 1,400 viviendas en la base de los marines de San Diego y en la vecina Oceanside, según el ciber sitio de la base. El incendio no había afectado hasta ahora ninguna estructura de la base.

Desde el domingo en la tarde, los dos principales incendios quemaron más de 6,000 hectáreas cuando estallaron casi en simultáneo cerca del valle de San Fernando y Porter Ranch, dos suburbios residenciales al norte de Los Angeles, enclavados entre colinas de vegetación boscosa y seca, tras dos años de una grave sequía en la región.

"El fuego quiere avanzar hacia la costa y estamos haciendo todo lo posible por impedirlo", dijo el vocero del Departamento de Bomberos de Los Angeles, Brian Humphrey. "Dos tercios de nuestro departamento está en la lucha".

Un automovilista murió el lunes en un accidente cuando embistió la parte trasera de un vehículo detenido en la carretera 118 en el Valle de San Fernando. Un patrullero californiano, Leland Tang, dijo que el tránsito se paralizó al paso de los bomberos a medida que las llamas se acercaban a la ruta.

Al menos 4,000 personas tuvieron que abandonar sus casas a raíz de esta nueva oleada de fuegos que azotó el sur de California, donde su gobernador, Arnold Schwarzenegger, declaró el estado de emergencia el lunes.

"Siempre obtenemos de alguna manera el dinero para combatir los incendios. Eso es lo último que me preocupa. Siempre tenemos dinero en nuestra reserva... \$1.500 millones de dólares de reserva exactamente para cosas como ésta", dijo el martes Schwarzenegger, confirmando que existen fondos para proteger a los californianos de estos siniestros, aún en plena crisis financiera.