

ACE train has special offer

The Record, Published Wednesday, April 23, 2003

Altamont Commuter Express is offering a special deal to commuters who have never tried taking the train to work.

Until the end of June, new ACE riders can get a one-week pass for free by calling (800) 411-RAIL.

Commuters who call by Thursday each week can get a pass for the next week.

After the trial period, those new riders who participated in the "Taste of ACE" event will be able to buy monthly passes for 50 percent off the regular price.

For more information on ACE schedules and stations, go to www.acerail.com.

Incentives for cutting S.J. emissions proposed

By Audrey Cooper, Record Staff Writer

Published Thursday, April 24, 2003

FRESNO -- Business and community leaders at a first-ever clean-air summit Wednesday unveiled a proposed plan to cut smog by offering tax incentives and government funds to industries or groups that cut emissions.

The Operation Clean Air summit drew more than 400 people from around the San Joaquin Valley, which is by some standards the country's most polluted area. That pollution has been linked to climbing asthma rates, premature deaths and cancer.

Operation Clean Air is a public-private organization interested in finding voluntary measures to cut the Valley's pollution. It was the brainchild of Fresno-area politicians and includes representatives of the nine-county Valley air basin.

Officials said the proposed plan was only a draft and would go through several changes over the next few months. But the popular centerpiece of the plan is a proposed "Air Quality Improvement Zone," which could work similar to municipal economic-improvement zones that use various financial incentives to encourage urban redevelopment.

Coordinators of Operation Clean Air see the air zone as a way to inject government funds into businesses and nonprofit groups that do anything from buying cleaner-burning cars to replacing old diesel engines.

"Everyone has to give a little bit. We have to join hands and say, 'If we all do our part individually and in the organizations we represent, we can indeed improve the air in the San Joaquin Valley,'" said John Welty, president of California State University, Fresno, and a member of the new coalition's steering committee.

No such air zones exist in the country.

The air-division chief for the federal Environmental Protection Agency's regional office, Jack Broadbent, said his office has discussed the idea before. It would, however, take congressional action or a presidential executive order, he said.

Summit participants didn't have to go far to see what they were trying to battle. Even with the mild temperatures in Fresno on Wednesday, clouds on the horizon were nearly indistinguishable from the polluted gray sky.

The Valley regularly exceeds federal pollution limits and has never had an anti-pollution plan approved by the EPA.

Three members of Congress who attended part of the summit said they were eager to help. They said getting millions of dollars in extra tax incentives would be difficult but could happen if the Valley group worked together to fight for the measures.

"You kind of look at us as an ATM machine for this effort. We'll help, ... but the important thing is to do the work here to get us there," said Rep. Cal Dooley, a Democrat whose district covers the southern Valley.

The summit included talks by physicians, asthma sufferers, regulators and business leaders.

San Joaquin County Supervisor Jack Sieglock and Stockton Mayor Gary Podesto said they appreciated the "refresher course."

Both men said they were interested in replacing local county and city fleets with hybrid or alternative-fuel vehicles.

"We, as government, have to set the example when we have the money to do it again," said Sieglock, who also sits on the Valley's Air Pollution Control District board.

Podesto said Stockton's City Council soon will approve a new garbage-service contract that includes requirements for garbage trucks to meet air standards by switching to clean-burning diesel engines or alternative fuels, such as compressed natural gas.

"We need to encourage other cities to do the same sort of things," Podesto said.

Other actions proposed by the Operation Clean Air group included:

- * Building new homes without wood fireplaces, which contribute to particulate pollution.
 - * Providing incentives for farmers to install clean-burning irrigation pumps.
 - * Encouraging businesses to think about ways to reduce vehicle trips, perhaps by ordering supplies once a week instead of several times a day.
 - * Encouraging telecommuting.
 - * Commissioning new studies on the link between air pollution and health problems.
 - * Replacing old school buses with cleaner models.
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Study: Carbon monoxide rules work, some areas need more controls

By JOHN HEILPRIN, Associated Press Writer

The Bakersfield Californian, April 23, 2003, 03:00:15 PM

WASHINGTON (AP) - Once a far-reaching menace, carbon monoxide emissions from cars and pickups are now a stubborn problem mostly in the West, where weather and terrain tend to trap pollution, the National Academy of Sciences said Wednesday.

Federal air quality standards and tailpipe emissions controls over the past three decades have reduced concentrations of the gas, an academy panel told Congress.

This regulation "has been one of the greatest success stories in air pollution control, reducing the problem, once widespread, to a few difficult areas," panel members wrote. When it persists in the air, the colorless, odorless, poisonous gas enters the bloodstream through the lungs. It comes mainly from incomplete burning of carbon in fuel and in other products such as cigarette smoke.

To illustrate the success, the academy pointed to Denver and Fairbanks, Alaska. Denver has not violated the federal standards for carbon monoxide since 1995, but did so for as many as 200 days a year in the 1960s. Fairbanks has not violated the standard the past two years; it did more than 100 days a year in the 1970s.

By contrast, Anchorage, Alaska and the southern California cities of Lynwood and Calexico have persistent carbon monoxide problems usually due to severe atmospheric conditions in which temperatures rise with altitude, the academy said.

Such places where colder air is trapped near ground level by warmer air above often have low-lying basins helping keep wind speeds low and air from circulating. In Calexico, an added factor is vehicle pollution drifting across the border from Mexico.

The academy recommended that such areas increase vehicle inspections and maintenance to assure catalytic converters and oxygen sensors are operating properly, and consider requiring cleaner-burning fuel with less sulfur content.

The air quality standards under the 1970 Clean Air Act were set at 9 parts per million for the amount of carbon monoxide that can safely be contained in the air for an eight-hour average, and 35 ppm for a one-hour average. The Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for enforcing those standards.

Most carbon monoxide pollution comes from motor vehicle exhaust - in cities, about nine-tenths of all CO emissions comes from cars and pickups, according to the EPA.

As evidence of the health benefits of federal regulation, the academy panelists cited a study sponsored by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last year that found 11,700 motorist deaths from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning probably were prevented because of tougher federal regulation between 1968 and 1998.

Increased chest pain in people with coronary artery disease is the main known health problem from carbon monoxide pollution, but some studies also have found a correlation between it and heart disease, childhood development abnormalities and miscarriages, according to the academy.

Ted Russell, an engineering professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology who was the study chairman, said more reductions in carbon monoxide pollution can be expected as a result of EPA rules taking effect next year to reduce pollutants that form ozone, a precursor of smog.

"The same controls that affect hydrocarbons also tend to impact carbon monoxide," he said.

Frank O'Donnell, executive director of the Clean Air Trust, an environmental advocacy group, said the story of carbon monoxide shows the success of tough regulations - and enforcing them.

The academy is a private organization chartered by Congress to advise the government about scientific matters.

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Wednesday April 23, 2003, 11:25:08 PM

The Bakersfield Californian

Summit addresses ways to improve air quality in valley

Operation Clean Air summit got under way on Wednesday to promote improved air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.

The Operation Clean Air coalition wants special status for federal money and tax credits to help businesses retool with cleaner technology, industries replace old vehicle fleets and people to leave their cars and ride the bus, according to a report in *The Fresno Bee*.

The special status would be called an Air Quality Empowerment Zone and would help clean air and promote economic growth.

Three valley congressmen -- Reps. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, and Cal Dooley, D-Hanford -- attended the summit and reacted to the call for federal support.

The coalition released a 112-page draft plan, divided into 11 major working groups, such as agriculture, building industry and health care. Each group canvassed the valley for opinions and came up with practical suggestions.

Cleaner air campaign launched

Thursday, April 24, 2003

By Cynthia Neff - Merced Sun-Star

FRESNO - Officials from nine San Joaquin Valley counties came together Wednesday with high hopes of combating air pollution from Bakersfield to Stockton.

Three Merced County officials joined more than 400 county officials, business people and nonprofit group members to jump-start a clean air initiative that will target the San Joaquin Valley's poor air quality.

The brainchild of Fresno Mayor Alan Autry and Fresno County Supervisor Bob Waterston, Operation Clean Air aims to create a five-year action plan that will clean the air and increase economic prosperity in the Valley.

The initiative is also a collective effort to reduce the amount of ozone pollution to meet health standards set by the federal Clean Air Act.

Currently, the Valley's air is classified as being in "severe" noncompliance and, if its situation does not significantly improve by 2005, sanctions will automatically slip into place and will take essential federal highway funding off the table.

The potential loss of funding - which Fresno County Supervisor Waterston said could total nearly \$300 million - could foster a devastating outcome on the economic development of the 25,000-square-mile Valley.

The unemployment rate for San Joaquin Valley counties currently ranges from between 17 and 20 percent.

"Economic development is affected directly by the quality of our air," said Autry. "We need to clean the air and preserve the economy."

The other option for the Valley is to downgrade to "extreme" noncompliance, to avoid sanctions and receive more time to lessen the amount of ozone.

The mission of Operation Clean Air's initiative, Fresno County officials stressed, will not replace the current federal Clean Air Act regulations.

Instead, mission objectives include expanding current efforts to reduce emissions from all pollution sources, and the creation of an "Air Quality Empowerment Zone" that would provide incentives - like tax breaks - so that cleanup efforts happen faster.



Merced County Supervisor Jerry O'Banion, above, and fellow board member Mike Nelson took part in Wednesday's session in Fresno.

"The way to clean the air is to have the public become aware of what they can do and then empower them to do it," said Dave Crow, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, the agency charged with cleaning the Valley's air.

Operation Clean Air already has secured support from congressmen George Radanovich, R-Mariposa; Cal Dooley, D-Fresno; and Devin Nunes, R-Visalia; and Sen. Barbara Boxer, as well as Merced County officials.

Merced County supervisors Mike Nelson and Jerry O'Banion carpooled to Fresno to attend the summit.

"It's the first time folks have come together ... and are willing to look for solutions," O'Banion said.

Added Nelson, "There's strength in numbers and (the nine counties) can have a louder voice ... Operation Clean Air is a way to advocate to Washington, D.C. and Sacramento."

Now, many of the summit's attendees will focus on what action needs to be taken next.

Merced College President Ben Duran said he will work to encourage voluntary measures by schools that would improve air quality, and will be an advocate for low-emission transportation systems.

Waterston said that he will now regroup and continue to communicate with each board of supervisors from the nine counties.

"I want results," he said. "People know there's a problem and I won't let anyone down."

Coalition pushes for teamwork at summit Operation Clean Air unites lawmakers, industry leaders, more.

By Mark Grossi and Barbara Anderson

Published in both the Fresno Bee and the Modesto Bee, April 24, 2003

An industry representative Wednesday borrowed from Fresno State football coach Pat Hill in challenging the San Joaquin Valley to clean up the country's second-dirtiest air basin.

"You need to shut up and do something about it," agriculture spokesman Roger Isom told several hundred people attending a summit on voluntary action to curb air pollution.

Isom was paraphrasing Hill, who tells his players, "Shut up and hit somebody." For the Valley's 3.3 million residents, Isom's comment means everyone must work together as a team to clean up the air.

The team approach was a major theme in the Operation Clean Air summit, the brainchild of Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, Fresno County Supervisor Bob

Waterston and others.

The summit brought together government, nonprofit and industry representatives to start a battle plan that will operate separately from the legal process at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The Operation Clean Air coalition wants special status for federal money and tax credits to help businesses retool with cleaner technology, help industries replace old vehicle fleets and get people to leave their cars and ride the bus.

The special status would be called an Air Quality Empowerment Zone. Coalition officials said the zone would help clean air and promote economic growth.

Three Valley congressmen -- Reps. George Radanovich, R-Mariposa, Devin Nunes, R-Visalia, and Cal Dooley, D-Fresno -- attended the summit and reacted to the call for federal support.

"You kind of look at us as an ATM machine for doing this, and we're willing to be the ATM machine for Operation Clean Air," Dooley said. "But you have to put together a strategic plan and expand your coalition and groups."

The coalition must reach out to organized labor, including the United Farm Workers and the Building Trades Association, Dooley said. "You're going to have to put together that political coalition."

Operation Clean Air, which was criticized a few weeks ago as not representing the whole community, was again characterized as being less than inclusive. Coalition officials added a member of Fresno Metro Ministry, a major critic of the process, to join a discussion panel.

"We need to have farmworkers, rural communities and grass-roots organizations to reflect the diversity of the Valley," said Carolina Simunovic, environmental health coordinator for Metro Ministry. "You need the overlying community involved."

But, in addition to Metro Ministry, the coalition also added panelists from Fresno-based Medical Alliance for Healthy Air. Officials said they will continue seeking opinion from various community groups.

"We've heard inclusiveness today," Autry said. "We got the message."

Medical officials had a message for the coalition, too: Make health the No. 1 priority ahead of everything else.

A 16-year-old asthmatic described how bad bouts of Valley air affect him.

"It almost feels like you're drowning," said Caleb Schneider of Hanford. "I just wish every day could be a good day to breathe."

It is more dangerous to breathe in the 25,000-square-mile Valley than any other place in the country except Los Angeles, by most measures. In one category -- the eight-hour or long-term smog measures -- the Valley has been

the worst in the nation for four years.

"We're living in a cesspool as far as the air is concerned," said Dr. Leo Shishmanian, a Fresno radiologist. Shishmanian was one of about a dozen doctors to attend the air summit.

The Valley must also make a case for new technology, Waterston said. The area should become a well-known testing ground for hydrogen-powered vehicles and other innovations.

The coalition released a 112-page draft plan, divided into 11 major working groups, such as agriculture, building industry and health care. Each group canvassed the Valley for opinions and came up with practical suggestions.

For instance, the Valley has 2,800 school buses, and most are diesel. More than 300 are a quarter-century old or older.

"One was built in 1933, and it's still being used," said California State University, Fresno, President John Welty, who discussed ideas to curb pollution in the education sector. "We need a clean fleet as well as the fueling and maintenance facilities for it."

Senate OKs air measure to regulate cars, trucks

By Lesli A. Maxwell, Fresno Bee Capitol Bureau, April 24, 2003

SACRAMENTO -- Local air officials would have broad authority to regulate cars, big rigs and other mobile sources of pollution in the San Joaquin Valley under a bill approved Wednesday by state senators.

For the first time since it was formed in 1991, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District would have the power to regulate cars and trucks -- the largest source of smog-forming gases. Local air regulators in Southern California and in the Sacramento region have similar authority.

Senate Bill 709 by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, empowers the air district to:

Invoke ride-sharing programs on bad air days for Valley businesses that employ more than 100 people. It would exempt farms, canneries and other rural businesses with a work force that is mostly seasonal or part-time.

Charge \$1 more for vehicle registration in the Valley to raise \$2 million annually for clean-air programs.

Monitor emissions from all diesel-run irrigation pumps on farms -- even clean-burning pumps that the federal Environmental Protection Agency will consider exempt from Clean Air Act permits. The district could only use emission measurements to compile data, not to impose penalties.

Assess fees on developers of subdivisions, shopping centers and distribution sites that create traffic and air pollution to pay for clean-air programs.

Set up an office that helps farmers and other business owners comply with new clean-air rules.

SB 709 is the first in a series of clean-air bills by Florez that lawmakers this session debated and voted on. The Senate Environmental Quality Committee will hear the measure again next week, along with four other air bills.

Air district officials, including executive director David Crow, favor the greater powers.

A measure by Sen. Mike Machado, D-Linden, to add four new members to the air district board also is moving through the Legislature. Machado's bill would allow the governor and legislative leaders to appoint medical and science experts to the 11-member board, which is comprised of elected city and county officials.

Machado, a farmer in San Joaquin County, said he supports Florez's push to regulate the Valley's agriculture industry and said farmers who are taking voluntary steps to reduce air pollution should have no worries.

"If you're doing it already, there's nothing to fear," Machado said. "We have people who come to intersections and stop, but we put up stop signs for the ones who don't."

Trains mean cleaner air

Ridership growth on Amtrak is good news for Valley skies.

[Editorial published in both the Fresno Bee and Modesto Bee, April 24, 2003](#)

The number of people choosing the train over cars and airplanes in the Valley is going up. That's good news for the Valley's air.

Trains produce a dramatically lower level of air pollution than a similar number of car trips. That's a critical consideration in this Valley.

Amtrak reports ridership went up 18.5% statewide in the first quarter of this year; Fresno's Amtrak station saw an increase of 18.3%, to nearly 60,000. A number of factors pushed the ridership up, from soaring gasoline prices to the difficulty of finding convenient flights from Valley airports.

Whatever the reasons, it is good to see train use rising. Traveling by train has several advantages over other methods of long-distance travel:

The Valley was made for trains -- it's long, wide and flat.

The cost is competitive, especially with today's high gasoline prices.

The comfort factor is higher. Riding the train means none of the tensions of driving, and none of the hassles of the airport. On the train passengers can walk around, chat, play cards, read, conduct business, eat and even sleep. Those things are a lot harder to do in an automobile or an airplane -- and

downright dangerous in some cases.

Conversations with strangers on the train are usually low key, civil and pleasant. Communication between strangers on the highway is usually monosyllabic, or carried out entirely with hand gestures.

Trains are not perfect. They do pollute, especially the diesels now in use. But they don't pollute nearly as much as all the cars and trucks they replace.

It will likely be a very long time before our addiction to the personal car is broken, and it may never happen. But trains are clearly making a comeback here and elsewhere, and that's nothing but good for Valley lungs.

LASTGASP

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

Another in a series of Thursday editorials on the Valley's dirty air.

Cleaning up dirty air paramount

Thursday, April 24, 2003

We've squawked on this page many times before about the poor quality of the air in Merced County. Everyone knows that air you can see (just take a glance at the haze masking the Sierras) can't be healthy to breathe.

It's also bad for business. As Central Valley air gets worse and worse, it makes the region more and more unattractive to high-paying employers that otherwise would locate here.

This is why we're behind state Sen. Dean Florez's legislation to take some unpleasant steps to cut down on vehicle emissions in the Valley. Florez, D-Shafter, is to be commended for expending political capital on such an important issue.

One of Florez's bills, SB709, is effective in that it attacks the real problem: vehicle emissions. We can dispense hot air all day about agricultural dust and smog blowing in from the Bay Area, but it's really the cars and trucks and fossil fuel-burning engines (what pollution experts term "mobile sources") that add the most foul contaminants to the air bathtub that is the Central Valley.

Florez's bill is expected to cut down on vehicle emissions by expanding the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's authority over these mobile sources, including passenger vehicles and trucks.

Some of the bill's provisions are aimed squarely at citizens who have failed to do their part to cut down on pollution. There's no question SB709 will spell significant lifestyle changes for all of us if it becomes law.



**The opinion
of the Merced
Sun-Star**

Measures in the bill include:

- Requiring ridesharing programs for businesses with 100 or more employees.
- Directing public agencies to add low-emission vehicles to their fleets.
- Monitoring all stationary agricultural pumps.
- Establishing an office to help small businesses and farmers comply with new air quality measures.
- Adding \$1 to the car registration fee in the Valley to help fund air district programs.

Opposition

It's no surprise that Florez has some significant opposition, including from state Sen. Jeff Denham, R-Salinas, our own senator. Denham also serves with Florez on the Senate's air quality committee.

Denham says he's worried that SB709 could lead to increased government regulations working against Valley businesses. "We're going to see a decrease in jobs and an increase in businesses moving out of the area," he said.

We disagree. The air quality problem threatens the future of all business in the Central Valley and it must be solved now. If the pollution continues to grow worse, Merced County will see a decrease in jobs and an increase in businesses moving out of the area simply because of the dirty air. And it's not just Merced - the entire Valley will be seriously limited in its ability to attract businesses to our polluted region.

The big businesses - especially those offering the coveted high-paying jobs - are astute about where to locate. They won't move into areas with bad air. It's a significant quality of life factor.

Even more important, we think, is the fact that breathing dirty air is unhealthy. That alone is a reason to support Florez's efforts.

It's not too late to solve this problem. Florez's ideas may not be perfect, but at least he's headed in the right direction.