

Monday, March 15, Lodi News Sentinel

Lodi residents 'get green' with eco-friendly lawnmowers

By [J. Paul Bruton](#), News-Sentinel Staff Writer

More than 30 Lodi residents disposed of their old, polluting gas lawn mowers Saturday as part of a city of Lodi environmental program. Some also took advantage of a \$200 city rebate and immediately bought new, rechargeable electric mowers.

The event was part of the city's Get Green program.

"It's staggering," said Rob Lechner, manager of customer service and programs for the city of Lodi Electric Utility. "You could drive from Sacramento to Los Angeles in one of today's newer automobiles and it produces less air pollution than running one of these older-style lawnmowers for half an hour."

Lechner and a representative from Black & Decker, Rufus Richardson, were among a cast of volunteers who were gladly accepting the turn-in of older model lawnmowers Saturday in the parking lot of Temple Baptist Church.

Together, Richardson and Lechner counted to three and then heaved an old Lawn-Boy model lawnmower into a garbage bin among more than 30 other machines.

While some residents disposed of an old machine and left it at that, others immediately purchased a brand-new, cordless, rechargeable electric mower which the Black and Decker reps had on hand.

"The new electric mowers are lightweight, easy to start, approximately 50 percent less noisy than gas mowers -- and of course, they're clean burning," Lechner said.

At right around \$400 a pop for a new electric mower, residents also had the incentive of a \$200 rebate from the city of Lodi for making the purchase. Doug Silva does his part to help the environment by purchasing a new, cordless, rechargeable electric lawnmower during Lodi Electric Utility's "Get Green" program Saturday in the Temple Baptist Church parking lot.

"Actually, I don't even really need a new lawnmower," said Doug Silva, one of the Get Green participants from Lodi. "I just want to do my part to help the environment. Plus I got tired of hearing that old thing."

Currently, Wright Mowers is the only Lodi distributor offering electric model lawnmowers to the public. However, Lechner said Lodi residents can still get a rebate on an electric lawnmower through the city, even if they purchase one at Lowe's, Home Depot or other stores -- as long as the mowers are electric.

In addition to offering the rebates on electric mowers, 100 free shade trees (Chinese pistachio, pin oak and Bradford pear) were up for grabs, as well as 100 free shower heads that restrict water flow.

The Get Green program, now in its second year, was created by Lechner in an attempt to help Lodi residents do their part to help the environment. The city's Get Green program partnered with Black & Decker, Home Depot of Stockton, and Wright Mowers of Lodi.

[Monday, March 15, Fresno Bee](#)

Bullet train's fate up to bills

Legislators move to delay or derail high-speed rail line.

By Jennifer M. Fitzenberger
Bee Capitol Bureau

SACRAMENTO -- Lawmakers weighing the fate of a bullet train linking California's major cities agree that the state is too financially strapped to ask voters in November to approve a \$9.95 billion construction bond.

But they have different ideas about when -- or whether -- they should put it back on the ballot, igniting debate that puts in limbo the \$33 billion rail line scheduled to slice through the central San Joaquin Valley.

Legislators have introduced four bills removing the bond from this year's ballot -- a move Gov. Schwarzenegger called for in his 2004-05 budget proposal.

Two bills would postpone the bond vote until 2006, one would wait until 2010, and another would ax it, killing the project that promises to create jobs and ease traffic congestion in a state with a booming population.

The bills need two-thirds legislative approval. In 2002, a bill by then-state Sen. Jim Costa of Fresno put the bond on the 2004 ballot to help fund the rail system's first phase. Costa, a Democrat who is running for the 20th Congressional District seat, said he favors 2006 if the bond is moved off this year's ballot.

Costa said he has talked with legislative leadership: "My sense is there is further discussion that needs to take place."

Observers say lawmakers are more likely to put off than get rid of the bond. Delaying it, though, could mean the state would have to redo costly environmental studies and pay more for land, labor and the trains themselves.

"One issue is if you move it too far off, does all the work done become stale?" asked Sen. Kevin Murray, chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee. Murray's Senate Bill 1169 would put the bond on the 2006 ballot.

"My preference is to move it off to the shortest time possible, and if we're still not in the fiscal place to do it, then postpone it" again, said Murray, a Los Angeles Democrat.

Schwarzenegger believes that, given the state's financial situation, this is not the time for a high-speed rail bond, spokesman H.D. Palmer said.

But Schwarzenegger has not publicly said when or whether he wants to put the bond back on the ballot. Lawmakers looking for guidance want his input.

"The governor needs to weigh in here," said Sen. Dean Florez, a Shafter Democrat who sits on the Transportation Committee. "He's the one who put it in the budget. Thus far, he has been a nonparticipant."

Mehdi Morshed, executive director of the High-Speed Rail Authority, said not having a date for voters to decide on the bond creates some uncertainty, but it won't immediately affect planning for the project. Schwarzenegger included about \$1 million in his budget proposal to fund the authority.

The authority is in charge of planning, designing, constructing and operating the system, and it carries out the requests of the governor and Legislature.

"You have a governor who has just come in here. He's got multi-billion dollar deficits," Morshed said. "They have to have time to weigh their options" regarding high-speed rail.

Murray said it's not necessary to quickly set a bond date.

"We certainly are not sold on 2006," he said. "The main issue is it needed to be postponed."

The Valley's portion of the rail line would include 270 miles of the 700-mile system. High-speed trains would carry as many as 68 million passengers a year by 2020, a draft environmental impact report made public in January states.

The system would be the first of its magnitude in the United States. In some places, trains could reach 220 mph, using technology that has been common for decades in Europe.

According to the report, a high-speed train could cart passengers from San Francisco to Los Angeles in about 2 hours and 30 minutes, and from Los Angeles to San Diego in slightly more than an hour.

Plans for the rail system have been in the works for more than 10 years.

According to Morshed, postponing the bond measure until 2006 would have "marginal" impacts on the project because the bonds, under current law, would not be sold until 2006. The change would foster uncertainty among developers, investors and local government officials who are making plans around the rail project, Morshed said.

SB 1483 by Sen. Don Perata, an Oakland Democrat, also postpones it to 2006.

Anything later than 2006, though, would have significant impacts, Morshed said.

By 2010 -- the year proposed by Assembly Member Russ Bogh in Assembly Bill 2865 -- environmental studies could be outdated because new housing and shopping centers could crop up along the proposed rail line.

Construction is supposed to start before 2010, but without money from the bond, tunnels, bridges and other infrastructure would be delayed, Morshed said.

"Each one of those delays would have an impact," he said. "Those delays put new uncertainties I can't predict."

Bogh, a Cherry Valley Republican, said he is working with state Department of Finance staffers. He said he chose that year because it is what the Schwarzenegger administration wants.

Palmer, a spokesman for the governor, could not confirm whether Schwarzenegger favors 2010.

Bogh said it likely will take more than two years for the economy to turn around: "Basically, the state can't afford it right now."

Sen. Tom McClintock, long a critic of high-speed rail, said it is too expensive and questions whether people would ride it. His bill, SB 1256, would kill the bond.

"The ridership figures [that planners] are generating are coming out of thin air, and they are being used to justify a project that by any rational measure is ludicrous on its face," said McClintock, a Thousand Oaks Republican who unsuccessfully ran for governor in the recall election. "It is the biggest boondoggle that has ever been proposed."

McClintock said he would rather use the money to add lanes to 665 miles of freeway in the state's most congested corridors: "I would hate to see us continue to waste money on a system that is destined to ultimately collapse of its own cost."

McClintock said skepticism over the high-speed rail system is growing in the Legislature. Indeed, lawmakers have scrutinized its cost and the likely choice of Pacheco Pass over Altamont Pass to link the Valley to the Bay Area.

Rail enthusiasts have argued that the Altamont route was not properly studied -- a claim that Morshed disputes.

Altamont would better serve the northern Valley, supporters say, than Pacheco, which would cut west through Los Banos from the Highway 99 corridor. Morshed said the Pacheco route makes more sense because it more directly connects to the Bay Area.

Debate over the route, however, likely won't affect plans for the bond.

Talk of scrapping the project unsettles Morshed, though he said he will do what he is instructed.

"In our view, it is absolutely essential," Morshed said. "It is the best transportation solution for the state of California."

March 15, 2004, The Bakersfield Californian

Feeling the squeeze

ERIC HSU, Californian staff writer

For as long as Hal Lockey can remember, the field across the street from his neighborhood has been filled with cotton, carrots and beans. But soon that field -- located at the southeast corner of Heath and Hageman roads -- may bristle with 400 houses, courtesy of a new subdivision proposed by Hageman Northwest, LP.

To some, the appearance of this subdivision was inevitable, the leading edge of development that has swept steadily across Rosedale in recent years.

But to Lockey and his wife, Pat, who live on a 2 1/2-acre lot with their horses, the development is an intruder, a case of bad planning they say will erode the rural lifestyle they've loved since settling in the area 25 years ago.

The Lockeyes and about 35 of their neighbors -- most of whom also live on estate-size lots -- are vigorously opposing the development, writing letters to county planners and preparing to testify before the county Board of Supervisors.

Residents say they're unhappy with development plans to rezone the area for quarter-acre lots, a doubling of the density. The current half-acre zoning has been in place since the mid-1990s, when the county devised a long-term master plan for Rosedale called the Western Rosedale Specific Plan.

The residents say they're not wholly opposed to development, but cite a litany of questions about the denser growth.

They worry that new residents, accustomed to more conventional suburban living, won't be as tolerant of the livestock in the area. They worry about overcrowding in the schools. They fear that if the county allows the zone change, it will set a precedent for changing the zoning of other nearby plots, leading to additional crowding.

"Don't put small lots in a rural area," said Hal Lockey. "We're trying to preserve the character. This area is not the area they should be doing it."

Above all, residents say, they are concerned about traffic. They say the new subdivision could introduce 600 to 1,000 additional cars onto worn and narrow county roads, especially Rosedale Highway, which narrows to just two lanes west of Allen Road.

"Try to get on Rosedale at Heath and tell me that's not a danger," said David Schuler, a resident on Shellie Marie Avenue.

Nearby residents aren't the only ones objecting to the subdivision. The Sierra Club has also challenged the project, saying the developer is not doing enough to address potential pollution problems caused by construction of the houses and by people who will eventually live there.

But county planners and the developers say these charges are unfounded. They say the development will cover the costs of its expected impacts, through homeowners' and developers' fees for schools, pollution, sewers and traffic. The new subdivision will yield about \$2.4 million in traffic improvements on nearby roads, as well as additional money that will go toward the installation of a traffic

signal at Rosedale Highway and Heath Road. The subdivision plans even include space for equestrian trails along Rudd and Meacham roads.

Bob Smith, a civil engineer representing the developers of the project, also refuted the argument that smaller lots were detrimental, saying they are a more economical use of space.

"The more dense the better," Smith said. The less distance people have to drive, the less air pollution, the less farmland you're chewing up. Density equals smart growth these days."

In fact, another 160-acre development, being undertaken by Lonnie Oman and SV Investments, has also been proposed catty-corner to the Hageman Northwest development, according to county planner Lorelei Oviatt.

The Oman development -- which is currently slated to include 584 houses -- is also contingent on a zoning change, in this case from agricultural to quarter-acre residential, which represents an even bigger jump than the Hageman development.

Smith said such changes are not uncommon, and are allowed for under the Specific Plan.

Smith said the developers would like to be good neighbors, but that some of residents' concerns were rooted in an outdated picture of the reality of the area's growth.

"They live out in the country but it's not going to be country forever," Smith said. "There's an area known as urban development and they're right in the middle of it."

County planners have proposed a compromise for the Hageman development that would retain half-acre zoning for lots on the edge of the development, while allowing the inner lots to be quarter-acre. Smith estimates that would reduce the total number of houses in the project to 362 from 412.

But neither the residents nor the developers have expressed much enthusiasm for that plan. Homeowners say it won't do enough to cut down on congestion. The developers say that since the entire development will be walled, the visual benefit of the larger lot sizes would be insignificant.

The county Planning Commission has recommended the project move ahead, but the final decision will rest with the county Board of Supervisors. The board's decision has been delayed until an unspecified date to allow the Planning Commission to review additional arguments by the Sierra Club.

[March 14, 2004, The Bakersfield Californian](#) **Three Californian reporters recognized**

A Californian reporter was awarded first place in the American Planning Association's annual journalism competition for a series examining air pollution in

the Bakersfield region. Matt Weiser's "Smog: A Growing Concern" series was the winner among entries from medium-sized newspapers in this year's competition. The series also won the Kern Council of Government's annual journalism award.

Weiser's articles, published in June 2003, were praised for their strong argument for smart growth and looking at solutions to fight the area's smog problem.

Two Californian education writers were honored recently by the Education Writers Association in the 2003 National Awards for Education Reporting.

Staff writer David Hunn won second-place prizes for "Parents demand novel be banned," in the breaking or hard news category and for "Culture of Truancy" in the series category.

Staff writer Charles Adamson won a special citation for his "Special Education" features.

Adamson and Hunn's stories were among 416 entries judged in the contest.

[Saturday, March 13, Fresno Bee](#)

High-speed rail committee delays OK

Valley panel hears criticism of funding, service.

By Mark Grossi

A group of San Joaquin Valley leaders who enthusiastically support high-speed rail in California decided Friday to slow down in endorsing the bullet-train bond measure.

The San Joaquin Valley Rail Committee delayed support after hearing criticism of a \$9.9 billion rail bond that environmentalists and others argue would prevent Merced, Modesto and Stockton from getting service for decades.

A stamp of approval from the Valley committee, which usually focuses on Amtrak issues, would help bond supporters rally voters. The committee will craft a new resolution supporting the high-speed concept and bond funding but backing away from the current measure.

Critics said fine print in the bond would grant approval to the state rail authority's approach, which excludes a route alternative preferred by environmentalists and northern San Joaquin Valley cities.

"We would be endorsing a route we don't want," said Mayor Rudy Trevino of Atwater in Merced County. "If we support that bond, we're eliminating everything north of Fresno in the Valley."

Several measures in the Legislature may delay the bond for years anyway, committee members were told. After passage of the \$15 billion bond for a budget bailout this month, many legislators believe voters should not be asked for another expensive bond this year.

Bond money would start the construction of a \$33 billion train system spanning 700 miles. In some places, trains could reach 220 miles per hour, using technology that has been common for decades in Europe.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority already spent \$15 million on an environmental impact report that favors a Pacheco Pass route between the Valley and San Jose and the Bay Area.

The group discarded an Altamont Pass alternative, which many environmentalists prefer.

Environmentalists believe the Altamont alternative would bring high-speed rail through Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties in the earliest phases of the project, years ahead of the Pacheco Pass option.

They also said the Altamont alternative would result in less ecosystem damage, because it already has a major freeway and rail corridor.

Members of Transportation Involves Everyone, a nonprofit environmental advocacy group, displayed stuffed animal specimens -- bobcats, a coyote and a brown bear -- that would be affected in the Pacheco Pass option.

"Altamont Pass is the lower cost between the two," said engineer Michael Kiesling, representing the transportation advocacy group. "There is a huge potential for reducing air pollution. There is more than 10 times the traffic going over Altamont, compared to Pacheco."

But Pacheco meets the needs better, said Mehdi Morshed, executive director of the state High-Speed Rail Authority. In a telephone interview after the Valley committee meeting, he said the Altamont route would be slower and less efficient than Pacheco.

"People want different alignments and different speeds," Morshed said. "Fine, we can study this forever. But every delay costs money."

The Valley rail group, a collection of county supervisors and other officials, should be careful to send the right message with its delay of support, said Larry Miller, a Fresno County representative on the committee. A new resolution of support should be positive, he said.

"There's no way everybody will be happy," he said. "We want to support the money raising."

[Saturday, March 13, 2004, The Bakersfield Californian](#)

Court allows Kohl's to stay open

DAVID HUNN and MISTY WILLIAMS, Californian staff writers

A California court revised a shopping center ruling Friday, allowing a two-week-old Kohl's Department Store on Gosford Road to stay open. But work on all other stores under construction around a pair of stalled Wal-Mart supercenters in south Bakersfield still must stop, the new order said. The largest retailers affected by

the ruling are Lowe's and Sam's Club. One shopping center is located at Panama Lane and Highway 99 and another is at Gosford and Harris roads.

On Thursday, a three-justice panel from California's 5th District Court of Appeal, in response to the appeal of a local citizens' group, had suspended city decisions that allowed those stores to be developed and added an emergency halt to all construction. The justices stated project opponents have shown the need for an injunction, pending further consideration of the appeal.

The ruling has little effect on the Gosford and Harris road site, where no construction was under way Friday. That shopping center is home to the new Kohl's store, already up and running.

Construction on the Wal-Mart Supercenter at the Gosford site was stopped a month ago by a separate court ruling.

But at the Panama Lane and Highway 99 site, workers were pouring concrete and moving dirt Friday morning, unsure whether they would be sent home or not.

By early afternoon, the shutdown was official.

The first steps in Friday's shuttering began more than two years ago, when Wal-Mart asked the city of Bakersfield to change its general plan and zoning so the national retailer could build two Wal-Mart supercenters -- the first two in California, the city says.

But a local group didn't like the idea and started protesting, as some cities and citizens have done across the state. Wal-Mart hopes to eventually build 40 supercenters in California.

The local citizens group argued the city hadn't adequately investigated whether or not the new shopping centers would increase air pollution, traffic congestion and urban decay -- the Wal-Marts may drive other stores out of business.

So when the council OK'd the projects in February last year, the Bakersfield Citizens for Local Control sued the city.

Kern County Superior Court Judge Kenneth Twisselman said the city's study was fine for air pollution and traffic congestion, but the urban decay was another matter.

Twisselman stopped construction on both Wal-Marts.

But everything around them, he ruled, could continue construction.

The citizens' group wanted all construction stopped and appealed Twisselman's decision.

Following Thursday's ruling by the appeals court, lawyers for Castle & Cooke California Inc., the developer of the Gosford center, immediately sent a letter to the court, asking it to rethink its decision.

The judges agreed and vacated their previous order Friday. They then issued another that maintained a halt on construction but allowed Kohl's to continue operation.

For the city, this is brand-new territory, officials say.

"The city's never been in this type of situation before," said city attorney Ginny Gennaro.

Elsewhere

Around the state, residents are asking officials to keep Wal-Mart out of town.

In Contra Costa County, residents have refused to support a measure that would have blocked the so-called big-box stores that sell groceries.

In northern San Diego County, residents overturned a City Council-approved change in zoning rules that would have allowed a second Wal-Mart store to be built there.

In Bakersfield, the judges' ruling will indeed stop Wal-Mart for now, as well as the other stores in the shopping centers.

What's next?

Subcontractors working on the Lowe's building were told to stop at around 1 p.m. Friday, said Chris Sneed, superintendent with The Bergman Companies, a general contractor out of Chino.

The shutdown will mean roughly 40 workers will be without jobs. Around 200 people could ultimately be out of work, and the injunction may leave subcontractors in tight financial binds.

Some work will still need to be done to the building, which was about 12 weeks away from completion, to make sure it's structurally sound, Sneed said.

"We don't know what conditions may cause that structure to become unstable," said Jack Highfill, a supervisor with the city building department.

"We want to make sure it's safe," he said.

Developer Lee Jamieson said he wasn't sure when construction will come to a complete halt at the Panama Lane shopping center.

"We'll stop when it's safe to stop, and we can't do anything short of that," Jamieson said. "Safety is the number one priority."

Bob Braaten, owner of Braaten Electric, has roughly \$50,000 worth of conduit wire, cable trays and other materials either already installed or just sitting at the Lowe's site. Braaten is concerned the court's involvement will mean delays in getting paid.

Braaten said he'll have to lay off 12 employees as a result of the ruling.

Monday, March 15, 2004

"Our National Parks" column, published in the Tulare Advance-Register
Why the San Joaquin Valley visibility is so poor

By William Tweed

Perhaps you remember the question we left hanging in my last column. We were talking about what the San Joaquin Valley looks like from the Sierra on a perfect day.

The question we left unanswered was, why is it that the San Joaquin Valley often has such poor visibility?

The short answer, of course, is that there is lots of bad stuff in the air. But why that stuff accumulates so quickly and dissipates so slowly is more complex than you might think.

Let me give you some examples.

I've often heard it said that the primary reason Central California has bad air is because mountains surround our Valley. The mountains do trap pollutants, of course, but there are other valleys not very far away that are just as mountain-bound as ours and don't have the same visibility problems.

Another answer often given is that our air problems result from the cumulative impacts of a large and growing population. This is also true to a substantial degree, but it's still not a full explanation of our situation.

Both New York City and Chicago have many more people than the entire Central Valley of California and not nearly the same air-quality problems.

Yet another answer sometimes proposed is that our air problems result from summer heat that cooks what's in the air and produces dangerous substances. This also is undoubtedly true, but there are places that are even hotter than the San Joaquin Valley (Death Valley, for example) that usually have relatively clean air.

So, if the mountains, the population and the heat by themselves do not fully explain the problem, what is going on that makes our world so susceptible to regional haze?

The magic answer -- the missing piece that brings all these factors together and makes them truly potent -- is latitude.

Latitude, you will recall, is how we describe our relative position between the equator and the pole. Geographers describe the entire distance as 90 degrees. This makes sense when you figure that a full circumnavigation of the planet adds up to the proverbial "360." Visalia and most of Sequoia National Park can be described as being between 36 and 37 degrees north, which means they are roughly 40 percent of the way from the equator to the pole.

But what does this have to do with air pollution?

The trick is this, and it's of great importance to Central California's air quality: Between the earth's two great climate systems -- the warm tropics, where air mixes vertically in thunderstorms year round, and the temperate/arctic zone, where major weather fronts regularly mix the atmosphere, there is a nearly

stagnant transitional zone where winds are unreliable and atmospheric mixing is often poor.

Sailors at sea call this largely windless world the "horse latitudes." Locally, we simply call it Southern California.

If you look up the "horse latitudes" in a meteorological textbook, they'll be defined as being between 30 and 35 degrees north and south of the equator. To put it in another context, the San Joaquin Valley is on the edge of one of the planet's two great bands of stable, quiet weather.

This is the fact that so many Central Californians miss as we wrestle with our regional air-quality problems. Our air is so dirty not just because there are quite a few of us, and not just because we have mountains around us, and not just because it's hot, but also, and this is important, because our climate is almost perfectly designed to minimize the kinds of air movement that disperses pollution. It is our location in the great climactic engine of the earth that makes our Valley air problem so intense.

Notice the contradiction. Many of us who live here cherish our relatively benign climate. Unlike other parts of the country, we don't usually see huge windstorms, powerful blizzards, tornadoes and all the other things that mix and disperse the atmosphere.

Instead, at least for those who live along the eastern side of the San Joaquin Valley or in the Sierra foothills, wind is more of a novelty than a real issue. This is particularly true in the summer, when our air hardly moves for weeks at a time.

But it is the very gentleness of our climate that makes us so at risk for air pollution.

So the bottom line is this: Mountains, population and heat all do play roles in making our regional air quality such a problem, but what pulls all this together and makes the problem truly challenging is the frequent lack of air movement that defines our 30s-latitude world.

There's an implication to this that can't be escaped. If one were to try from scratch to design a place to collect and hold air pollution, it would look exactly like the southern San Joaquin Valley. We have everything one could possibly want in the way of geography and climate -- if smog is your goal. To live here successfully over the next few generations, we are going to have to work very hard to improve our regional air-quality situation and make our Valley livable for our children. Only then will we return to a world where folks in the Sierra will be able to see more than a sea of haze when they look down from the mountains.

William Tweed is the chief naturalist at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. To ask him questions, write: William Tweed, Visalia Times-Delta, P.O. Box 31, Visalia, CA 93277.

Monday, March 15, Modesto Bee, letter to the editor

Housing explosion in Waterford

The Waterford Planning Commission has approved 13 acres adjacent to what was Big Bear Park for the development of 64 more houses. They can't maintain services for their community now.

What about traffic on Highway 132 between Modesto and Waterford? It's difficult turning on and off the highway; what will happen after they add 120-plus commuter cars per day heading west in the morning and back east in the evening? More cars, more gas, more tax revenue, [more pollution](#). We've got to break the cycle. Isn't there any politician who will stand up for what's right?

LELAND MORSE

Modesto