

S.J. business leaders air out ideas

By Audrey Cooper

Record Staff Writer, August 22, 2002

LODI -- County officials should pursue an unprecedented effort to break away from federal air-pollution rules and sanctions that will soon befall San Joaquin County industries, business leaders agreed Wednesday.

How to escape those penalties was the subject of a public meeting at Lodi's Wine and Visitor's Center. The meeting focused on a report commissioned by the San Joaquin Council of Governments, a regional land-use and transportation-planning agency. That report outlined ways the county could form its own air-planning region, which could mean different rules for the county than the southern part of the San Joaquin Valley.

Different rules would make sense, some business officials say, because the air quality in the northern part of the Valley meets most air standards, while air around Fresno and Bakersfield is among the dirtiest in the country.

Nevertheless, the entire Valley suffers fines and new regulations if any part of the Valley fails to meet health-based air-quality goals. Those new rules hit local industries that pollute the air. Operating and permitting costs for polluting businesses could soon increase by thousands of dollars throughout the Valley, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The air district doesn't have legal authority to put restrictions on vehicle emissions and other so-called mobile sources of pollution. Only the state and federal governments can implement such emissions rules, leaving the air district with only industries to regulate.

"The beatings can't continue until morale improves," said Tom Heller, whose company manages a cogeneration power plant in Stockton that Heller says puts out only as much pollution as two cars traveling on the highway.

Other business representatives complained that regulations in the Valley air-pollution district are becoming unfairly stringent.

The report, written with the help of a former air chief at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, outlines four possible ways the county could separate itself from the looming clean-air rules and fines, which potentially include the loss of millions of dollars in transportation funds.

The county could form a new rule-planning agency with Stanislaus and Merced counties; join the Bay Area air-pollution district; join the Sacramento air district; or form a new district that included the northern Valley counties and four neighboring Sierra counties.

Environmental groups such as the Sierra Club have attacked the county's interest in splitting from the Valley air district, because the county could escape tougher rules to clean the air. If the county enjoyed looser rules, that could mean worse air quality in the Mother Lode and south Valley, because pollution from San Joaquin County blows into those regions, environmentalists argue.

But officials from the state Air Resources Board and the EPA warned Wednesday that divorcing the rule-making power of the Valley air district would be difficult.

The only other time a county was successful in such a divorce was last year in eastern Kern County. That was approved only after federal regulators realized the Tehachapi mountains cut off the eastern part of the county from the rest of Kern County, state Air Resources Board air planning chief Cynthia Marvin said.

No similar topographical features separate San Joaquin County from the south Valley. The county is also in the same meteorological area.

"EPA is going to look at what cleans up the air the most, the best and the fastest," said Kerry Drake, associate director of the EPA air division that covers the Valley.

"I would be lying if I didn't say that ... it will be harder to undraw the boundary lines than it was to draw them in the first place. I can't stand here and say there are going to be rose petals sprinkled along this path," Drake said.

The seeming reluctance of state and federal officials to endorse such measures is a major obstacle, said county Supervisor Jack Sieglock, who also sits on the Valley air district governing board.

Sieglock said that he plans on discussing the county's interest in forming a new air region with other politicians but isn't convinced the campaign would be worth the effort.

Among other things, new air-pollution standards that will soon go into effect mean even San Joaquin County won't meet air muster.

Julia Greene, the executive director of the Council of Governments, said the COG board likely will decide next month whether to approach the Valley air district about the county's interest in forming a new planning region.

"I think there was definitely interest from the business community. And although the (state and federal regulators) warned us about how hard it could be, they didn't say 'don't do it.' " Greene said.

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City fleet gets charge from electric vehicles

By JAMES BURGER, Bakersfield Californian staff writer, August 25, 2002

Seven cars. One year. Three surveys. Zero cost.

That's the deal the city of Bakersfield was able to seal with Pathway Research Program for the use of seven street-legal electric club cars.

The city gets the Neighborhood Electrical Vehicles free for one year if fleet services staff fills out three operational surveys ranking the performance of the battery-powered mini-autos.

Pathway Research is trying to get the carts out into the real world to see how they hold up, how much they are used and how often they replace traditional trucks and cars, said city Fleet Services Superintendent Ernie Medina.

For the city, it's a chance to do a little more to reduce air pollution in the smog-clogged metropolitan area.

"We are taking to heart the issue of air quality," said Assistant Public Works Director Jacques LaRochelle.

The electric cars aren't going to be rolling along the Truxtun Avenue extension without a serious power upgrade. Their top speed is a leisurely 25 miles per hour.

But the small carts are perfect for neighborhood streets and driving paths through some of the city's largest operations plants.

They could be at home on the Kern River Bike Path and in city parks, Medina said.

City Recreation and Parks Director Stan Ford already has four of the carts, bought with city money, for the staffers who clean and maintain the city's parks.

"We like them a lot for a couple of reasons," Ford said. "These things, they're sort of the utilitarian golf cart. They're lightweight. They don't damage the park. They are very maneuverable."

Ford said they are perfect for a two-person crew picking up trash.

The new carts should raise the tally of vehicles in the city's low-emissions fleet to an even 80.

The city owns 51 pickups and five street sweepers that run on compressed natural gas. There are five garbage trucks that run on liquid natural gas.

Even four of the city's forklifts are run on low-emissions propane fuel.

The city was able to pick up the new trucks through the Department of Energy's Clean Cities program -- of which the city of Bakersfield is a member.

Two of the seven electric carts will be assigned to Recreation and Parks, two to the city's Public Works operations yard, and one each to the police garage and each of the city's two sewer treatment plants, Medina said.
The cars should be delivered to the city in the next three weeks.

Dairy Odor-Busters?

Iowa researcher wants to cut smells with soundwaves

By Amee M. Thompson, Visalia Times-Delta, August 26, 2002

Waking up to the aroma of dairies wafting through Visalia might become a thing of the past if new soundwave technology proves to be effective in cutting the smell.

University of Iowa biological sciences professor David Soll has applied for a patent on ultrasound technology that cuts the buildup of hydrogen sulfide in hog manure by half. Hydrogen sulfide is the key odor-producing component of hog manure.

"The very next thing that we are researching is dairy and feedlot waste, to see if it will work," Soll said Thursday in a telephone interview from Iowa. "We are just waiting for more research money."

Acoustic waves generated by titanium tubes vibrating 20,000 times per second penetrate the manure, breaking chemical bonds and triggering chemical reactions that alter the typical decomposition process.

Soll said the process not only reduces the smell but also breaks up the waste into smaller particles so there is less hydrogen sulfide emitted while the waste is in lagoons. That allows for the lagoons to be drained quicker and the manure to be sprayed on the fields.

"I'm interested in seeing if there could be mechanical solutions for chemical problems," Soll said.

Soll turned to using soundwaves after he found that soundwaves could be used to infuse pesticides and fertilizers into seed to eliminate the need to spray fields after planting or to develop genetically engineered seed.

Soll is confident his invention will cross over to cattle, but others are more skeptical.

"We're approached constantly by folks who have some miracle cure for smells," said J.P.

Cativiela with Community Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, a group supporting dairies in California.

Cativiela said he is always interested in hearing about the ideas, but a cow is not a hog.

"The hydrogen sulfide [in a dairy] might not be comparable to those in hog operations," he said.

"We would need to see more research."

With \$87,000 in research funding coming from Caviforce Technologies Inc. of Des Moines, Iowa, and Heartland Pork Enterprises of Alden, Iowa, the nation's ninth-largest pork producer, Soll's research will concentrate on the hog industry for now.

After proving his theory on frozen samples of hog manure shipped to him from hog farms, a large-scale test is under way at a 1,300-head confinement barn south of Alden, a small town in the heart of hog country in central Iowa.

"The machine that we designed works," Soll said. "There is another 1,300-head barn next door and already you can tell the difference."

It's also economical for the farmer. Soll said for a company to make money selling the machine it would have to charge by the head and for the maintenance it requires every four months.

Opponents of large-scale hog operations are skeptical of the technology. Hugh Espey, rural project director for Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, said making large operations smell better doesn't solve problems such as water pollution and the threat posed to smaller, family hog producers.

"Our bottom line is Iowa has too many hog farms in the first place," Espey said. "We should be looking at ways to improve sustainable farming by smaller, independent producers. This just gives the bigger operations reason to expand and proliferate."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Fresno Bee Editorial, August 26, 2002

High-speed march

Rail bond passes crucial legislative hurdle, route decisions loom for the South Valley and elsewhere.

The effort to build a high-speed rail system for California moved a little closer to the front burner recently. That's good news for the Valley. The need for such a system is becoming increasingly urgent, as freeways choke with more and more cars, the Valley's air gets worse and as the future of much of the airline industry becomes even more clouded.

Of most immediate concern, the Assembly Appropriations Committee approved a bill that would set a November 2004 vote on a \$9 billion bond measure to begin construction of the system. The bill, by Sen. Jim Costa of Fresno, moved ahead when three Republican members -- Bakersfield's Roy Ashburn, along with Southern Californians Robert Pacheco and George Runner -- joined the 15 Democrats on the committee in voting to advance it.

That's gratifying, because in the full Assembly, the bill will need two-thirds approval, meaning that if all 50 Democrats support it, it would also need at least four Republican votes for passage. This ought to be a bipartisan no-brainer. Every Valley representative from Sacramento to the Tehachapis should be enthusiastically backing high-speed rail.

The bond measure would pay for the first leg of the system, a 700-mile stretch linking Los Angeles and San Francisco, by way of the Valley. Later phases would connect San Diego and Sacramento to the high-speed line.

The committee also approved another bill by Costa that would indefinitely extend the life of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, the agency charged with planning and building the rail system. Without that legislation, the authority would go out of business in 2003.

A delegation from that agency was in Fresno last week for hearings on possible routes and stops along the rail line. Several sites are proposed for stations in some of the cities along the route, though Fresno has only one on the table, the old Southern Pacific depot in downtown. That site is best because it lies close to a nexus of freeway and bus service. With few stops planned along the route, it's important that access be maximized, as Rod Diridon, the chairman of the authority's board pointed out.

Another crucial decision for Valley residents will be whether the new line should follow the alignment of the Union Pacific or the Burlington Northern Santa Fe lines as it leaves Fresno to the south. The choice will determine whether the next stop south of Fresno is in Hanford or Visalia. That decision could come as early as next summer.

Obviously, none of this is a done deal yet. It's in the very best interests of everyone in the Valley that the pressure keep building, from elected officials to business people and ag groups, to private citizens. The potential benefits are too great for us to fail in this venture:

Thousands of construction jobs.

Gains in air quality as more cars are kept off freeways.

Trips to the Bay Area, Los Angeles, San Diego and Sacramento much faster -- and with much less anxiety -- than is possible by automobile.

Competition for airlines, which could have a moderating effect on the current extortionate air fares out of Fresno. (This is also a reason why the airline industry is already fighting the high-speed rail proposal energetically.)

That's just the short list, but it ought to be enough to gather the support, in the Legislature and from the public, that this great vision be made to come to pass.

Bakersfield Californian Editorial, August 22, 2002

Dealing with summer practices

Just a few decades ago, athletic coaches from high school to the professional ranks believed it unmanly if athletes drank cooling liquids during practice sessions in the summer heat -- no matter how oppressive the weather was.

Fortunately, that coaches' paradigm has drastically changed. Now the coaching mantra has changed to drink as much water -- or some sports drink -- as possible. It could be a matter of life or death.

Nobody wants a repeat of the heatstroke death last August of Minnesota Vikings player Korey Stringer during practice.

Throughout the country, including Kern County, coaches are shortening practices; starting practices earlier in the day or in the evening; and cutting the number of workouts in pads. Commendably, Kern coaches told *The Californian* that while getting ready for games is important, keeping their athletes safe from heat-related problems comes first.

Garces Memorial High School football Coach John Fanucchi observes: "When you are a coach in Bakersfield, you understand that (heat problems are) something you have to deal with. There isn't anything you can be preparing for that is more important than their health."

That translates into sometimes being on the football field for practice at 8 a.m. and then taking a long break until early evening.

Tom Clarke, varsity volleyball coach at Bakersfield High School, said he makes his player take water breaks -- no excuses accepted.

He said: "The time of day that you exercise and hydration -- those are the two keys to making sure your athletes don't get into a heat problem."

Coaches must be on constant alert to determine if any of their players show any symptoms of dehydration, which include a bright red face and lack of perspiration.

The Kern High School District has an excellent safety checklist for summertime practices of athletic teams or bands.

Mike Keese, director of school support services for KHSD, receives information daily from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. This allows him to determine whether students should be participating in strenuous activities outdoors. As a result, the Bakersfield High School band canceled marching drills recently due to the heat and poor air quality conditions.

Keese sends out instructions to all high school athletic directors emphasizing: "Go easy. Be cautious," when it comes to outdoor training sessions.

Local coaches also should be aware of a study by the National Football League after the heat-related death of Stringer. NFL officials consulted with several experts and learned that dietary supplements increased the risk of heat-related illnesses. As a result, the league banned the herbal stimulant ephedra.

A bottle of Ripped Fuel, which contains ephedra, was found in Stringer's locker after his death, according to The Associated Press. There's no evidence that caused his death since he weighed more than 300 pounds with a history of problems with heat -- but it scared a lot of professional players out of using supplements.

The good news is that Kern County high school officials are aware of all the dangers connected with exercising vigorously in the summertime, and take appropriate steps to keep students safe. Parents also should be aware of these dangers and work in concert with coaches and band directors to keep their offspring healthy.

[The Record Editorial, August 26, 2002](#)

Clearing the air

Bush fire-prevention plan shines light on politics, forestry mismanagement

When Congress takes up President Bush's new fire-prevention plan this week, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., may be *the* key player.

On his Western swing last week, Bush announced a new initiative to either eliminate or revise the National Fire Plan of 2000. At the core of his proposal are three profound changes in U.S. policy:

- * Proactive thinning of forest undergrowth, reducing small trees and brush that provide kindling for forest fires.

- * An offer to private logging companies to remove this dead wood in exchange for limited logging rights on larger trees.

* Streamlining environmental review with restrictions on the administrative appeal process.

His ideas have bipartisan support, with most elected officials in the West lined up behind the call for change. A Feinstein representative told the New York Times that the senator "does feel that we need to move more aggressively to protect our forests, and one of the problems has been the extended process we need to go through in order to thin and do other projects that would deal with the tremendous overgrowth we now have." Other Western Democrats have said little.

Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., did little to help his party. He did a summertime flip-flop on environmental laws he once supported, seeking a forestry cleanup exemption for his home state. With eroding congressional support, the environmental community has been somewhat muted in its response to Bush's plans -- although there have been outcries from predictable sources.

Most conservationists agree something must be done. Present policy obviously isn't working. And Bush may have picked the perfect year to introduce significant change.

Too much of the West has gone up in flames the summer of 2002.

The president picked southeastern Oregon and its devastating Biscuit Fire (471,000 acres) as the site for announcing his new forest-management plan.

Standing amid mountaintop ashes, he made his point in words and symbolism, challenging critics to "come and stand where I stand."

So far, this is the fourth-worst summer on record for forest fires. Colorado, Arizona, California, Oregon, New Mexico, South Dakota and Utah have all suffered heavy damage. About 6 million acres have burned so far, with 16 states considered at high to extreme risk of fires over the next two months. The price to fight these blazes has topped \$1.2 billion.

Anticipating Bush's initiative, even the Sierra Club has released plans for fire-prevention thinning.

But there will be conflict over the details as Congress weighs the best national policy. And there will be questions: How much to thin? Where to thin? Who should thin? What to thin?

Worth questions all, and they must be answered, but the time is right for change.

Earlier this month, Feinstein stood shoulder to shoulder with 15 Western Republicans in calling for a new approach. Like the president, she's been listening to those on those who live in the real world -- in forested areas and on the fire line. She's been convinced that thinning to some degree is essential.

She must use her seniority and influence with entrenched Belt Way politicians to convince them that the policies of the past 100 years have not worked.

If a new plan is not adopted, we'll simply continue losing forests and rangelands year after year until only charred remains are left.

As Feinstein herself said, "Without active management, we will be asking ourselves in a few short years where our forests have gone."

What's at stake?

There are 18 national forests in California with a total of 20 million acres (approximately 20 percent of the state). Potential impact of Bush forest thinning plan: half that total.

Nationally, there are 470 million acres of federally managed forests; 190 million acres are listed as at risk for catastrophic fires.

According to U.S. Forest Service, 80 percent of the fuel-reduction projects proposed in California over the past five years have been delayed on appeal.

Our voice

Tehachapi vying for N.Y. grants

Bakersfield Californian, August 22, 2002

GE Wind Energy, which builds wind power turbines in Tehachapi, could benefit from New York's decision to provide \$17 million in grants to develop five wind farms in the state.

These projects, announced by Gov. George Pataki Tuesday, are up for bid.

Were GE to win any of the projects, the turbines would be built in Tehachapi, said company spokesman Dennis Murphy. He said he could not disclose what GE has or will submit as a bid. Tehachapi previously received a project to build 20 30-megawatt turbines for the town of Fenner, N.Y. That project has been completed.

The Fenner wind farm is the largest on the East Coast, generating 100 megawatts of energy.

The New York Energy Research and Development Authority will provide the grants announced Tuesday to private companies building the wind farms. The total value of the five projects is estimated at more than \$375 million, according to state officials.

The grants represent a major expansion of wind power generated for sale on the state's power grid.

"Clean energy technologies like wind farms will help New York state and the nation accommodate the growing demand for electricity in an environmentally responsible manner that avoids air pollution," Pataki said.

Zilkha Renewable Energy, a Houston-based company, will receive a \$2 million grant to develop a 50-megawatt wind farm in Erie County. The total project will cost about \$50 million, according to an Erie County official.

Patrick Doyle, director of project development for Zilkha, said the company has lease agreements with landowners in Sardinia to build the complex of 34 windmills. The sites are atop north-south ridges that benefit from wind off Lake Erie.

The company hopes to build the project next year.

"It's a new crop which many farmers are glad to have on their land," Doyle said. The money from the leases helps some farmers stay in business.

Zilkha operates three wind farms in California, two in Somerset County, Pa., and one in Iowa.

The state also announced a \$3.1 million grant for York WindPower to construct and operate a 51-megawatt wind farm in Chautauqua County.

These will not be the first wind farms in western New York. Vestas, a Danish company, opened a small wind farm in Wyoming County several years ago.

The largest and most successful wind farms in upstate New York are run by Canastota Windpower and PG&E National Energy Group in Madison County, southwest of Syracuse. The project generates about 41 megawatts.

The other wind farms announced by the state Tuesday will be developed in Lewis County, Steuben and Yates counties, and Otsego County.

-- Californian staff writer Erin Waldner contributed to this report.

California Farm Bureau Seeks Air Pollution Exemption

Medical, Community, Environmental Groups Seek to Defend EPA Rule

SAN FRANCISCO, Aug 21, 2002 (ASCRIBE NEWS via COMTEX) -- A coalition of medical, environmental, and community groups filed papers in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on Wednesday asking for intervenor status to help defend a decision by the US Environmental Protection Agency to regulate air pollution from large agricultural operations in California. The Central Valley of California has three of the nation's four metropolitan areas with the worst ozone pollution: Fresno, Bakersfield, and Visalia-Tulare-Porterville.

The rule was challenged in July 22, 2002 by the California Farm Bureau Federation in an attempt to resurrect a loophole provided by the California State Legislature from Clean Air Act permitting requirements that big agriculture has enjoyed since 1976.

The request for intervention was filed by Earthjustice and the Environmental Law and Justice Clinic on behalf of a coalition of groups including: the Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, Our Children's Earth Foundation and Communities for a Better Environment.

On November 30, 2001, the EPA approved California's permitting programs for major sources of air pollution, known as Title V under the Clean Air Act, which contained an illegal exemption for agricultural sources. In January 2002, the same coalition of community, health, and environmental groups went to court to bring California agriculture under the same permitting requirements as those faced by every other industry in the state. In May 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency settled three consolidated lawsuits and brought an end to California's agricultural exemption by agreeing to regulate major sources of agricultural air pollution.

In the settlement, the EPA agreed to find that California was not properly implementing the permitting requirements of the Clean Air Act and proposed to withdraw its approval of California's Title V program. Agriculture has been shielded from state regulation by a provision of state law that prohibits local air districts from requiring permits for "any equipment used in agricultural operations in the growing of crops or the raising of fowl or animals."

"Giant factory farms represent one of the largest sources of air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley," said Anne Harper, an attorney with Earthjustice who is representing the coalition. "Major sources of air pollution must be regulated as such. Every sector must do its part to help clean the air in a region so polluted that public health officials have reported alarming increases in asthma and other respiratory problems."

Agricultural pollution comes from diesel irrigation pumps, farming equipment, livestock waste from giant dairy, poultry, and beef factory farms as well as pesticide application and dust kicked up from fields and unpaved roads.

A copy of the motion to intervene will be available at: www.earthjustice.org today 8/22/02 in the morning.

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[Bakersfield Californian Editorial, August 24, 2002](#)

Strengthen quality-of-life battle

"During the next 20 years, Bakersfield's streets and freeways will choke on ever-heavier traffic."

That ominous news came from the first meeting between members of the planning commissions of the city of Bakersfield and the county of Kern. This was delivered in an environmental critique of an update to the Metropolitan Bakersfield 2010 General Plan, which also predicted as much as 60 square miles of agricultural land will be lost to residential, commercial and industrial development in a couple decades.

The report added that even plans to combat the city's growing problems by adding more freeways and attacking air pollution won't do enough to stop a drop in the quality of life in the area. Despite such dire statements, the good news is that the planners vowed greater communication on growth and development issues between the city and county in the metropolitan Bakersfield

area. And the environmental critique roused private citizens who vowed to make false prophets out of such grim predictions.

Hurrah for them!

Community activist Terrie Stoller said it best when she told the planning commissioners: "As quality of life continues to degrade we throw up our hands and say 'unavoidable impacts.' We are repeating the scenario of Los Angeles in the last century without the benefit of an ocean breeze." Indeed, we must take swift actions to avoid becoming another Los Angeles.

Another citizen upset about the forecast in the General Plan update is Peter Belluomini, with the Kern County Farm Bureau. He told the planners: "If we don't get respect from the writers of this document, how can we expect respect from the other members of our community."

He wisely called for farmland protections that would buffer farms from homes and keep the urban growth from wiping out or severely hindering agricultural operations.

Pauline Larwood, spokeswoman for Smart Growth Coalition and a former supervisor, said the "Achilles' heel of (the General Plan review) is that the transportation infrastructure is not there, nor will there be anytime soon."

Bakersfield Planning Commissioner Tom McGinnis wisely called for development of better bus and light rail systems.

The public can join this vital discussion of the future. Residents can get a copy of the Metropolitan 2010 General Plan update at City Hall or the county administrative building and make written comments on it before Friday. These comments will be printed in the final draft of the environmental review before it is approved by the city and county.

The Bakersfield metropolitan area is at a critical juncture. The revised General Plan covering the area must be written so that better methods are detailed to adequately handle traffic, clean the air and protect farmland. City and county planning commissioners, staff members, the Bakersfield City Council and the Board of Supervisors must work diligently to avoid a degeneration of quality of life.

To paraphrase Stoller: Let's not just throw up our hands and say the sky is falling and we can't do anything about it. Let's keep the sky from falling by doing proper planning.

[Bakersfield Californian Community Voices, August 23, 2002](#)

J.B. Selvidge

State needs Amtrak, high-speed rail

With the driving of the golden spike joining the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads in 1869 at Promontory, Utah, the dream of a transcontinental railroad became reality. Twenty years following the great California Gold Rush of 1849, the East and the West became one as travel and transport on ribbons of polished steel embraced a special romance and expedience. A grueling 23-day trip by Butterfield Stagecoach from St. Louis to San Francisco became four days by rail equivalent.

One hundred years later, heavy freight so dominated the rails over the tortuous Tehachapis connecting Bakersfield to Los Angeles and points east that Chicago-bound luxury passenger trains such as the San Francisco Chief were shut down about 1970.

Around this time, nationwide passenger service began in a new guise with the creation of federally owned and operated Amtrak. Amtrak bought up numerous smaller eastern railroad companies mostly for the trackage, inheriting the retirement plans of their employees, thus creating burdensome long-term debt.

For more than 30 consecutive years, Amtrak has operated at a loss, costing taxpayers billions of dollars. A recent figure reflects the depth of the deficit: a trip from New Orleans to California costs taxpayers \$300 per passenger. Congress has threatened to derail Amtrak by pulling its subsidies, but opted for a stop-gap \$200 million emergency funding.

Having recently ridden Amtrak's Coast Starlight train from Seattle to Los Angeles, I can say that the leisurely scenic beauty of rail travel is still there, and the service, food and drink were superb. However, the expedience was not there, nor was the smoothness.

Heavy freight trains with cars grossing up to 260,000 pounds each and multiple diesel locomotives each at around 425,000 pounds are hard on rails and roadbed. In its 1,400-mile

journey, our train shared the rails with freight trains, causing numerous delays and reduced speed due to rough trackage. The trip time was 37 hours, for an average speed of 38 mph.

It is obvious that in California we need passenger trains on dedicated rails. As the nation's most populated state (34 million and rising), a fresh approach is needed to relieve air pollution, global warming and logjams of traffic, and to bridge the missing link over the Tehachapis.

Just imagine high-speed rail -- Los Angeles to San Francisco in less than three hours with stops. No buckled rails, no grade crossing threats, same-day parcel and letter delivery and time for "cocktails for two." Let's dream of futuristic travel in the Golden State and new-found romance on the rails.

Suddenly, it is one of those golden moments -- the ride is smooth as silk and the parlor car is four-diamond elegance. Hello there, can I buy you a drink? I'm having a Rusty Nail. You'd like what? A Golden Spike?

J.B. Selvidge is a partner in Buttonwillow Land and Cattle Co.

Letters to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian August 26, 2002:

Backs Wilderness Bill

I passionately feel that our county supervisors should do the right thing and support the Wilderness Bill.

They say our air is bad now. How do you think it will be if we allow loggers to take out those trees right above us. Don't they understand the benefits of having a forest so close to us.

It is only 48,000 acres; Kern County acres of wilderness, trees, rivers, wildlife and clean water.

Why can't the loggers leave it alone?

More than 90 percent of the old growth forests have been cut down. When will these logging companies be happy -- when they take it all down?

There is no truth in a recent letter to the editor about the environmentalists being responsible for the recent fires around us. Environmentalists are not against taking out dead trees. It's the live ones they don't want taken down.

BARBARA GIBBS, Bakersfield

How to fight pollution

I have children and grandchildren. For their sakes I write this letter.

Would you all please cut down on driving your cars. You are polluting the air we breathe. Our children and our grandchildren would surely appreciate you for it.

Spare the air every day. Car pool, ride a bicycle to and from work. (Better buy a good rain suit for rainy days.) Plan your vacation plans around local areas (camping along the Kern River, etc.)

Drive your cars only for the utmost necessities (doctor, dentist, grocery shopping, etc.)

So please, spare the air for your children and grandchildren. How much do you love them?

TERRY M. SWISHER, Bakersfield

August 25, 2002:

Protect Kern's beauty

I was very excited to read recently about the plan to protect more land and water in Kern County. Protecting Kern County's natural resources is exactly what we need now. Wilderness designation is a boost to our local economy, offers us clean air, which is worth a million now, helps protect our water quality and preserves some of our natural resources.

We are fortunate to live in a place with such natural beauty. It is our duty to ensure these places remain wild so that future generations can also enjoy visiting them.

Wild and scenic river designation will ensure that rafters can continue to enjoy the mighty Kern's whitewater rapids. Folks who would prefer to visit a lake have Lake Isabella. By protecting the Lower Kern, we ensure a balance to the recreation we can offer. This is very important.

Also, with wilderness, we again balance recreational opportunities. There are so many trails and areas open to off-roaders in the Sequoia forest. Protecting the Bright Star/Piute area will ensure that a small portion of that type of landscape is available for people who want to get away into the wild and escape the craziness of everyday life.

Senator Barbara Boxer's bill is a perfect way to balance the many different needs of Kern County and ensure we are leaving a legacy to our children that we can be proud of. I hope our Board of Supervisors and Dianne Feinstein also support this plan. This is a win-win bill for the people of Kern County.

Devra D. Milam, Bakersfield

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, August 24, 2002](#)

Clean air coalition facing big task

Good news the other day.

Some doctors, lawyers and environmentalists have formed what is called the California Clean Air Coalition, and the group says it is committed to enforcement of the federal Clean Air Act in the San Joaquin Valley.

We applaud the formation of the coalition, and we hope it will be able to turn the tide in the fight against air pollution in the Valley.

It is clear that the various governmental agencies that should be upholding the law aren't doing it now, and the coalition identifies the recalcitrant parties as the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the California Air Resources Board, the transportation planning agencies, the metropolitan planning organizations and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. We suggest that state government (the governor's office and the legislature) should be added to the list.

The coalition notes on its Web site (www.calcleanair.org) that even though the Clean Air Act was passed in 1970, and even though the act promised healthy air for all by 1975, we here in the Valley "are still faced with air so dirty that we have to keep our children from playing outside on smoggy summer afternoons."

The coalition says the "foul brew of pollution" comes from many sources, and it goes on to note that our bodies "cannot tolerate these dangerous pollutants entering our airways and bloodstreams." When the air is bad, "we get sick, our breath shortens, we begin to cough and wheeze and our hearts and lungs are damaged."

How bad is the air in the Valley? Very bad.

So bad that the air pollution control district, because it has repeatedly missed EPA deadlines for cleaning up the air, is poised to ask that we be declared in "extreme" noncompliance with provisions of the Clean Air Act. If the EPA grants the request, we will become only the second air basin in the nation to be in "extreme" noncompliance. (Los Angeles is the other one.)

And here's something more to chew on: The air is likely to get worse before it gets better.

We say that because, for one thing, the Valley's population is expected to continue growing, which means there will be more motor vehicle exhaust and other types of pollution that accompany people. (Merced County does not have a true mass transit system.)

Also, the air is expected to get a lot worse because more than a dozen new power plants are planned for the Central Valley. Oh, some people say with a straight face that the quality of the air will improve as a result of the plants being built, but we don't think that's likely, not even on paper. We say that because the assertion of cleaner air is based in part on a numbers game with air pollution "credits," and the net effect of "credits" is that polluters can pollute for a price. What's more, there is some question of whether enough "credits" will be available for the new plants, which calls into question the thoroughness of the California Energy Commission's licensing process. (A spokesman for GWF Energy LLC, which is building the Peaker Power Plant at Tracy,

says, "We haven't been 100 successful in finding them (credits) here, but we've made significant progress.")

Enter, now, the California Clean Air Coalition. What will it do? What should it do?

At the moment, it is taking a shotgun approach. Its Web site is intended to educate and to keep us all aware of what's happening on the air pollution front. It also provides information on what each of us can do to help clean the air.

It's good information, certainly, but let us hope the coalition will not stop there. Let us hope it will become involved in litigation, and let us hope it will attack some of the fundamental problems associated with cleaning up our air.

A good place to start, we think, is at the beginning, and so we suggest a complete revamping of how California approaches air pollution control.

The basic problem now, as we've said previously, is that pollution control is too caught up in politics, which is to say that it is too caught up in compromise. Compromise with polluters may have been all right at one time, but given the severity of the problem now, the time for compromise has passed. The politics must stop, and the politicians must be stripped of their authority.

We recognize that getting rid of the politicians will not be easy, but we think it is possible, because Californians have the power of the ballot. We can submit propositions to the voters and accomplish objectives that would be impossible if we had to rely on Sacramento.

So we suggest that the coalition prepare a proposition that will dramatically change how air pollution is regulated and controlled, and we suggest that scientists, doctors, environmentalists and representatives of organizations such as the American Lung Association - people with the public's best interests at heart - replace the politicians.

That, we believe, is the only solution to our air pollution problem.

The California Clean Air Coalition is in a perfect position to accomplish such a change, and so we hope it takes up the challenge.

We are suffocating on the air-borne filth, and that cannot be allowed to continue. The time for revolution has arrived.

Letter to the Editor, Merced Sun-Star, August 23, 2002

Emission control rules strict

Editor: The Valley Air District did not issue the fiction included in the Aug. 16 editorial. If we had submitted something, it would have contained the following facts:

- * The district has adopted over 60 emission control rules regulating virtually every polluting industry.
- * They have been among the strictest in the country and include technology-forcing controls for a variety of industries and equipment.
- * By 2005, the district's current regulations will reduce smog-forming emissions from industrial sources by 50 percent from 1990 levels. Without these rules, emissions would have increased by 76 percent since the 1970s.
- * The number of days surpassing the federal smog standard has declined by 30 percent since 1990.
- * As the California Legislature authorizes agricultural burning, the district can manage but not ban it outright.
- * Similarly, the agency does not have regulatory control over cars and trucks, which cause 60 percent of our smog problem.

* While the state population has increased by 14 percent since 1990, the San Joaquin Valley has experienced a 23 percent growth rate.

* More people mean more cars, driving and emissions beyond the district's control. In 1990, traffic in the Valley was 62 million miles daily. In 2000, it rose to 82 million miles. By 2005, it will reach 93.9 million miles a day.

* If the agency summarily closed any business creating air pollution, the Sun-Star would be out of business. The paper uses a printing press that emits 1,500 pounds of emissions annually.

Mark Boese

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[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee, August 24, 2002:](#)

Let's start cleaning the Valley's air right now

By Ron and Virginia De Pry
Clovis

Agricultural and waste burning should be stopped. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and elected officials should enforce air quality standards. These standards should apply to all: agriculture, industry and citizens.

Most waste -- brush, trimmings and green garden waste -- can be shredded, incorporated in the soil to replace organic matter or composted, and even used in cogeneration for electricity.

Direction and incentives in developing alternate electrical power generation are needed?

California once led the nation in wind power production of electricity. Why are we relying on natural gas power plants instead of alternate non-polluting sources? The Sacramento Municipal Utility District encourages the use of solar power. Are Pacific Gas & Electric and Southern California Edison encouraging alternate power sources?

Pollutants come from many sources: burning, power generation, cars and trucks and even stationary diesel engines.

Let's start cleaning our environment for the health of this and future generations.