

Jamtrak: Ridership soars

By Matt Weiser

The Bakersfield Californian

June 30, 2003

Editor's note: This story was revised June 30, 2003, to correct the percentage discount Amtrak offers riders who are 62 years old or older.

Valley travelers are flocking to Amtrak this year in response to special offers and better service, pushing ridership on the train's San Joaquins route to record highs.

Ridership on the route, which connects Bakersfield with Sacramento and Oakland, increased every month from September through April compared to the previous year. Passenger volumes dipped slightly in May, but Amtrak officials anticipate another increase in June. The route posted increases of 12 percent in April and a 20 percent jump in March.

Overall ridership for the July 2002 through May 2003 period is up 5 percent. With one month still to go in Amtrak's fiscal year, the route has already carried more than 733,000 passengers, an increase of 23,000 over the prior year.

"I don't think they've ever grown this fast, this long," said Richard Silver, executive director of the Rail Passengers Association of California.

The San Joaquins isn't the only Amtrak route growing in California. The Capitols and Pacific Surfliner routes have also seen ridership gains. All three are operated as a partnership between Caltrans and Amtrak. But the valley route has become one of the fastest growing in the nationwide Amtrak system, and it is not unusual for its trains to be full, especially on weekends.

"It's taking hundreds of thousands of vehicles off the road and saving untold gallons of gasoline," said Caltrans spokesman David Anderson.

A number of factors contribute to the ridership gains. One key contributor is Bakersfield's new downtown Amtrak station and bus transfer facility, which opened in 2000. The \$15 million station offers easy bus-to-train connections, plenty of shade, clean and spacious waiting areas and easy walking access to neighboring amenities.

The new station is important not just to Bakersfield's image, Silver said, but to the image of Amtrak as a whole. Many northbound Amtrak passengers board the train for the first time in Bakersfield after arriving by bus from points south and east.

"Nobody has a bad experience there, like before," he said. "I don't dread that transfer to the bus like I used to."

Anderson noted the state has invested \$141 million in the San Joaquins route since 1998. These improvements range from track repairs to a second daily round-trip train added on the Bakersfield-to-Sacramento route last year. Four others make daily runs between Bakersfield and Oakland. In recent years, many of the train cars and buses serving this route have been replaced with newer models, offering passengers more comfort and convenience.

All this has helped make the train appealing to those who wouldn't have considered it in the past, including business travelers.

Michael Turnipseed is one example. A Bakersfield-area farmer, Turnipseed was appointed in 2001 to represent Kern and Kings counties on the California Farm Bureau Federation board of directors. The board meets nine times a year in Sacramento, and he rides Amtrak to each meeting.

"I just decided to take the train, basically, because of the convenience," he said. "I clean up my schedule, take some work with me, and I make the trip. It takes about an hour longer than driving by car, but I get there refreshed and I'm not tired."

School groups have also become a big share of Amtrak's riders, thanks in part to a joint venture with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The district promotes the train by offering educational materials to local schools, and Amtrak allows school groups to ride to Sacramento for as little as \$10 round-trip per pupil. A number of valley schools now make regular field trips by train to see the state Legislature in action, for example.

The air district also promotes Amtrak as a travel alternative on Spare the Air days, when pollution reaches unhealthy levels.

"Hopefully it will encourage more teachers to think of Amtrak when they want to do some field trips," said air district spokeswoman Janis Parker. "It just makes travel easier for everyone and reduces the air pollution. All around, it's a good deal."

Special and ongoing promotions also contribute to ridership gains. The March and April spikes, for example, are linked to a half-price adult ticket offer during those months. Currently, children under 15 ride Amtrak for half price every day. Ongoing

Valley looks for strategy on growth

By John Ellis

The Fresno Bee

June 30, 2003

There were rapid-fire Power Point presentations and talk of "smart growth" scenarios and evaluating "models."

The presentation was very technical and likely would have been beyond the grasp of a layman who happened to walk in off the street.

Those present, however, grasped the crux of the discussion and hoped the wonkish talk might someday translate into reality -- a Valley with better land-use planning, cleaner air and less congestion on its roadways.

"This is hugely important," said Fresno attorney Patience Milrod. "This is managing land use and transportation."

Organizers of last week's Caltrans-backed forum -- known officially as the "San Joaquin Valley Growth Response Study" -- hope to develop innovative strategies to deal with urban growth.

Two phases of the study have been completed, and work is progressing on the third and final phase, which will take "planning tools" developed in the second

phase and develop planning models that could be put to use by local jurisdictions such as Fresno, Clovis or Fresno County.

The models will be large-scale, but the hope is local communities can apply them not only to overall general plans, but even to the effects of individual proposals.

"It's a great toolbox," said Sierra Club member Kevin Hall. "We need it."

He described the toolbox as the "most sophisticated computer program you could want."

It will be able to create computer simulations that explore different mixes of land use and transportation, then look at the impacts each would have on the economy, the environment and traffic congestion.

Hall's concern is the vision isn't broad enough.

The computer simulations that will be developed in the third phase will concentrate on the Fresno-Clovis area as well as southeastern Madera County.

Hall said bedroom communities, such as Kingsburg, Sanger and Reedley, need to be included as well as Hanford, Shaver Lake, Coarsegold and Millerton New Town.

He said Sanger is rapidly developing, and there is development pressure at Shaver. All will affect Fresno and Fresno County.

Carolina Simunovic of Fresno Metro Ministry said any study needs to place a priority on health and air quality.

"Land use and transportation are so closely linked to those," she said.

Other stakeholders attending the meeting included the Fresno Cycling Club, the Sierra Foothill Conservancy and the Fresno West Coalition for Economic Development.

Bill to expand makeup of SJ air board hits snag

The Modesto Bee

June 30, 2003

A bill proposed by a Linden lawmaker to expand the 11-member San Joaquin Valley air board has been stalled in the state Assembly by special interests, bill supporters say.

Democratic Sen. Mike Machado's bill would add four members to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's board, which is now made up of city council members and county supervisors in the eight-county air district from San Joaquin to Kern.

Senate Bill 999 would require the governor to make two appointments to the air district board, including a physician with air pollution expertise. The Senate Committee on Rules and the Assembly speaker would make the other appointments.

SB 999 supporters say a good example is the South Coast Air Quality Management District board, which has made progress cleaning up the smoggy Los Angeles region. Clean-air advocates credit non-politicians on the L.A. district's board, saying they've added scrutiny to the smog problem and given the public a new voice.

"We firmly believe the revision of the district board is one of the key priorities in cleaning up the air in the San Joaquin Valley," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, an American Lung Association lobbyist. "Right now, we feel each member is more focused on local issues and problems, and we need to inject members that are specifically accountable to looking at the problem as a whole."

But the bill is racking up opponents, who fear losing local control if appointments are made in Sacramento.

"I have grave concerns about adding four additional members to the air district board," said Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford. "This bill, while good-intentioned, will not add to assisting the board with doing anything to combat air pollution. I'm one who always has a bias for local control."

Landscaping clears air

Low-allergy shrubs, trees will help reduce asthma in students

By Julie Fernandez

Staff writer, Visalia Times-Delta

June 30, 2003

TULARE -- Amber Wilkinson didn't know she would be planting low-allergy trees, shrubs and flowers when she showed up for work, but the project at the new Heritage School campus was one she could readily endorse.

"I think it's really beneficial," said Wilkinson, who will attend California State University, Sacramento, in the fall. "Kids will breathe better and the parents won't have to worry as much."

Wilkinson, who said her younger brother has asthma "really bad," and other young people employed for the summer by the Tulare City School District joined district administrators, Community Services and Employment Training students and volunteers June 23 in doing \$10,000 worth of landscaping at the new campus at 895 W. Gail Ave.

The event was sponsored by the Tulare County Asthma Coalition, the school district and the Urban Tree Foundation. A grant secured by the coalition is paying for the landscaping.

Heritage is one of the first schools in the county to have low-allergy landscaping, according to coalition officials.

Among the plantings are eastern and western redbud and tulip trees, Indian hawthorn shrubs, emerald carpet manzanita ground covering and mirror plants. The grass will be Princess 77, a hybrid of Bermuda grass.

Thomas Leo Ogren's book "Allergy-Free Gardening: The Revolutionary Guide to Healthy Landscaping" by Ten Speed Press was used as a guide in making selections, said the coalition's Christine Foster.

Kathleen Bolduc, current head of the coalition, and other members were on hand to provide information.

School district board president Melissa Janes, a nurse and director of education at Tulare District Hospital, said she is supportive of "anything we can do to reduce asthma in our children."

Stephanie Moen, the hospital's director of respiratory services and a former president of the asthma coalition, wrote the application that resulted in a \$450,000, three-year grant for asthma-related projects such as the Heritage landscaping effort.

In addition to reducing outdoor asthma triggers, the coalition is also introducing schools to the Environmental Protection Agency's Tools for Schools program to improve indoor air quality, Moen said, which includes taking steps to prevent mold formation, planting trees and shrubs away from ventilation systems and other measures.

The coalition also hopes to address the need for a greater variety of low-allergy trees which are also drought tolerant, provide good shade and have a good root system, she said.

"The trees that we need don't exist," Moen said. "We're going to have to ask [growers] to start propagating trees that have all these wonderful qualities."

A survey found 10.5 percent of Tulare County students have asthma. The national average of 8 percent, Moen said.

But coalition officials believe the county's percentage is even higher, because one of their surveys pegged the childhood asthma rate at about 14 percent, she said.

Heritage School will re-open at the new campus in August and the existing campus next door will become Los Tules Middle School for sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders.

What's next

An asthma management class for parents and their children is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. July 19 at Tulare District Hospital. Information: 685-3404.

Air board bill faces key vote

Measure to add 4 appointed seats has vocal foes

By Jake Henshaw

Sacramento Bureau, Visalia Times-Delta

June 30, 2003

SACRAMENTO -- A proposal to expand the San Joaquin Valley air board is heading toward a difficult vote this week, with the author cautiously optimistic that it will pass.

But key members of the committee that will consider the bill still are either noncommittal or doubtful about the measure.

"You never want to second-guess a committee and take members for granted, but our indications are we should be able to move the bill" out of the committee, Sen. Mike Machado, D-Linden, the bill's sponsor, said Friday.

Fails in first vote

His measure, Senate Bill 999, failed June 18 on the first vote in the Assembly Local Government Committee and is scheduled for a second and final vote Wednesday.

The bill needed five votes to pass but only received three Democratic votes, with three other Democrats abstaining or absent. The committee's three Republican members voted against the measure.

Assemblyman Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, one of the nonvoting Democrats, said he needed to review the bill further, and Assemblywoman Patricia Wiggins, D-Santa Rosa, said she's leaning toward preferring a delay in further action on the bill until next year.

'There is a problem'

"I do believe there is a problem" with the Valley air district's board, she said. But, noting the conflict over the bill, she called for agreement on the proposed new appointments to the board.

"We don't want to send them into a tailspin where they refuse to do anything," Wiggins said.

Assemblyman Simon Salinas, D-Salinas, chairman of the committee, said he didn't vote last time because of local opposition, but added that he abstained to encourage proponents to offer amendments or better arguments before the next meeting.

'Convince me'

"Convince me," said Salinas, a former local official who has served on his local air district board. "He's [Machado] never talked to me" about the bill.

There are 11 members of the board of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District.

Each of the eight counties in the district is represented on the board by a supervisor. Three cities of varying sizes and areas also are represented on the board on a rotating basis.

SB999 would expand the board to 15 members, with the governor appointing two of the new members and the Assembly speaker and the Senate Rules Committee each appointing one member.

The four new members would have to be residents of the air district and one of them would have to be a doctor who is an expert in the respiratory effects of air pollution.

The proposal is one of many aimed at addressing the air quality problems in the Valley, which have become so bad that the federal government is threatening sanctions unless significant improvements are made.

Bill sparks conflict

SB999 has generated a major conflict, pitting some local elected officials, farmers and other business representatives against Machado, the American Lung Association and other environmental activists.

Machado said the board has "made positive incremental steps" but needs a broader perspective to achieve a Valleywide plan that will make the maximum effort to clean up the air.

"I think with a boarder perspective, you can get it," Machado said of a regional approach.

But opponents argued that the board generally is doing the best it can, given its limits. For example, the board has no control over vehicles, which contribute a major of the Valley's air pollution.

Opponents speak out

"I think with the limited resources, the limited amount of jurisdiction over air issues, they've done a good job," said Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, who opposes the bill.

She agreed with Assemblyman Bill Maze, R-Visalia, who argued that the local control of the board is the key to long-term success in building a communitywide consensus on a plan.

"There is local control down there ... and that is a very good structure as it is today," Maze said.

Parra and others suggested that perhaps the bill's backers should consider making any new appointee advisory or ex-officio members of the board, to provide the additional insight but leave the voting power with the current board. But Machado said Friday that he doesn't plan to make any such changes in the bill for next week's vote, though he said he's open to further discussions if the bill passes this committee.

He did say he might consider an amendment to terminate the effect of his bill if and when the Valley meets federal clean air standards.

"None of those [other proposed changes] seem to be to me a change that would be equivalent to the impact of what we proposed," Machado said.

Letters

The Bakersfield Californian

People create smog

June 30, 2002

What part of smog does Dean Florez not understand? His Sunday opinion article shows a complete lack of knowledge. I lived a goodly portion of my life in the San Fernando Valley and the situation in Los Angeles is totally different than in this valley. Remember L.A. consistently still has the worst or next to the worst smog problem in the nation even with all of their clean-up efforts and attempts.

L.A. is in a basin, but not at the end of a valley, where the prevailing winds always blow as is the case of Bakersfield. They are two totally different scenarios. Most of the particulates from the entire San Joaquin Valley and from the Bay area end up at the southern end of the valley from the air currents, a considerable difference from L.A. where they produce their own smog. So it's not just the trucks, cars that pass through the Bakersfield area, the refineries in the area, the farming, etc.

I lived in the San Fernando Valley and at a time when there was rampant, uncontrolled development. The valley became just another piece of the smog-infested L.A. area. Much the same thing is now taking place in the Santa Clarita Valley, and unless something is done to curb the entire out-of-control development at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, it too will become just another piece of the L.A. puzzle.

All development translates into is more people, cars, trucks, pollution and congestion.

GIL EFFERTZ, Frazier Park

The Fresno Bee

Main priority

By David Crow

Air Pollution Control Officer

San Joaquin Valley Air

Pollution Control District

June 30, 2003

An article and editorial on June 11 and 12 quoted a Valley Air District spokeswoman on the issue of engine emissions. Based on a single quote from a lengthy interview, The Bee incorrectly concluded that reducing off-road emissions is not a priority for the Valley air district.

On- and off-road engines are significant sources of smog-forming emissions. The Valley air district does not, however, have significant authority in regulating them. The district's jurisdiction is generally restricted to business and industry, called "stationary sources." For that reason, historically, regulating stationary sources has been the agency's priority.

However, the district's governing board has advocated that responsible state and federal agencies expedite the implementation of cleaner engines and fuels.

Additionally, the district has encouraged state and federal control measures through locally funded incentive programs. For example, through the Heavy-Duty Vehicle Incentive Program, United Parcel Service retrofit or purchased a total of 99 compressed natural gas delivery trucks. This will reduce smog-forming emissions by approximately 239 tons over the lifetime of the vehicles.

The district has invested more than \$74 million toward incentives since 1992. Over their lifetime, these programs will eliminate more than 25,000 tons of pollutants from passenger cars, heavy-duty engines, agricultural equipment and lawn mowers.

The Valley air district remains steadfast in its commitment to reduce emissions from all sources through an effective combination of regulatory controls, incentives and public education programs.

Don't trust mayor

By Linda Hancock

Fresno

June 30, 2003

In the June 27 article, "Autry, council square off on budget," I find The Bee misleading. The article said, "When Mayor Autry took office in 2001, he vowed to shake up the school system ... and bring fresh ideas to reduce pollution and double-digit unemployment."

Oh, he has shaken up the schools, but not in a positive way. And pollution is worse than ever. Unemployment is still high and rising.

The Bee also stated, "If left intact, the budget would result in no layoffs." Mayor Autry, who I am sorry to say I voted for, really isn't creating jobs nor stopping layoffs. My son-in-law was laid off June 26 from the Fresno Convention Center.

That whole political mess isn't for the betterment of the city. The people are the city, not the buildings. Mayor Autry has put another family with two children in the unemployment statistics. Mayor Autry is not trustworthy.

'Magnificent'

By William D. Keller

Visalia

June 30, 2003

Bravo, Fresno Bee! Your thought-provoking articles regarding the pollution of the San Joaquin Valley have been, without doubt, magnificent.

Your staff deserves the highest commendation as the continuing coverage of this most important health issue is a great service to us all who must breathe in order to sustain life.

Please keep up this high level of journalistic reporting. I do not want to personally experience my "Last Gasp" in polluted and foul air. Give me a break; I am only 70 years old.

EPA: Ag pollution exemptions must end

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

Published in The Modesto Bee

June 29, 2003

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has told California again to lift the decades-old farm exemption for air pollution permits.

The federal agency last year required the state to remove the exemption so large farms would enter a permit program, called Title V, which accounts for pollution emissions from big sources and charges annual fees.

Now the EPA has announced farms must be included in the "new source review" permit program. The permits are required whenever pollution increases as the result of a modification at a large business.

State officials have until Nov. 18 to repeal the exemption or a sanctions clock will begin. California's new and expanding businesses could face millions of dollars in extra fees by mid-2004 if the exemption is not removed.

The new requirement underscores the importance of repealing the exemption, not simply adjusting the language, said state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter.

Florez's Senate Bill 700, which would repeal the exemption, has cleared the Senate and is expected to be considered in the Assembly soon.

"There's no way to avoid it," Florez said. "You have to remove it now to make sure the state can comply with all of the Clean Air Act."

SB 700 is aimed at heading off EPA sanctions, including the loss of federal road money, if the exemption is not repealed. The sanctions are connected to the EPA's requirement last year that the state remove the exemption and have large farms enter the Title V permit program.

In announcing the new requirement on Thursday, federal officials said they are not sure whether any farms would need a new source review permit because they are uncertain any farming modification would increase pollution. But they said the law should apply.

The Nov. 18 deadline for the new requirement was no accident. That's the day sanctions would begin on Title V requirements, although Florez said the EPA would give the state some breathing room if SB 700 is signed and ready to go into effect in January.

"It's symbolic that we chose Nov. 18 to start the sanctions clock for the new source review," said Kerry Drake, associate director of the agency's regional air division. "It may seem redundant, but it makes our point."

The Bee captures nine newspaper accolades

The Fresno Bee

June 29, 2003

The Fresno Bee won nine awards Saturday in the 2002 Better Newspaper Contest.

The Clovis Independent and Neighbors City View, Fresno -- both weekly newspapers owned by The McClatchy Co., which owns The Bee -- each won two awards.

The awards were presented at a luncheon ceremony during the California Newspaper Publisher Association's annual convention in San Francisco.

The Bee won seven first-place awards and two second-place plaques in the 75,001-200,000 circulation category.

The Bee's first-place awards:

"Killer fog," an account of a multi-vehicle pileup along Highway 99 near Selma that killed two, in the local spot news category.

Reporters Cyndee Fontana, Jennifer Fitzenberger, Valerie Avalos-Lavidomiere and Javier Eric Olvera and photographers John Walker, Eric Paul Zamora, Richard Darby and Mark Crosse combined to produce the report.

The Bee's sports staff won for its overall sports coverage and staff of the Life section for overall lifestyle coverage.

Three agriculture stories by reporter Mark Grossi that ran in **"Last Gasp,"** a special report on the health effects of the San Joaquin Valley's poor air quality, in the environmental/ag resources category.

"Lost in America," an inquiry into a rash of suicides by teenagers in Fresno's Hmong community, in the photo essay and special issue categories.

Reporter Anne Ellis and photographer Diana Baldrice produced this special report.

"Why our Valley Air is Polluted," an information graphic by artist John Alvin that ran as part of "Last Gasp" for illustration/informational graphic.

Second-place awards captured by The Bee:

Reporters Matt Kreamer, Matt Leedy and Michael Baker in non-local spot news for "Merced man kills four children," a story about John Hogan's deadly rampage against the children of his ex-wife.

Reporter Doug Hoagland in feature story for "Bishop in title; priest at heart," a profile of Fresno Bishop John Steinbock .

The Clovis Independent took top honors in the front-page category and placed first for its Web site, www.clovisindependent.com <<http://www.clovisindependent.com>>.

Neighbors City View, Fresno, won first place in sports story and overall sports coverage.

Awards won by other Valley newspapers in various circulation categories:

Lemoore Advance: Second place for front page.

Merced Sun-Star: First place in public service, editorial pages and feature photo and second place for feature photo.

Reedley Exponent: First place for sports coverage and second place for lifestyle coverage.

Sierra Star of Oakhurst: Second place for public service.

The Porterville Recorder: First place for spot news photo and sports photo and second place for editorial comment, business/financial story and special issue.

Selma Enterprise: First place for feature story and sports coverage and second place for environmental or ag resource reporting.

Visalia Times-Delta: First place for environmental or ag resource reporting.

Opinion

The Bakersfield Californian

Bay area joining the 'real world'

June 29, 2003

Talk about whiny. With Tuesday's startup of the Smog Check II program in the Bay area looming, residents, drivers, air pollution officials and politicians still are complaining.

It's not that big a deal. The rest of the state has been complying for years. But because of the clout of Bay area politicians, drivers in that privileged region have skated.

After suffering the downwind flow of fumes from Bay area vehicles, Central Valley lawmakers finally achieved equity. The last region to implement the more stringent vehicle inspection program is biting the bullet.

It's OK for Californians in other communities to sacrifice to clean up the air. But folks in San Francisco and thereabouts don't think their fumes stink or pollute.

Teresa Lee, a spokeswoman for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, recently told the *Contra Costa Times* that the Bay area is just a victim of "the blame game."

Sure the Bay area's air is cleaner. But credit the ocean breezes that push smog-producing pollution inland into the already polluted Central Valley.

This migration may constitute only a small portion of the Central Valley's pollution problem. But it is a portion that must be controlled. It is only fair.

Come Tuesday, Bay area residents will join the real world where everyone must do his or her part to help reduce pollution from every source.

Opinion

The Fresno Bee

What's keeping us from saving our own children's lives?

By Stephen D. Lewis
California State University Fresno
June 29, 2003

"We can't go on living this way. And we won't."

This quote from The Bee's "Last Gasp" editorials on Valley air quality has been repeated many times, but just repeating this hopeful exhortation to join in cooperative political, economic and cultural action does nothing to improve air quality, nor does it get us any closer to reducing the price we each pay every day for the dirty air we breathe.

Worst air

The Valley now has the worst ozone pollution in the country. Last year, Fresno suffered more than 120 days of at least 85 parts per billion 8-hour average ozone concentration, up from a 10-year low of 82 days in 1998. Fresno also exceeds the national standard for the most dangerous dust particles in the air, 2.5 microns or smaller, more than 100 days every year.

Air pollution affects us in many ways, from the cancellation of youth sports events, to increased prices for produce, to the loss of vistas of the Sierra Nevada, to the asthma and other health effects of breathing dirty air.

The reality is that air pollution, whatever its source, results from the fact that it is less expensive for someone to pollute rather than not pollute. The polluter saves money by polluting, but the rest of us pick up the tab.

The tab is large, and growing.

The annual Fresno County tab includes more than \$300 million in health care costs to treat asthma, with nearly 10% of school-age children suffering from asthma symptoms. Fresno Unified School District data show that about 2,600 students suffered from asthma in the 1989-90 school year, but more than 6,600 had asthma in 1999-2000, an increase of more than 250%.

Data presented at the Operation Clean Air Summit meeting in April by Kevin Hamilton, respiratory therapist, and asthma specialist Dr. David Pepper show that Fresno Community Medical Center emergency room admissions for asthma and other respiratory problems skyrocket when particulate matter concentration in our air is high.

People aren't the only ones who suffer from air pollution.

In a 1997 report, the California Environmental Protection Agency calculated that ground-level ozone concentration in the San Joaquin Valley, typically 45 to 55 parts per billion, costs farmers an average of about 15% in reduced crop yields. Some crops suffer even higher losses from air pollution.

Reduce the ozone

Reducing the ozone level in the San Joaquin Valley to half its current level could save farmers as much as \$250 million annually.

Add up the numbers. Just in health care costs and lost agricultural productivity, Valley residents pay about \$550 million every year for the privilege of breathing hazardous air.

So, if the tab to clean up the Valley air is less than \$550 million per year, we would at least break even financially, and enjoy the benefits of clean air in the bargain. It seems simple. Why aren't we getting on with the show?

The Operation Clean Air Draft Action Plan requests about \$458 million for a variety of programs, which is almost \$100 million less than what we pay each year to live with air pollution.

Maybe it isn't really so expensive to clean up the air after all.

So what is the problem? Why aren't we moving forward rapidly?

The Operation Clean Air Action Plan proposals do not require developing any new technologies or discovering any new scientific principles. No technical reasons prevent us from moving forward today.

Our hesitation cannot be based on economics. My simple back-of-the-envelope calculation, based on published data and Operation Clean Air funding requests, makes it likely that cleaning up the air will actually save Valley residents a lot of money. If we factor in the hard-to-measure benefits of a healthier environment, such as increased real estate values and increased tourism, we might even make money.

What's stopping us?

Maybe our hesitation to act decisively to solve the air pollution problem is based on behavior habits, our ingrained patterns of economic and cultural activity that make us unable or unwilling to recognize that there are different ways to do things, ways that will directly benefit the entire region. Maybe we need to understand that San Joaquin Valley air is a shared resource each one of us depends on every time we take a breath, and not merely a commodity, like 15 acres of land used as a garbage dump.

Perhaps this is the real challenge we face.

Letters

The Fresno Bee

Reedley smoking ban a 'socialist approach to governing'

By Jim Boswell
Fresno
June 29, 2003

The new law in Reedley banning smoking in "public" parks is appalling.

What is even more sickening is the possibility that a person cited could actually spend up to six months in jail. Most people convicted of DUI don't even spend one day in jail.

This is nothing less than a socialist approach to governing. The Reedley lawmakers did forget, however, to include a ban on chewing tobacco, burping and passing gas, equally offensive habits.

If we continue to allow our representatives to shove their stupidity down our throats, pretty soon we can look forward to life sentences in prison for not washing our hands before eating and not saying "excuse me" after bumping into someone.

Now that the "critical" issue of smoking in parks has been addressed, maybe elected officials can concentrate on the small issues, such as our dwindling economy and how our children can't play in the parks due to the bad air and real criminal elements.

Valley sizzles at 107

Veterans of the torrid summer heat offer tips for staying cool.

By Louis Galvan

The Fresno Bee

June 28, 2003

Patricia McMillian has lived in Fresno long enough to get used to the summer's triple-digit days.

"Well, sort of, but that does not mean I like it," said McMillian about noon Friday, trying to finish her grocery shopping before going to a friend's pool to cool off.

Formerly of Los Angeles, McMillian, 37, has lived in Fresno for 32 years, and each summer hears the same thing when her out-of-town friends and relatives come to visit.

"It's too hot," they complain.

"Hey, that's Fresno," McMillian said she tells her friends. "Sometimes it's too cold, and sometimes it's too hot."

And, she said, there is really very little anyone can do about either extreme.

On hot days, however, McMillian's advice:

Turn on your air conditioner and stay indoors.

Don't cook.

Drink lots of water.

And if you don't have a pool, find a friend with one.

"And stock up on ice cream," she said.

It was 107 degrees in Fresno on Friday, and the rest of the Central Valley was in that neighborhood, too.

There is more heat ahead. The forecast is for 106 today and 102 on Sunday. Temperatures are expected to cool to the mid- to upper 90s next week.

The weather conditions mean the air will be hot and unhealthy again, prompting the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to extend its Spare the Air Day warnings through Sunday for Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and parts of Kern counties.

Residents are encouraged to reduce outdoor activities between 2 and 7 p.m. when ozone is the worst.

People also are asked to curtail driving and using machines such as lawn mowers and leaf blowers that create ozone-producing emissions.

Sherrita Turner, 29, like McMillian, is no stranger to hot weather.

"I come from Louisiana," said Turner. "I know about heat and humidity."

A Fresno resident for 25 years, Turner said spring is her favorite time of year.

And while hot days are ugly, luckily summer is here and gone "before you know it," she said.

"All you can do is stay indoors with your air conditioner or find another cool place and kick back."

Shopping in southwest Fresno with her 1-year-old daughter, Kyarie Williams, Turner said she had a cool place lined up in the afternoon to relax.

"We're going to my sister's pool," she said.

Carmen Costa, 27, and her boyfriend, Jess Cruz, who declined to give his age, were trying to keep cool Friday with a couple of scoops of ice cream.

"I also drink a lot of water, and I love ice-cold watermelon," Costa said.

Opinion

The Bakersfield Californian

Give credit where deserved

June 28, 2003

Wednesday night. The Bakersfield City Council is meeting. Gordon Nipp, who heads the local chapter of the Sierra Club, is hammering away at yet another northeast Bakersfield subdivision proposal.

The Sierra Club is feeling heady with its successful legal challenge of a developer and the city over the air pollution consequences of building in the bluffs. More lawsuits are on the horizon.

Ward 4 Councilman David Couch gets up from his seat and plops down next to Arthur Unger, an outspoken Sierra Club representative, who is sitting in the front row of the audience.

We are a family newspaper and we won't quote Couch. But the gist of what he whispered to Unger was that he better tell Nipp that he is sick of hearing him say the council is ignoring the city's air pollution problems.

And he had good reason to feel that way particularly last Wednesday night.

Going way out on a limb defying some in the agriculture and development industries the Bakersfield City Council earlier in the meeting unanimously endorsed Sen. Dean Florez's package of controversial air pollution bills.

Bakersfield is one of only two cities in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to do so. Fresno is the other.

And there is good reason these two cities are taking air pollution VERY seriously.

The air over Fresno is the nation's second most polluted. Bakersfield's is the third. The two valley cities are sandwiched between Los Angeles (number one) and Houston, Texas (number four.)

Our air is making us sick. Lung and heart diseases plague us. The incidence of asthma in the valley is high. All and all, the quality of life is suffering.

In a move some call crazy and others call courageous, Kern's Democrat state senator introduced a package of 10 bills that propose to expand and add controls on industrial and residential sources of air pollution.

Florez's bills target some of the most vocal and politically powerful constituents in his district.

Included in the Florez proposal are: establishing air pollution controls on the now exempt agriculture industry; targeting "indirect sources" of pollution, which include home construction; setting buffer zones to separate dairies from cities and other sensitive uses; and expanding the authority of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Not all the bills will make it through the legislative process. Some already have been sidelined and others have been modified to gain support.

But the bills go a long way toward cleaning up the valley's air. They deserve support. And we congratulate the Bakersfield City Council for showing courage and leadership in giving that support.

Bakersfield is growing. Enticed by affordable housing, people are moving to Bakersfield. Others with deep family roots in the area are sticking around, creating new families and moving into the new homes sprouting in the bluffs and on the western edges of the city.

It's a fact of life that Bakersfield will experience the pains that growth brings. But these pains must not lead to a fatal disease. They must be addressed and soothed.

Already we see Bakersfield city officials placing conditions on new homes that require they be built with pollution-cutting features. The pressure placed by such groups as the Sierra Club, outdoor advocates and health organizations are raising the sensitivity and responsiveness of our elected officials.

Growth must be tempered by the insistence that maintaining and even improving the quality of life in Bakersfield is a priority. The consequences of air pollution,

traffic congestion and sprawl must be considered when residential and commercial projects are approved.

But for development strategies to be successful, they must be applied uniformly in a valley air district that includes eight counties and stretches over 23,000 square miles.

Pollution knows no city or county boundary. It travels on the winds that swirl around a ring of mountains. We are breathing the pollution we create in Bakersfield, as well as what is created upwind.

SPARE THE AIR

Alert extends 2 more days

The Modesto Bee

June 27, 2003

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has declared today and Saturday "Spare the Air" days in Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Merced counties. Officials urge children and adults with breathing problems to take it easy outdoors. Everyone can help reduce pollution by carpooling to work, not using gasoline-powered yard equipment and forgoing lighter fluid for barbecues.

Stay Inside, The Valley's mercury is on the rise As temperatures rise, residents are urged to find ways to keep cool.

By Debbie Noda

The Modesto Bee

June 27, 2003

Highs are expected to be in the triple digits Saturday.

Check the air conditioner. Put on the heavy-duty sun screen. Stay indoors if possible. Only drive your car if necessary.

Why?

Thermometers in the Northern San Joaquin Valley and foothills are needing three numbers to tell how hot it is. And air quality is bad.

The high temperature in Modesto reached 102 Thursday, according to the Modesto Irrigation District. The National Weather Service recorded 103 at Modesto Airport.

Stockton and Fresno each hit 104 degrees, and Merced reached 102.

San Francisco was warm at 89 degrees, and Yosemite National Park recorded 92 degrees.

Expect more of the same today and Saturday, according to forecasters.

The Modesto Irrigation District checks the temperature hourly, and each reading Thursday was higher than for the same hour Wednesday.

"It's been running eight degrees hotter than yesterday all day long," MID spokeswoman Maree Hawkins said.

The highest reading ever recorded on a June 26 was 104 in 1956 and again in 1973.

Thursday was the second triple-digit-temperature day of the year, the first coming May 28 with a 100-degree reading, Hawkins said.

Since 1980, MID has recorded an average 2.56 days of 100 degrees or more in June. July has been hotter, with an average 5.52 days at 100 or more. August has averaged 4.21 days.

But it won't be that hot right away. Come Sunday, the high temperatures should drop back into the low 90s and upper 80s for a few days, forecasters predict.

Poor air quality is accompanying the warmer weather.

Thursday was another Spare the Air day in Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties. Today and Saturday will be, too, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

People are urged to carpool to work, not use gasoline-powered yard equipment and forgo lighter fluid for barbecues.

The air district also declared no-burn days in the Northern San Joaquin Valley counties. Burning in the foothills and Sierra also is banned.

For burn day information in the foothills and Sierra, call: Tuolumne County, 533-5598; Calaveras County, 754-6600; Copperopolis area, 785-7664; Mariposa County, 966-3622.

Valley still under smog alerts

The Stockton Record
June 27, 2003

A series of smog alerts has been extended into Saturday, San Joaquin Valley air regulators have announced.

Saturday also has been designated a Spare the Air Day. On such days, residents are encouraged to avoid activities that pollute the air, from driving to using aerosol cans.

The string of Spare the Air Days started Wednesday. The smoggy air is mostly due to high temperatures, which cook certain emissions to form smog.

During smog alerts, residents -- especially children or adults with breathing problems -- are encouraged to stay indoors if possible.

Smog can aggravate breathing problems such as asthma. It also is suspected of causing lung disease.

EPA warns state on ag pollution

By Matt Weiser

The Bakersfield Californian

June 27, 2003

The federal government Thursday gave California one more warning that farmers must play a role in halting air pollution.

The action by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finalizes a rule that requires California to change a long-standing state law exempting farms from air pollution rules. That exemption violates federal law, said Wayne Nastri, the EPA's Southwest regional administrator, and it threatens public health.

"The Clean Air Act does not exempt any industry from federal air quality permitting rules," Nastri said.

Unless California ends the exemption by Nov. 23, the EPA will start a "sanction clock" to punish the state. The sanctions would begin 18 months later with a doubling of pollution-related fees paid by businesses in the state, followed six months later by a loss of federal highway funding.

Agriculture is one of the biggest polluters in the San Joaquin Valley. Plowing and harvesting cause nearly one-fourth of all particulate pollution in the valley, and the engines and equipment used by farmers for processing food and pumping water contribute a large share of the exhaust emissions that produce smog.

The EPA's action Thursday merely locks in a rule-making action first announced in February, and efforts are already under way to lift the exemption.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, has introduced a bill to do just that. The bill, SB 700, was approved by the Senate May 22 and comes up for a hearing in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee Monday.

Despite the state exemption, the EPA has already begun a process to regulate the diesel engines used on many farms in California. And the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is moving ahead with a number of new farm-related pollution rules, anticipating the exemption will be dropped.

For more information on the EPA action, visit www.epa.gov/region09/air/ca/nsr.

Air quality contradiction in terms

The Bakersfield Californian

June 27, 2003

It's a bad health double-whammy -- wildfires and smog.

With fire season officially under way and smog in the air, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is asking people to take precautions.

Josette Merced Bello, a public education administrator for the district, said today and Sunday will be bad air days.

Temperatures are expected to be in the 100s all weekend long, according to the National Weather Service. Today could reach as much as 106 or 107 degrees, said weather service meteorologist Gary Sanger.

"We already have ground level ozone (smog)," Bello said. "Anybody in an area being hit by smoke should remain indoors or leave the area while the conditions persist."

During bad air days, Bello suggests valley residents not exercise outdoors.

Bello also recommends that people avoid any strenuous outdoor activities between the hours of 3 and 7 p.m. when smog and temperatures are typically at their worst.

Fresno protests greet state air officials

Activists show empty inhalers to oppose local district's latest cleanup plan.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

June 27, 2003

State air officials walked beneath a banner of empty lung inhalers Thursday morning at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District building on their way to approve the area's controversial new cleanup plan.

Activists used the banner to get officials' attention and suggest Valley residents' lung problems will only be prolonged by the local air district's newest plan, which they consider flawed.

The banner, pasted together using 150 empty inhalers, rope, glue and plastic pipes, displayed the word "help," which also was formed from inhalers.

Davor Simunovic, 11, who suffers from asthma, stood with about a dozen opponents and said he hoped the state would do more to clean up the air.

"My chest gets really tight sometimes," he said. "They need to make it so there's not so much pollution."

Inside the air district office, governing members of the state Air Resources Board unanimously agreed to the new plan for cleaning up tiny particles from dust, soot and chemical specks in the air.

The Valley is among the eight worst-polluted places in the country for such particle pollution, which triggers asthma attacks and raises mortality rates.

Opponents repeated what they said last week when the Valley air district board approved the document: The plan is illegal and inadequate to make the air healthy. Several said a lawsuit eventually may be filed over the plan.

The opponents on Thursday admonished the state board not to be a "rubber stamp" for the local air district.

Lawyer Brent Newell of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment offered the Air Resources Board a rubber stamp to approve the plan. Board members bristled.

"This is a big step forward," said board member Dorene D'Adamo. "It's important for environmentalists to keep the pressure on us, but I wouldn't call this a rubber stamp at all."

State staffers, who have reviewed the Valley's plan, defended it, saying it demonstrates the standard can be achieved. They said the plan is legal and flexible enough to be updated by 2006.

Farm officials, who support the document, added that the plan is state of the art.

"There's no question the San Joaquin Valley's plan is, by far, the most comprehensive ever put together," said Roger Isom, vice president of the Fresno-based California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association.

The plan, which will be sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for review, would cut 275 tons of pollution out of the air by 2010 and bring the Valley into compliance with federal standards, officials said.

In seven years, agricultural reductions would total 34 tons of particles per day. To achieve the reductions, farmers with property larger than 100 acres would choose one control measure from each of five categories.

In one category, for instance, they could opt to make fewer passes on their fields when tilling, thus reducing dust. They also could water unpaved roads and high-traffic areas as well as reduce speeds.

Other reductions would come from a new ban on fireplace burning on the worst winter days. Officials said the measure, which was required by EPA in a lawsuit settlement with environmentalists, would reduce particle pollution by 20.4 tons per day in cooler weather by 2010.

The plan also shows reductions for oxides of nitrogen or NO_x, which combine with ammonia in the winter to form tiny particles called ammonium nitrate. State officials believe that if NO_x is significantly cut back, ammonium nitrate won't form.

NOx comes from combustion sources, such as vehicles, boilers and generators. The district proposes to reduce about 8 tons of NOx per day with better emission controls on boilers, heaters and steam generators.

Stricter state and federal requirements on vehicle engines and fuels would result in another 10 tons of NOx reduction per day, the plan shows.

But the plan intentionally omits controls on ammonia, much of which comes from livestock operations, such as dairies. The science is not yet clear on how effective reduction of ammonia would be, and ammonia alone is not considered to be harmful, officials said.

Scientist Diane Bailey of the Natural Resources Defense Council argued that ammonia has health effects of its own. Others said ammonia makes their eyes water and makes breathing difficult.

"Failure to regulate ammonia is a mistake," Bailey said. "This plan only goes part way in many areas."

She and other opponents said the Valley air district and the Air Resources Board are too focused on stopping a federal sanction clock. If the EPA does not receive a complete plan by Aug. 28, new and expanding businesses will have to pay extra fees.

EPA officials, who will receive the plan soon, have been consulting with the Valley air district on the document. Last week, they indicated they are encouraged but that they would have to study the plan before making any decision.

Officials approve valley's air plan

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

Published in The Modesto Bee

June 27, 2003

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"My chest gets really tight sometimes," he said. "They need to make it so there's not so much pollution."

Inside the air district office, governing members of the state Air Resources Board unanimously agreed to the new plan for cleansing the air of tiny particles of dust, soot and chemicals.

The valley is among the eight worst-polluted places in the country for such particle pollution, which triggers asthma attacks and raises mortality rates.

Opponents repeated what they said last week when the valley air district board approved the document: The plan is illegal and inadequate. Several said a lawsuit may eventually be filed over the plan.

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To achieve the reductions, farmers with property larger than 100 acres would choose one control measure from each of five categories.

For instance, they could opt to make fewer passes on their fields when tilling, thus reducing dust. They also could water unpaved roads and high-traffic areas and reduce speeds.

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"Failure to regulate ammonia is a mistake," Bailey said. "This plan only goes part way in many areas."

Opinion

The Modesto Bee

'Spare the air': More than nifty catchphrase

June 27, 2003

Spare the air. It's a nice catchphrase that succinctly gets the point across. Spare the air. It rolls off the tongue easily without much thought.

However, giving some thought to this phrase and slightly altering our daily routines are two ways we can all help make the valley's air healthier and easier to breathe. Pointing fingers at "others" who contribute to the brownish gunk that often obscures the region's skyline is easy. But this is a problem we all share -- and we all share the responsibility of cleaning it up.

We are entering an especially challenging time of year. During hot summer months, the sun bakes the air, which becomes heated and stagnant, making outside activities unsafe for people, especially children, asthma sufferers and the elderly.

Occasional reminders about what we can do to "spare the air" are helpful:

Avoid unnecessary vehicle use and combine errands into one trip.

Accelerate gradually when driving. Hard acceleration puts a vehicle in a mode called "power enrichment," in which extra gas is forced into the cylinders, resulting in a spike of pollution emissions.

Don't warm up vehicles for too long.

Avoid idling vehicles at drive-up windows or train crossings.

Obey the speed limit.

Keep vehicles tuned and in good running order. In addition to doing much for air quality, this saves on gas costs.

Inflate vehicle tires to the proper level.

Avoid "topping off" at the gas station. This releases more vapors.

Walk or ride a bicycle to the store.

Use public transportation or carpool.

Postpone painting projects and yard work that require gas-powered equipment.

Buy a gas grill or switch to a chimney starter for charcoal, and don't use starter fluid, which sends out pollution.

Seal all paints and solvents in the garage. Escaping fumes add to air pollution.

Use water-based paints when possible because they emit fewer ozone-making gases.

There are no revelations here. We have heard similar advice often before. But these are simple, useful reminders that each of us can do our part to improve air quality in the polluted valley. We all need to spare the excuses -- and spare the air.

Opinion

The Fresno Bee

Clearing the air

Summer is especially a challenging time for the Valley's air basin.

June 27, 2003

Spare the air. It's a nice catch phrase that succinctly gets the point across. Spare the air. It rolls off the tongue easily without much thought. Spare the air.

However, giving some thought to this phrase and slightly altering our daily routines are two ways we can all help to make the Valley's air easier to breathe. Pointing fingers at "others" who contribute to the brownish gunk that obscures the region's skyline on far too many days is easy.

This is a problem we share -- and we share the responsibility of cleaning it up.

We are entering an especially challenging time of the year. During the hot summer months hereabouts, the sun bakes the air, which becomes heated and stagnant, making outside activities unsafe for people, especially children, asthma sufferers and the elderly.

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There is nothing new here, no great revelations. We have heard these words of advice many times before. Just some simple reminders about ways for each of us to do our part to improve air quality in the Valley.

We all need to spare the excuses -- and spare the air.

Valley air, heat ticket to indoors

By Christina Vance

The Bakersfield Californian

June 26, 2003

Grab a lemonade and a chair next to the air conditioner, Kern County.

Crummy air and soaring temperatures today and Saturday have experts urging people to stay out of the sun.

Bakersfield temperatures reached 105 degrees Thursday. The National Weather Service said the mercury could hit the same today and 103 on Saturday.

Kern desert temperatures could reach 107 in Inyokern and 102 in Mojave.

Mountain highs will top out at 106 at Lake Isabella and the mid-90s in the Tehachapi and Frazier Park areas.

Spare the Air days are also predicted for Kern valley areas today and Saturday, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Spare the Air days encourage residents to voluntarily reduce pollution on severely unhealthy days. A list of ways people can reduce pollutants is online at www.valleyair.org.

Temperatures are normally in the mid-90s for Kern County during this time of year, weather service meteorologist Gary Sanger said Thursday from his Hanford office. The extreme heat comes from a high-pressure system on the West Coast. The pressure brings lots of sunshine and few heat-blocking clouds, all during some of the longest daylight hours of the year, he said.

By Saturday, the high pressure should begin to break up. That should allow temperatures to slip into the mid-90s by Sunday, according to forecasts.

In extreme temperatures, people should avoid strenuous outdoor activities.

Those with respiratory problems should try to stay indoors.

The weather service urged people to wear light-colored clothing and to drink plenty of water or fruit juice. People should try to limit alcoholic beverages, which are dehydrating.

Spending some time in air conditioning, if possible, isn't a bad idea either.

"Practice common sense. Don't go out and run a marathon," Sanger said.