

Cash for Clunkers Seen as Auto Sales Boost

By Rick Elkins

Valley Voice Newspaper, Tuesday, July 21, 2009

Tulare County - Local car dealers are hopeful the Cash for Clunkers program signed into law last month by President Barack Obama will be a boost to their sales, but most are waiting to see the rules before jumping into the program.

Now called Car Allowance Rebate System (CARS), the program went into effect July 1, but local dealers say they likely will wait until all the details are finalized before offering the rebate.

The program gives consumers cash incentives to trade in gas guzzlers for new models with higher fuel efficiency. The incentives are \$3,500 or \$4,500, depending on the models being traded in and what the consumer is purchasing or leasing.

The basic rule is an old car rated at 18 miles per gallon or less in combined city and highway mileage, be traded for a new car – foreign or domestic – that gets at least 4 mpg higher. For small trucks, the new vehicle must be rated at 18 mpg or greater and at least 2 mpg higher than the trade-in.

"I see it as something that may stimulate some traffic," said Don Groppetti who owns several dealerships in Visalia, including Honda, Nissan, Toyota, Buick, Scion, Hyundai and Ford.

"I think it should be a boost to our business," agreed Frank Serpa who has Kia and Suzuki in Visalia and Hyundai in Hanford.

"Hopefully, it generates a little traffic. That's for sure. There's a lot of people who have called about it," added Lonnie Tiesiera of Tiesiera Ford in Tulare.

"We are encouraged by anything that's going to help people get into new cars," said Jonathan Morrison, staff counsel with California New Car Dealers Association.

Groppetti, Tiesiera and Serpa all said they want to see all the rules and conditions in writing before committing. That could mean a drop in sales for a few days as some buyers wait for the program to begin. None was pleased the program was announced before the details were finalized.

However, Groppetti has decided to offer the rebate on a limited basis now and will expand the offer once the rules are finalized.

"We allocated a certain number of units we have advanced it on," he said, explaining that it covers all manufactures. One of the things that prompted him to act early is one of his manufactures – Hyundai – announced it would cover the rebate paid by dealers if the rules are changed at a later date.

As part of the President's stimulus plan, CARS is designed to sell vehicles. However, the feds have put up only \$1 billion and experts say that it will cover only about 250,000 purchases. The program ends Nov. 1.

Groppetti and Serpa said that if they were to give a rebate on a "clunker" that later would not qualify, then they would have been out the money. The program is completely dealer-sponsored, so that means so are the risks.

Morrison said they are encouraging their members to hold off on the program until how the program will be implement is flushed out. He said that is expected by July 24.

"We're strongly advising our guys – don't put any advertisements out," he said, until the rules are in place. He added that will not be easy as buyers are anxious. "People are literally dragging in their clunkers and want rebates," he said.

Even if they don't give a lot of vouchers – Serpa said he expects to do about 20 – local dealers say the program will bring out buyers – even those who don't qualify for a voucher. That, in turn, they say, could help sales.

“It would have some good legs when it comes to marketing,” said Groppetti.

How it works

As it appears now, the amount of what will be paid for a “clunker” depends on the difference in improved gas mileage of the new vehicle.

Because the program requires dealers to scrap the vehicles that are traded in, the most a trade-in will be worth to a customer is \$4,500. So only people who own cars worth less than \$4,500 – or \$3,500 if they don't trade up to a car with substantially greater efficiency – are likely to participate in the program.

The old car traded in must have been manufactured in 1984 or later, and must get 18 mpg or less city/highway combined. If the mileage of the new car is at least 4 mpg higher than the old vehicle, the voucher will be worth \$3,500. If the mileage of the new car is at least 10 mpg higher than the old vehicle, the voucher will be worth \$4,500.

New cars purchased with a voucher must get at least 22 miles per gallon, light trucks must get 18 mpg and large light trucks must get 15 mpg.

Also, a vehicle must be registered and insured for at least one year by the person trading it in. That is to avoid a person going out and purchasing a car for less than \$1,000 to collect the \$4,500 rebate. Also, there will be only one rebate per individual or couple if the vehicle is jointly owned. The rebate can be used on leases of five years or more.

The rebate, however, can be added on to any dealer or manufacture incentives being offered.

“It's a lot of money,” noted Serpa, adding in some cases the rebates may add up to between \$7,000 and \$10,000 per vehicle.

“There's going to be some enormous cash down on cars,” added Tiesiera.

In addition, part of the stimulus plan offers purchasers of new vehicles to take the sales tax as a deduction on their federal tax return.

The deduction is limited up to \$49,500 of the purchase price of a qualified new foreign or domestic car, SUV, light truck, motor home or motorcycle and is only available to families making less than \$260,000 (or \$135,000 for single filers).

The new vehicle must be purchased on or after Feb. 17, 2009, and before Jan. 1, 2010, to qualify for the deduction. Purchases before Feb. 17, 2009, are not eligible. The deduction is available regardless of whether a taxpayer itemizes deductions on their return.

Still unknown is how the vehicle will be scrapped. Groppetti said right now they get about \$200 for the metal, but he is afraid that price will go away – maybe they will even be charged to send the vehicle for scrap metal because of the influx of vehicles.

The law requires the vehicles being turned in to be destroyed, but the logistics of that have not been announced. Groppetti thought that getting the vehicle destroyed would be up to the dealer and at the dealer's cost.

Groppetti said he was somewhat concerned what the program will do to the low-end used car market.

“That market's going to really get tighter,” he said, adding that inexpensive vehicles will become scarce – something that would hurt a lot of buyers in Tulare County who don't have a vehicle to trade in, or cannot afford a very expensive vehicle.

The bill gives the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration 30 days from the date it is enacted to come up with rules for the program. NHTSA needs to devise ways to register participating dealers and make sure they scrap the cars traded in under the program, so they don't turn around and resell them.

Bad air day for California's Central Valley

By Bob Swanson

USA TODAY, Tuesday, July 21, 2009

It may not be hot enough to fry an egg on the sidewalk, but the heat in the West is leading to some air quality concerns in California's Central Valley.

Who's hot and who's not— Much of the West will again face above-average temperatures, with excessive heat warnings in place across Central and Southern California as well as southwestern Arizona. With the heat also comes reduced air quality. Code red (unhealthy) air quality is expected today for urban areas in central and southern sections of California's Central Valley, from Visalia through parts of San Bernardino County.

While the Southwest sizzles, much of the nation's northern tier will face below-average temperatures. Cool temperatures are even being felt in the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast.

Severe thunderstorm threat— Thunderstorms that developed in the High Plains last evening and overnight continue to move through parts of the central and southern Plains today. There is a slight risk for severe thunderstorms that extends from eastern South Dakota through Nebraska, Kansas, eastern Colorado, Oklahoma and into North Texas. Primary threats will be damaging winds and large hail, particularly for parts of Nebraska and Kansas. In addition to the severe weather threat, moderate to heavy rainfall will also be possible for the region. More than 2 inches of rain will be possible with storms moving through central and eastern Kansas.

Rainy days and Mondays— Rain will also be possible along the Eastern Seaboard. Florida will see another day of scattered showers and storms, while rain is also expected today and tonight from the Mid-Atlantic through southern New England.

Rancho Cordova-area rendering plant raises a stink with neighbors

By Loretta Kalb

Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, July 21, 2009

It's a classic California story.

Government leaders approve a malodorous animal rendering plant remote from urban centers. Generations later, neighborhoods spring forth nearby.

Suddenly, two entities not intended to coexist are as close as a summer breeze, infuriating new residents and putting a once-isolated plant in the firing line.

It happened in Modesto, where the Modesto Tallow Plant began operations in 1917. More than 50 years later, county supervisors allowed construction of houses and a school not far from the plant. Complaints about the wretched smells followed, and the plant closed in 2006.

And it's happening in Sacramento County, where the Sacramento Rendering Co. has operated along Kiefer Boulevard since 1955. In 2002, the county approved thousands of new homes for the Sunrise-Douglas area to the east.

Now operators of the 800-acre rendering plant, facing growing complaints over smell, are looking to pull up stakes.

"It's not a healthy situation," said Michael Koewler, president of the Sacramento Rendering Co. "We stated our case when they put the houses there, and nobody listened to us."

Since the Sunrise-Douglas development began in what is now the city of Rancho Cordova, more than 300 odor complaints have been logged with the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, agency data show.

James Goddard, principal of Santa Rosa High School in that city and a resident of the area's Anatolia development, counts himself among the latest to raise the odor alarm.

He and his family live northeast of the plant.

Goddard, who bought his house last year, said required disclosures about the home failed to mention the smell. And because he works outside the area and his family was traveling after the purchase, it took time to discover the problem.

"We didn't smell anything until the springtime," Goddard said. "We opened the windows to get a nice breeze and all of a sudden ... What is this smell?"

Now, Goddard said, he and his wife are talking about taking their young child and moving away. He has waged a petition drive to "Stop That Smell!"

"I never would have bought here," Goddard said. "There are a lot of people who did not get a disclosure."

The air quality district and the state's Central Valley Water Quality Control Board, meanwhile, are scrutinizing the plant.

The water board issued a cease-and-desist order in 2005, giving operators until August of this year to comply with waste discharge requirements.

The agency also fined the company \$30,000 in 2004 for failing to monitor the groundwater and submit reports, said Wendy Wyels, supervisor of the water board's Compliance and Enforcement Section.

"They paid in full, and they began monitoring and submitting reports," she said.

David Grose, a division manager for the air quality district, said the agency regularly inspects the site and responds to odor complaints.

On Thursday, representatives from both agencies visited the plant to "begin figuring out the source of the odors," Wyels said. "We have to see what they're doing at the time we get the most complaints."

Plant operators have agreed to submit weekly reports describing wastewater operations to help pinpoint the source, Wyels said.

Such monitoring wasn't always so intense. In the 1940s and 1950s, there were scores of rendering plants in California. Today, just four companies operate the major plants, Koewler said.

The Sacramento plant is among the industry's most advanced since developers of the Sunrise-Douglas area in 2004 helped finance \$5.5 million in upgrades, including air scrubbers to help remove odors.

The site takes animal carcasses from feed lots, ranches, dairies and elsewhere for processing. But carcasses are just a portion of what the plant processes, Koewler said.

The plant also processes animal waste, including fat and bones from butcher shops and grease from restaurants.

Materials are recycled for other products, such as lubricants, animal feed, soap, cosmetics and biofuel.

The concept is not popular. But industry representatives say rendering is necessary.

"If the rendering plants closed today, in less than four years you would fill up every landfill in the country," Koewler said.

If Koewler has his way, the Sacramento plant one day will relocate to a more remote location.

Sacramento County is at work on a general plan update for 2030 and is expected to evaluate thousands of acres along Jackson Highway as the county's next major growth area. The rendering plant is on the eastern end of that area, and making acreage available for urban uses could help finance a relocation, he said.

Koewler said he hopes the move will be to a site that can stay in operation for well more than 50 years.

Trend worsening for pollutant in 16 national parks

By Mike Stark- Associated Press Writer

Merced Sun-Star and Modesto Bee, Monday, July 20, 2009

SALT LAKE CITY -- A pollutant that can slowly trigger changes in the lives of plants and animals is increasingly being found in 16 National Park Service sites, mostly in the western United States.

Air quality data obtained by The Associated Press shows significant worsening trends for ammonium in several flagship parks, including Yellowstone, Mount Rainier and Utah's Canyonlands. At Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park, researchers have already seen subtle shifts in the alpine tundra, where some of the park's trademark wildflowers are being replaced by grass.

Scientists worry that increases in nitrogen-rich ammonium could gradually transform other national parks' sensitive ecosystems, affecting everything from microscopic algae and plants to fish, frogs and other wildlife.

"We're in the early stages of seeing impacts to the parks but the longer we let it go, the harder it is to fix later," said Tamara Blett, an ecologist with the National Park Service's air quality branch in Denver.

Ammonia is a mix of hydrogen and nitrogen. When it mixes with water, it becomes ammonium and acts as an extra dose of fertilizer when it reaches the ground. It's commonly associated with fertilizers, large animal feeding operations, vehicle exhaust and factory emissions. It also occurs naturally.

After it is emitted, it gets swept up into the atmosphere and hitches a ride back to Earth on bits of rain and snow.

And, more often in recent decades it has found its way to national parks, detected by a network of air and precipitation monitors.

The latest data from the Park Service, which analyzed trends from 1998 to 2007, raises particular concern about seven national parks and monuments in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and Washington state.

"Nitrogen is a fertilizer. It's used on lawns to help them grow and be green. That's fine for lawns but not good for national parks where we want them functioning in a natural way," Blett said.

In large enough doses, excess nitrogen can change soil and water chemistry, affect species diversity or provide extra nutrients for exotic grasses that facilitate the spread of wildfires.

Much of what's known about the effects of ammonium in national parks comes from studies at Rocky Mountain National Park north of Denver.

Scientists there watch vulnerable high-elevation tundras and lakes for signs that nitrogen is overloading the system and setting off a chain-reaction that alters which native species survive and which don't, according to Jim Cheatham, a biologist at the park.

Of the park's 265,000 acres, about a third are alpine tundra.

"All of that is susceptible to that change," Cheatham said.

Rocky Mountain officials say ammonium is "perhaps the most subtle, potentially the most serious, air quality threat to the park." A plan between the park, federal regulators and state officials aims to cut ammonium levels by more than half over the next 25 years.

Researchers plan to publish a study later this year trying to pinpoint sources for those bits that show up in Rocky Mountain National Park. Roughly half comes from Colorado and half from out

of state, according to John Vimont, chief of the Park Service's research and monitoring branch for air quality.

At southern Utah's Canyonlands, there's concern that the pollutant could affect waterways, including the park's famous potholes, which are rock indentations that collect rainwater and host a fascinating - and sensitive - collection of tiny squirming creatures.

Some of the geologic formations at the park, particularly the bedrock, may absorb and buffer the effects of the increased ammonium, but it won't work forever, said Jeff Troutman, Canyonland's chief of resources.

Other park units where nitrogen deposition was listed as a significant concern are: Washington state's Olympic National Park, Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado, New Mexico's Capulin Volcano National Monument and Arizona's Chiricahua National Monument and Fort Bowie National Historic Site.

Enviro concerns over proposed NorCal power plant

The Associated Press

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, July 21, 2009

ANDERSON, Calif.— A new report by Shasta County on a proposed power plant in Anderson raises a number of environmental concerns about the project.

The 20-page report by the Shasta County Department of Resource Management lists concerns in 13 of 17 categories over the cogeneration power plant proposal by Sierra Pacific Industries.

The company wants to build the new plant to replace a smaller one on the Sacramento River.

But the initial environmental study found it could pose a "potentially significant impact" on air quality, noise and biological resources, among other things. Potential air quality problems include carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide emissions from the boiler.

Sierra Pacific spokesman Mark Pawlicki says the company hasn't determined whether to move forward with the project, but says it would address the issues raised in the study.

Environmental groups up in arms over possible budget provisions In a letter to legislators and the governor, conservationists urge politicians to resist efforts to enable the building of power plants in the Los Angeles Basin, among other topics.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Monday, July 20, 2009

Earlier this year, when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger hunkered down with legislators in budget negotiations, the result was a delay of regulations to crack down on cancer-causing diesel pollution from construction and farm equipment.

It was a provision intensely sought by business interests, but one with little effect on budgetary or fiscal matters.

Now, once again, environmentalists are sounding the alarm that eco-issues are on the table in the budgetary arm wrestling that has paralyzed Sacramento in recent weeks.

Eight major advocacy groups wrote Schwarzenegger and legislative leaders on July 16 asking that they resist efforts to insert into the budget a provision that could enable the building of new power plants in the Los Angeles Basin.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District, a regional agency, is pushing the provision, incorporated in a stalled bill in the state Senate, SB 696. The air quality district has been prevented by a recent court ruling from giving out emissions credits for power plants until it fully analyzes the environmental impact.

Republican and some Democratic legislators, along with the California Chamber of Commerce and other business groups, want any budget deal to overturn the court decision.

Air district officials said they view new power plants as necessary to serve a growing population and prevent blackouts. But as a result of lawsuits brought by the Natural Resources Defense Council and other groups, the agency has delayed permits for power plants and hundreds of other businesses until the credits issue is resolved.

According to the July 16 letter from the Sierra Club, the American Lung Assn. and other groups, overturning the court decision in the budget deal would "add 10 tons per day of dirty particulate pollution to the Los Angeles Air Basin. . . . Our organizations have argued strenuously against 11th-hour budget proposals to weaken environmental and public health laws that have nothing to do with the state budget."

Two other issues are also reportedly on the table. Bill Magavern, director of the California branch of the Sierra Club, said Schwarzenegger wants to insert a provision in the budget deal to overturn the State Lands Commission's denial of a plan to expand oil drilling off Santa Barbara. Magavern said the governor is also seeking to use the budget deal as a vehicle for his earlier proposal to abolish a key scientific review agency, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, which evaluates the effects of chemical contaminants.

Aaron McLearn, the governor's press secretary, said: "We don't comment on budget negotiations. Once there is a final agreement, we will share that with the press."

NM court considers dispute over auto emissions

By Barry Massey, Associated Press Writer

In the Contra Costa Times, Tri-Valley Herald and other papers, Tuesday, July 21, 2009

SANTA FE, N.M.—The state Supreme Court was asked Monday to toss out a lawsuit challenging a regulator's power to establish stricter emission requirements for new cars and trucks in New Mexico.

A group of Democratic legislators, car dealers and a farmer contend that the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board exceeded its authority by approving emission standards in 2007 that were more stringent than federal requirements. New Mexico is among 13 states that have adopted California's tougher air pollution rules for cars to help fight global warming.

The emission standards in New Mexico will take effect with 2011 model cars, which become available to consumers next year.

In April, Democratic Gov. Bill Richardson vetoed measures passed by the Legislature to delay the requirements for cleaner-burning vehicles for two years.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cleared the way for states to implement the California emission standards. The EPA last month granted California a waiver for imposing more stringent air pollution rules than required by the federal government.

The legal challenge in New Mexico was filed in 2007, but it has become entangled in procedural questions and it's up to the Supreme Court to decide whether the lawsuit can move forward.

Justices heard arguments from lawyers in the case, but the court likely won't issue a decision for several months.

One of the main issues for the Supreme Court is whether the lawsuit focuses only on questions of law—such as the scope of powers of the regulatory board—rather than factual matters such as the substance of the pollution standards and the effect of them being adopted in New Mexico.

Tania Maestas, an assistant attorney general, said state law required challenges of the board's air pollution decisions to go to the state Court of Appeals. The lawsuit, she said, wrongly asked a state district court to invalidate the rules through a declaratory judgment, a procedure typically reserved for purely legal questions.

"The EIB adopted these regulations because they believe that they have the authority do so. The mere authority is not challenged in this matter. It's the merits of the regulations that are being challenged," she said.

The board wants the justices to affirm a district judge's decision dismissing the lawsuit. Last year, the Court of Appeals reversed the judge and revived the lawsuit. The board, which is part of the Richardson administration, appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court.

Victor Marshall, an Albuquerque lawyer, said the lawsuit was proper.

"These pure questions of law are for the judiciary to decide, not for an agency to decide the scope and power that it might exercise," said Marshall.

The lawsuit contends that state law prevents the board from adopting air quality standards tougher than federal pollution requirements.

"It may well be that to save our environment we need stricter auto emissions," said Marshall, "but if we do that's going to have to be done by the Legislature."

Two of the legislators who brought the lawsuit, Senate President Tim Jennings of Roswell and Rep. Jim Trujillo of Santa Fe, attended the court hearing. Also bringing the case was Sen. John Arthur Smith of Deming, car dealers from Clovis, Alamogordo and Las Cruces and Curry County farmer Scott Pipkin.

Maritime Group Seeks Cleaner Fuel for Ships

By Henry Fountain, staff writer

N.Y. Times, Monday, July 20, 2009

Oceangoing ships are not the cleanest form of transportation. Their fuels usually have high sulfur content, which leads to high particulate emissions. And air that is high in particulates has been linked to health problems like asthma, heart attacks and lung cancer, particularly among people who live in coastal areas.

As a result, the International Maritime Organization has adopted policies calling for reducing the sulfur content of marine fuels, from an average of about 3 percent currently to 0.5 percent by 2020. A few areas have been created, notably in the Baltic and North seas, that will require use of fuel with even less sulfur.

A study in the journal Environmental Science and Technology suggests that such reductions, if enforced, would cut the number of potential premature deaths due to ship emissions in half in some cases.

James J. Winebrake of the Rochester Institute of Technology and colleagues modeled the impact of reducing sulfur content globally, and within 200 miles of coastal areas, versus maintaining the status quo. They found that by 2012, with no reduction in sulfur content, about 87,000 premature deaths annually could be attributed to ship emissions.

Reducing sulfur content to half of one percent worldwide would cut that number by about 41,000, they said.

[Valley Voice Newspaper, Commentary, Tuesday, July 21, 2009](#)

New 'Green' Power Line in Works for Central Valley

By John Lindt

California - California's energy planners need to connect all those new renewable power projects – thousands of megawatts of new solar and wind from southern and central California to the rest of the state in the near future. The planners have their marching orders. It's a high wire act to figure out a way to connect to all those renewables coming online, given the goal of generating a third of the state's power through low carbon sources by the year 2030.

Near term, the plan is to get 20 percent of the power from renewable sources by the end of next year.

The low-pollution energy sources can crank out electricity that needs to travel long distances to reach population centers from rural outposts like windy Tehachapi and eastern San Luis Obispo County where big solar projects are in the works.

Altogether, there are some 40,000 megawatts of renewable power in the planning stage that needs to be connected to the grid.

High Wire Act

Similar to the exercise Tulare County residents have watched with SCE trying to find a route to connect its Sierra hydro projects with the Central Valley near Visalia – state planners have to do a high wire balancing act of their own to connect the north and southern parts of the state on a much grander scale.

As it looks to maximize efficiency, costs and geography while dealing with public opinion – the plain fact is when you connect the dots, it's hard to beat a straight line.

The state has been studying how to link power with users since January 2008 when it began the current round of studies called the Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative (RETI) that seeks a way to connect the dots. Now in Phase 2, energy planners are offering up new details of how the grid would be laid out even though they insist that for now this is all an exercise and no exact rights-of-way have been selected.

Still, the RETI study published conceptual maps in the past few days that lay out a major backbone line it calls its “foundation” line up the middle of the Valley on new right-of-way.

Energy Crossroads

The new line would originate at the big Midway substation near Buttonwillow where PG&E and SCE lines converge. This South Valley power station is already the state's energy crossroads where Diablo Canyon feeds power to the grid as well.

The latest RETI plan proposes acquiring new right-of-way and building twin high-voltage lines north 140 miles into southwestern Tulare County and across eastern Kings County into rural Fresno County before reaching the big Gregg substation near Fresno on the San Joaquin River.

The study says the new foundation line would add the ability to carry 1250 MW of power south to north adding to the capacity it has on Highway I-5 called Pathway 15. That stretch is a well-known power flow bottleneck and a second alternative route might boost system flexibility, says the study.

The state has big plans north of Gregg as well, both near Tracy and in northern California where solar and hydro are important with plans to interconnect Silicon Valley with the Pacific Northwest.

Foothill Alternative

At the urging of PG&E, the state also launched a parallel study to run a high voltage line along the Sierra foothills to connect with the big hydro facilities owned by PG&E above Fresno. That proposal was to run a line also from Midway in Kern County to a new proposed substation in the Auberry area. The proposal got foothill residents up in arms when it surfaced in 2007.

The project called the Central California Clean Energy Transmission Project added the ability to better use the pump storage facility at Helms, PG&E believed. That study is still under consideration by the state Independent System Operator (ISO), although there has been no public discussion of it for six months.

But Chip Ashley of the resident group Save The Foothills says he believes the pace of the RETI plans at the California Energy Commission and the fact planners have not visited the foothill site near his home for long time makes it appear less likely the state will approve such a foothill route that he believes would cost much more anyway.

"I think there is now less chance they will do this foothill line," says Ashley, in part because he believes PG&E sought the route for its own competitive advantage over rivals.

"All the players in the state are at the table discussing RETI at the Energy Commission," he adds, and won't likely agree to a project that gives the other guy a leg up.

The new RETI maps have no line directly linking Midway to the Sierra.

Of course, it's all lines on paper now and public pressure could change how those lines run, as we have seen in Tulare County and elsewhere.

Ashley was critical of energy planners in a July 3 letter noting the proposed mid-valley route appears to head through "densely populated" parts of Fresno making it likely "it would never be approved." He urged the planners be more realistic and clearly identify the route.

The mid-valley backbone line takes it from the Buttonwillow area north approximately following the Highway 43 alignment into southern Tulare County, swinging over to Kings County before moving into rural Fresno County until it gets to the city of Fresno. The route is mostly rural along dusty roads and ag land.

That has concerned the California Farm Bureau that has let it be known through the approval process that it is concerned the routes might impact agriculture.

Public Works director for Tulare - Lew Nelson says farms can prosper under high-voltage lines these days, noting the lines can be built on single towers so movement can take place more easily than before.

Nelson believes the state may want to run on a new corridor for security reasons of having all north south transmission on one big line on I-5 – a line that has been shut in the past because of westside wildfires.

Besides the mid-valley route, the same RETI documents show a new high-voltage line proposed between Diablo Canyon and the Gates substation near Kettleman City connecting to the Gregg substation through Lemoore.

As it is, Tulare County has its only major power lines connecting SCE-owned Big Creek with the main Edison grid on the grapevine.

Faced with deadlines in recent weeks, both big private utilities in the state announced new deals to acquire more renewable power – each requiring more long distance power transmission. SCE made a deal for more wind from Oregon, for example. Two weeks ago, a plan to build a huge hydrogen-based 390-mw power plant in the middle of Kern County's oil patch was announced. The project offered by BP and Rio Tinto would capture CO2 and use it to enhance heavy oil recovery.

The proposed plant is just a few miles from the big Midway electric hub station that would connect up to Tulare and Kings counties. The federal government offered \$308 million for the clean burning plant announced July 1.

What this new series of power lines tries to do is offer lines that can be co-used by all utilities and power generators, building a more flexible and competitive grid for moving power around the state.

The state-run, multiyear RETI process now pushes on from this Phase 2 stage to a more defined Phase 3 level in the next year, laying out these new key energy corridors.

What happens if we don't do all this? Last week T Boone Pickins himself gave us a clue canceling billions in wind farm investment in part because of lack of transmission capacity.

The feds will have a say as well before it is all over. In the end, all the studies will pile up at the Public Utilities Commission for a final say-so since it represents the rate payers who will fork out the money for all this.

[O.C. Register blog, Monday, July 20, 2009:](#)

Building, road surfaces help create smog, UCI chemist says

posted by Pat Brennan, green living, environment editor

Buildings and roads might be hotbeds of smog formation, playing host to chemical reactions that lead to higher levels of harmful ozone gas, according to a new study by a UC Irvine chemistry professor.

These surfaces could account for a significant portion of the state's legal limit for ozone in outdoor air, says UCI chemist Barbara Finlayson-Pitts. The reactions were previously unknown, so are not factored into computer models used by regulators to predict air pollution patterns.

"When we put this into the model, it does predict that it would lead to increased ozone levels in Southern California," Finlayson-Pitts said Monday. "Exactly how much we are not in a position to quantify well."

The study is to be published this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Concrete, asphalt and even plants provide ideal platforms for tailpipe pollutants called nitrogen oxides to react with sea salt, Finlayson-Pitts's study shows.

That results in the release of highly reactive chlorine atoms, which speed up formation of the ground-level ozone that can cause lung and throat irritation and worsen asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

After the reaction was confirmed in the laboratory by postdoctoral researcher Jonathan Raff, UCI professor Donald Dabdub and graduate student Wayne Chang plugged an extreme version of the chemistry into an air-pollution computer model. It yielded a prediction of 40 parts per billion of ozone resulting from the reactions. That's nearly half the 90 parts-per-billion air-quality standard for California, Finlayson-Pitts said.

In the real world, she said she was almost certain that ozone resulting from reactions on surfaces would never reach such a high level. But even at the more likely lower levels, ozone formation from building, road and other surfaces could make up a significant part of the air we breathe, she said.

"What it does say is that this is potentially a contribution worth understanding," she said.

Finlayson-Pitts, an acknowledged expert on the role of sea salt in smog formation, said many scientists expected that road and building surfaces would destroy nitrogen oxides.

The discovery that they instead provide a friendly environment for important smog-related reactions could force a revision of computer models, which provide much of the basis for efforts to reduce ozone pollution.

And the reactions might be taking place indoors as well as out.

Outdoors, hydrochloric acid from sea salt and other sources reacts with nitrogen oxides on buildings, roads and airborne particles. Indoors, hydrochloric acid from cleaning products reacts with nitrogen oxides from appliances, such as gas stoves, again leading to release of reactive chlorine atoms.

In this case, the result would not be ozone; sunlight is needed for that. Instead, it could result in fine particle pollution, another worry for regulators. The odd chemistry also could increase corrosion of things like electronics.

The new and unexpected findings were supported by theoretical work by UCI professor Benny Gerber and postdoctoral researcher Bosa Njelic; they collaborated with professor Mark Gordon of Iowa State University.

[USA Today blog, Tuesday, July 21, 2009:](#)

Study links prenatal pollution to lower IQ

Posted by Michael Winter

For the first time, lower IQ scores in children have been linked to air pollution their mothers inhaled while pregnant.

"It's a profound observation," Patrick Breysse, an environmental health specialist at Johns Hopkins University, told the Associated Press. "This paper is going to open a lot of eyes."

The study, which appears in the August issue of *Pediatrics*, examined 249 New York children whose mothers lived in mostly low-income areas of the city. The women wore backpack air monitors for 48 hours during the last few months of pregnancy to measure smog, mostly from car, bus and truck exhaust.

Children were given IQ tests at age 5, and those exposed to the most pollution in the womb scored on average four to five points lower than children with less exposure.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Sierra Club files lawsuit against power plants that emit millions of tons of thermoelectric carbon. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

Demanda Sierra Club regular miles de millones de toneladas de cenizas de termoeléctricas de carbón

Manuel Ocaño
Noticiero Latino,
Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, July 21, 2009

La organización Sierra Club advirtió que cada planta termoeléctrica que opera con carbón genera miles de millones de galones de contaminantes peligrosos y hasta hoy no hay reglamentos para controlar esa suciedad en el aire. De acuerdo con una experta, Mary Ann Hitt, la contaminación de ese tipo de termoeléctricas es muy peligroso para la salud humana: "Está llena de mercurio y de otros metales pesados que provocan daños a la salud". La Agencia federal de Protección Ambiental distingue los lugares donde la contaminación de cenizas de termoeléctricas son de mayor riesgo para los residentes, pero la institución no quería publicar la información: "Hay 44 sitios de riesgo; Sierra Club, HearthJustice y el Proyecto de Integridad Ambiental consiguieron y publicaron la información".