

Autry seeks Valley air plan

Fresno mayor wants summit that would focus on innovation.

By Barbara Anderson, The Fresno Bee, October 28, 2002

Saying the San Joaquin Valley needs innovative ideas to reduce smog and soot that threaten the health of residents and economic prosperity, Fresno Mayor Alan Autry is calling for a summit of elected officials, business leaders and environmentalists.

"Somebody's got to clean this air up," Autry said. "Our children and our grandchildren are depending on us to do it."

The Valley is one of the dirtiest air basins in the country. Childhood asthma rates in Fresno County are the highest in the state.

Smog, dust and soot can cause asthma attacks. Emergency room visits for respiratory and heart problems increase as levels of air pollutants rise.

The Valley faces losing millions of dollars in federal highway funds in the next few years unless it meets federal deadlines for cleaning up the air.

The summit, planned for February or March, won't replace a plan being drafted to control ozone, soot and dust. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is responsible for submitting cleanup plans to the federal Environmental Protection Agency for approval.

Ideas from the summit would complement the air district's plans, Autry said.

"Our air affects everything -- being able to retain business; businesses being able to expand; bringing new businesses in," the mayor said.

Business leaders, city and county elected officials and environmentalists from Stockton to Bakersfield will be invited to the summit.

A Valleywide approach is needed to improve air quality, said Fresno County Supervisor Bob Waterston. The county board chairman is working with Autry to hold the air conference in Fresno.

"We're looking for new ideas and help," Waterston said. "It's a lot easier to go after this problem with nine counties instead of one."

Bakersfield Mayor Harvey Hall said he supports a regional meeting to address air pollution. "The poor air quality in the Valley is something of importance to every city and every community as I see it, and Bakersfield is no exception," he said.

The EPA would welcome suggestions from Valley residents on strategies for cleaning the air, said agency spokeswoman Lisa Fasano. "I would be hopeful the EPA would be invited to participate and do what we can to support [the air summit]," she said. Autry said the summit's goal is to create a clean-air action plan that would convince the federal government that the Valley qualifies for financial help and other resources.

For example, the federal government could assist the Valley by offering tax credits to people who use mass transit and financial incentives to farmers who pave dirt roads.

"We need the political will in the Valley, the state and the federal government to make a specific commitment to this Valley to clean the air," Autry said.

City, county planners to weigh in on update

By OLIVIA REYES GARCIA, Bakersfield Californian, October 27, 2002

Traffic woes, protection of farmlands and endangered species, and poor air quality concerns could likely take public center stage tonight.

The Kern County and city of Bakersfield planning commissions will hold a joint public hearing to consider the Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan Update at 6:30 p.m. today in the Kern County Board of Supervisors' chambers at the County Administrative Building, 1115 Truxtun Ave.

The commissions will be asked to adopt the plan update and its environmental impact report. That action will then be forwarded to the Bakersfield City Council and Kern County Board of Supervisors for final approval.

The general plan is the blueprint for future development and growth in metropolitan Bakersfield over the next several years. Metropolitan Bakersfield covers 408 square miles, and its rough boundaries are Bear Mountain Boulevard, Enos Lane, 7th Standard Road and the foothills of the Sierra.

Because the hearing involves planning for the area's future, it is expected to draw watchdog and special-interest groups, business owners, and residents who have concerns about noise, housing, roads and other issues that are discussed in the general plan.

For instance, there is a proposal to have more trees and other landscaping in the area, said Ted James, county planning director. That proposal may draw concerns from business owners who may worry about potential costs.

Another proposal is to discourage dairies within the plan's boundaries.

"It's been 12 years since we've adopted the plan. It's time for us to update," James said. "We're not starting from scratch."

Goals outlined in the Greater Bakersfield Vision 2020 plan also will be included in the update, James said.

The two commissions don't usually meet together. Each meets and takes action independently on issues that face its respective areas of coverage.

But the general plan draws on both the city and county areas, which is why the meeting is critical, said Marc Gauthier, a city principal planner.

Since the plan was adopted a dozen years ago, houses, shopping centers, conservation lands and more have been developed in both the city and the county, not to mention various city and county rules that have been added in recent years, Gauthier said.

The problem is none of those changes are reflected in the plan, he said.

In addition, traffic impact, park and other fees have not been updated in the plan, he said.

Areas such as Rosedale appear on the city's plan as agricultural with small lot subdivisions, and that's not the case, Gauthier said.

Today's meeting will be the second joint meeting. Both commissions met this summer for the first time, and many residents showed up to air concerns on problems such as traffic.

At that meeting, commissioners and those who attended learned how Bakersfield streets and freeways will choke on ever-heavier traffic within the next 20 years.

More dust and smog is foreseen, and as much as 59 square miles of farmland will be replaced by homes, shopping centers, offices and industrial developments.

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee](#)

Need Measure C

By Joe Levy

Co-chair, Measure C Committee, Fresno

(Published Saturday, October 26, 2002)

Over the last 16 years, our current Measure C has built a basic freeway system in the metropolitan area of Fresno and Clovis that has provided safer mobility beyond anything we had

ever hoped for. The urban and rural monies that Measure C put into this transportation system have given our area the chance to match and bring in additional dollars from both federal and state gasoline taxes.

Every day this system takes more than 300,000 cars off local streets; everybody benefits. Air quality has been improved because we have substantially reduced the number of cars standing at red lights.

We face more congestion over the next 30 years as our population grows. We will need our local dollars to match these additional dollars to buy a balanced transportation system. Tens of millions will be put into the Fresno bus system, \$150 million for rail consolidation, tens of millions for street repair, curb cuts and bicycle lanes, along with enhancing our freeway and expressway system to keep the mobility that we all want. Herndon Avenue will be improved, along with added freeway lanes on Freeways 180, 168, 41 and 99 to keep people moving safely.

I urge a "yes" vote on the extension of Measure C.