

DISTRICTS SEEK FUNDING TO PURSUE STRONGER CONSTRUCTION ENGINE RULES

Inside Cal/EPA, August 3, 2007

The San Joaquin Valley, Bay Area and South Coast air districts may soon pursue rules on construction equipment

that are more stringent than a landmark regulation adopted last week by the air board, but these efforts are

reliant on millions of dollars in incentive funding. The San Joaquin Valley district is appealing to the state board to

help provide these funds.

The ability of major air districts to seek out more stringent rules targeting diesel emissions from construction

equipment is seen as a key strategy to help accelerate attainment of state and federal air quality standards in these

regions.

The Air Resources Board July 26 adopted a controversial rule cutting diesel emissions from construction and

other off-road equipment (see related story, pl). Before adopting the rule, ARB added a provision allowing areas

currently failing to achieve federal clean air standards for particulate matter (PM) to seek out stricter local rules if

incentive funds are available.

The districts that could take advantage of this provision are South Coast and San Joaquin Valley, both considered

in nonattainment of federal PM standards. Depending on the amount of incentive funding available, this provision could as much as double the nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions reductions in these districts, an ARB press

release states.

A San Joaquin Valley district source said the district will seek out a more stringent version of the off-road rule

and potentially adopt it in 2008.

With the enhanced provision, the San Joaquin Valley could reduce an additional four tons per year of NOx in

2015, the district source said. "Our preliminary analysis indicated that this could well make the difference in

whether or not the valley can meet the PM 2.5 standard in 2015. It also goes in the right direction towards our 100-

tons-per-day gap for the 8-hour ozone attainment plan."

The valley district would need a total of about \$10 million per year for four years, beginning in 2008, to

implement a more stringent rule, the district source said. The district currently has \$5 million per year to allocate to

a rule, with an additional \$5 million per year needed.

"We are asking that ARB target \$5 million from the statewide, multidistrict [Carl Moyer Program] funds that

ARB has access to," the district source said. "Most of these large construction facilities operate in multiple districts,

and given the valley's unique needs, we believe that such expenditures by ARB are justified. We are also looking at

other state and federal funding sources."

An ARB spokesman did not immediately return e-mails seeking comment by press time.

The district lobbied ARB heavily to also allow the Bay Area air district to have the option to implement a

stronger off-road rule, the valley district source said, because of the significant ozone transport from the Bay Area to

the valley.

Studies show that 10%-30% of the valley's ozone is directly attributable to pollution transported from the Bay

Area, the source said. "We will do everything we can to persuade [the Bay Area district]" to seek the more stringent

rule, the source said. "I have been getting positive preliminary indications from them that they would."

A Bay Area district spokeswoman said the district is still trying to learn as much as possible about the off-road

rule and could not comment on whether the district would seek the measure.

Meanwhile, a South Coast spokesman said the district hasn't yet decided when it will seek out a more stringent

off-road rule. The spokesman said one of the district's committees in July gave preliminary approval to set aside

\$120 million over the next four years for incentive funding to clean up off-road equipment. Final approval of this funding will have to come from the full South Coast board, the spokesman said.

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New air rules lead Calif. firms to dump old diesel gear abroad

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, San Diego Union-Tribune and other papers, August 13, 2007

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—Many businesses forced to upgrade their diesel fleets to meet new California emissions standards will likely sell their old equipment to countries with looser environmental regulations, according to companies affected by the recently adopted rules.

State air quality regulators last month approved the nation's toughest standards for exhaust from off-highway diesel vehicles like bulldozers and airport baggage trucks. An estimated 180,000

vehicles in the state would have to be replaced or retrofitted with smog traps, filters or cleaner-burning technology as the new rules are phased in starting in 2010.

As a result, companies scrambling to comply with the regulations are looking to sell their diesel gear quickly, with buyers abroad often providing a ready market.

"We are working with a number of different organizations to see if we can move this equipment to Asia, South America or elsewhere," said Rich Soltero, project manager at Dahl's Equipment Rental Inc. in San Jose.

Still, purchasers of used diesel fleets in countries where emissions rules are less strict often won't pay top dollar, since they know the stricter emissions standards often leave U.S. companies with little choice but to sell, used equipment brokers said.

Some environmentalists have voiced worry that the foreign sales amount to simply exporting California's environmental problems elsewhere. But regulators have argued that shipping the old equipment abroad

could prove to be an environmental boon not just for California, which will rid itself of the dirtier engines, but also the countries where the gear ends up.

"The equipment that will be moving to other parts of the world will still be meeting U.S. standards and may be cleaner than what they've got now," said Mary Nichols, chairwoman of the California Air Resources Board. "It's a little bit of a trickle-down effect, but it's better than not doing anything at all."

The used market for heavy construction equipment amounts to about \$100 billion dollars, said Richard Aldersley, a manager with Ritchie Brothers Auctioneers, who said the proposed regulations drew a record number of would-be sellers to the firm's May sale in Los Angeles.

One-fifth of the equipment sold in the auction went abroad to countries including Australia, Chile, Ghana, Latvia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Venezuela.

Proponents of the air board's new regulations, intended to reduce the state's diesel emissions 85 percent below 2000 levels by 2020, have said the rules will help prevent premature deaths and cases of asthma and acute bronchitis. The requirements will ultimately save the state \$26 billion in health care costs, according to air board estimates.

But construction industry officials say upgrading their fleets could cost from \$3 billion to \$12 billion, and the air board's staff has acknowledged the new regulations could result in a loss of up to 3,400 jobs a year.

Tougher emissions rules prompt state firms to sell equipment overseas

Matthew Yi, Chronicle Sacramento Bureau
S.F. Chronicle, Sunday, August 12, 2007

Sacramento - -- The state's efforts to cut emissions are having an unintended consequence: Some equipment rental firms required by the California Air Resources Board to make their diesel-engine fleets greener say they plan to sell their older machines to nations with less stringent environmental rules.

The move is a side effect of a new regulation approved last month as part of the Golden State's campaign to improve the environment by cutting air pollution as well as greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

"We don't want to export pollution from California, although to a certain extent, there are places that don't have quite the air pollution problems that California has," said Bill Magavern, a lobbyist for the Sierra Club.

But moving air-polluting equipment out of the state rather than taking it out of commission seems to be one result of the new rules as companies scramble to meet deadlines to retrofit their diesel-engine vehicles or sell them and buy machinery with lower emissions.

"We are working with a number of different organizations to see if we can move this equipment to Asia, South America or elsewhere," said Rich Soltero, project manager at Dahl's Equipment Rental Inc. in San Jose.

One such broker is Power Systems International in Oakland, which already sends about 50 shipping containers of old heavy construction equipment abroad.

"We buy used equipment that doesn't meet (the Environmental Protection Agency) standards. We ship to Mexico, Taiwan, Vietnam ... they know our (regulatory) situation here so they don't pay much for them, though," said Ray Ferraris Sr., who co-owns Power Systems with his son.

With additional rules approved by the state air board on July 26, Ferraris expects to get more calls from California diesel-engine construction fleet owners who need to get rid of their older equipment.

The new regulations require firms to begin reporting their diesel-fleet information to the air board in 2009. Businesses with large fleets need to start complying in 2010 while medium and small firms begin ratcheting down their diesel emissions beginning 2013 and 2015 respectively.

The ultimate goal is to help meet the state's diesel-reduction plan, which is to reduce diesel emissions in California to 85 percent below 2000 levels by 2020.

Mary Nichols, recently appointed as chairwoman of the air board by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, said California's old equipment being gobbled up abroad is just part of the state being a pioneer in fighting for a better environment.

"The equipment that will be moving to other parts of the world will still be meeting U.S. standards and may be cleaner than what they've got now," she said. "It's a little bit of a trickle-down effect, but it's better than not doing anything at all."

Supporters of the new regulations say the rules are needed to improve public health and reduce illnesses like childhood asthma in smog-heavy regions such as the San Joaquin Valley and the greater Los Angeles area.

According to the air board's staff, the new standards for cleaner-burning diesel engines could help reduce premature deaths by 4,000 over the next two decades as well as result in savings of between \$18 billion and \$26 billion in health care costs.

But the changes come at a price, especially for construction firms, heavy equipment rental companies and other owners of the state's 180,000 earthmovers, excavators and other off-road diesel machinery. Industry officials say it could cost them between \$3 billion and \$12 billion to upgrade or replace their fleets.

The air board staff also acknowledged that the new rules would result in a loss of 1,400 to 3,400 jobs a year.

Soltero doesn't think his 53-year-old business will have to lay off any of its 30 employees. But he is racking his brains to figure out how to operate under the tougher regulations.

He has 128 pieces of diesel-engine equipment - generators, compressors, aerial lifts and forklifts - that would be affected by the new regulations.

The initial plan is to reduce the number of the firm's diesel-engine rental fleet by selling older equipment on the used market while holding off from buying new machines. It's a tough choice to make considering that the 128 machines represented a quarter of the firm's \$6.3 million revenue last fiscal year.

"You hope that you'll come up with other equipment to rent, such as electricity-powered light towers," Soltero said. "You just try to make up revenue in other areas."

Lisa Carter, general manager of California Diesel & Power in Martinez, said she doesn't expect her rental firm to make wholesale changes to its fleet because it already upgrades its equipment on a regular basis.

Still, there will be equipment that will probably have to be taken offline sooner than expected and the machinery will likely be sold on the used market.

"I already sell older equipment, and they go out of state or across the border," she said.

The used market already is a burgeoning industry worth about \$100 billion, said Richard Aldersley, Southern California regional manager for Ritchie Brothers Auctioneers, the world's largest auctioneer of heavy construction equipment.

In fact, the new California regulation helped fuel additional business for Ritchie Brothers even before the rules were adopted.

The company announced in May that the proposed regulations helped boost its three-day auction in Los Angeles to new records for the number of consignors and lots, generating more than \$41 million in gross auction sales.

One-fifth of the equipment sold went abroad to countries including Australia, Chile, Ghana, Latvia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Venezuela.

Cutting air pollution and fighting global warming has become the new battle cry among many political leaders in California, especially after the passage of last year's landmark legislation AB32, which aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020.

Schwarzenegger, for example, has traveled around the world stumping for the cause and trying to convince leaders in other states and nations to adopt similar measures, said Aaron McLearn, the governor's spokesman.

Steve Maviglio, spokesman for Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, who co-authored the bill, said there has to be recognition that businesses need to figure out ways to see returns on their investment. While that may mean moving heavy-polluting equipment elsewhere, replacing it with greener machines in California is a good first step toward saving the environment, he said.

"We never intended to save the world, but we've intended to do our part," Maviglio said.

Regional renewable energy group formed

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, August 11, 2007

HANFORD -- The Valley leadership on Friday appointed a 23-member organization to spearhead regional strategy planning to achieve the future renewable energy goal.

Dubbed the San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization, the group is tasked to develop ways to meet 25 percent of energy from renewable sources by 2025.

"This will be the principal engine that really moves all the parts within the Valley to make it a Green Valley," said Rollie Smith, regional director of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development who helped plan the group's establishment.

"That means total energy efficiency. We want to be the Valley where other green companies want to come."

The organization is the first sub-entity established by the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley since it was commissioned by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2005.

The partnership, which brings together cabinet secretaries, local decision-makers and business leaders, held its public meeting in Hanford Friday.

The public-private partnership aims at a regional approach to tackling some of the toughest quality of life challenges inherent to the Valley -- such as air quality, water supply, transportation, education and unemployment.

The main task of the group would be to find and organize means to achieve the state renewable energy goal by working with existing utilities.

Currently, only 5 percent of California's energy needs are met with renewable energy, such as wind and solar, Smith said.

The new clean energy organization is expected to facilitate economic development in the Valley's renewable energy sector as well as set a steady course for curtailing air pollution.

"That means we will do a lot of education and a lot of organizing with key decision-makers, because so many decisions are made locally," Smith said.

The Clean Energy Organization is scheduled to hold its first board meeting in September.

Partnership 'positive' for Valley

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, August 11, 2007

The \$1 billion funding to upgrade Highway 99, the talk of a water conservation plan in the Legislature, and a newly commissioned clean energy group -- the Valley has gotten more than its fair share.

Ever wondered why here -- traditionally a region passed over -- and why now?

It turns out, behind all these projects, which appear to be just a random sequence of good news to the average citizens, is the so-called "Partnership."

Just two years in existence, the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley has brought some visible results for the region.

"We're not whiners any more," said Connie Conway, a Tulare County supervisor who chairs the Partnership. "It's positive. We're now working together to make things better."

Created in 2005 by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley is where the public and private sectors meet under the common goal of giving the Valley a voice.

Today, the 26-member board made up of cabinet secretaries, local government and business leaders is the driving force behind the emerging regional strategy in many issues.

But the relationship didn't happen by chance, said Fresno Mayor Alan Autry.

"Historically, the Valley has been left behind ... We sit on several crises -- an air quality crisis, water quality crisis and education crisis," Autry said. "These are issues we have to do something about because the future generation depends on us."

"But we didn't have the collective political clout," he said. "There was a great fragmentation from Bakersfield to Stockton."

So came the Partnership, said Autry, who urged the governor to create it.

On Friday, the Partnership was in Hanford holding its quarterly public meeting to discuss a wide variety of pressing issues for the region.

The top issues were:

- Air quality
- Water supply and quality
- Transportation
- Higher education
- K-12 education
- Economic development
- Health and human services

This is the kind of broad sweeping approach the California Partnership takes, as it wrestles with the giant task of finding ways to solve economic and environmental problems in the Valley.

"It's an opportunity to raise the quality of life and economic opportunity for every single person in our Valley," Conway said. "But it's not an attempt to force someone else's idea on the Valley. It is our own doing."

Information shared in the meeting is often technical and complex.

The power of regional partnership is beginning to manifest in the accelerated debate on water conservation and funding for the highway.

But goals set by the Partnership are mostly long-range and broad-based.

Board members say the primary focus is on the regional benefit and communities can do to together to achieve a common goal under the economy of scale concept.

"It's important to be able to see that our problem is not just our problem. It's part of a whole San Joaquin Valley problem," said Hanford City Councilwoman Marcie Buford, who sits on the Partnership board. "We can't solve the problem, but if we join with other areas, then we have a chance to solve it. It's not guaranteed, but we have a better chance."

Don't expect instant gratification for a small locality though, Buford warned. The Partnership is trying to put the Valley on a good footing for healthy growth in the future.

"You have to have the building blocks in place, or everything else will fall down," Buford said.

"We're trying to get combining our resources so we can be the spark that lights the fire ...

"But nothing is going to happen tomorrow," she said. "If we want to be masters of our own destiny, we've got to do that planning."

Valley coalition brainstorms on high-speed rail

By Eiji Yamashita

Hanford Sentinel, Friday, August 10, 2007

California's high-speed rail system -- if built in time -- could bring San Francisco and Los Angeles within an hour's reach of Kings County. It would create thousands of high-paying jobs and change the automobile-based, pollution-producing way of life forever.

Enthusiasm among the Valley's vision-makers was palpable Thursday as they met in Hanford to discuss the concept as a way to "keep the Valley together."

But so was their concern.

With Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's funding support wavering, the survival of the long-planned high speed-rail project -- a priority for the Valleywide leadership -- is in question.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority this year faces a severe funding cut that could lead to its end.

"This gathering is great. My question is, is this the beginning or the last supper?" Mehdi Morshed, executive director of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, told a roomful of Valley leaders.

On Thursday, members of the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley and movers and shakers in state transportation spent five hours inside the Hanford Civic Auditorium thrashing out why they want the high-speed rail, how they want it and when they want it.

Among them were Lt. Gov. John Garamendi and Rep. Jim Costa, Kings County's congressman -- two individuals who initiated the high-speed rail debate in Sacramento 20 years ago.

The focus of Thursday's discussion rested much on how they can keep the project alive for the benefit of the Valley.

"It is really important for us to figure out how to make the high-speed rail viable in the San Joaquin Valley and make sure that it gets built and that the Valley isn't left behind," Sunne McPeak, partnership board member, said as she opened the meeting.

"This is about how we see the benefit for the future of being the greener, more environmentally inviting region."

According to the high-speed rail authority, its \$82 billion project would reduce long-distance car travelers by 57 million a year, curbs greenhouse emission by 17.6 billion pounds annually and save 22 million barrels of oil a year.

The high-speed rail system, which would connect San Francisco and Los Angeles in less than two-and-a-half hours, also generates 450,000 permanent jobs for California, the authority says.

The Valley leadership -- commissioned by Gov. Schwarzenegger in 2005 -- sees it as a critical piece for the region's future economy and environment.

"What we are trying to achieve through this is more accessibility for Hanford and Kings County to the rest of the world," said Partnership board chair Connie Conway, a Tulare County supervisor.

"At the same time, we're trying to contribute to quality of life through cleaning the air ... We believe it means raising the opportunities for the Valley."

Partnership board member Kirk Lindsay said the goal of the partnership is to "keep the Valley together" and that the high-speed rail helps achieve the vision by "connecting the Valley together."

After millions of dollars in investment and 11 years in planning, the high-speed rail plans could derail this year, if Schwarzenegger axes the funding for the authority in the 2007-2008 state budget.

The railroad -- which would possibly include a stop between Visalia and Hanford -- will only be given \$15 million under the Assembly plan.

With the state budget still in a limbo, even that amount is in doubt.

"We're looking at what we can accomplish with the \$15 million, but even that may not come through," said Morshed, the authority head. "Then, we'd have to close doors."

The authority is asking for at least \$50 million to keep the engineering plan going in advance of a planned 2008 bond election.

Meanwhile, a strong call for action came Thursday from Garamendi, who authored laws establishing the high-speed rail authority with then-Assemblyman Costa in the early 1990s.

"There's no way California can achieve carbon dioxide reduction without the high-speed rail," Garamendi said, referring to the 2006 bill that set ambitious goals for California to curb greenhouse gas emissions to the 1990 levels by 2020. "But we have a problem, a financial problem."

Last November, California voters passed Proposition 1B, a \$20 billion transportation bond. Of this money, \$4 billion is earmarked for public transportation.

Garamendi urged state leaders to use \$50 million of that money to sustain the authority's effort.

"It can be done," Garamendi told the Valley partnership. "There's plenty of political power here to go after this money ... I'm here to build a political coalition."

But to convince the governor and the Legislature, there must be strong public-private partnership, federal funding commitment must be demonstrated, Garamendi said.

Rep. Costa, who flew in from Washington D.C. to join the discussion, said efforts are underway.

Costa said he is working with U.S. senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer to create a high-speed rail authority at the federal level as a way to secure funding for California.

But more immediate actions required of the Valley partnership, Costa said, is to protect this year's \$15 million funding in the state budget and ensure to keep the \$10 billion bond measure on the November 2008 ballot.

Air pollution rule supported by environmentalists face new challenge

Stockton Record, Saturday, August 11, 2007

A San Joaquin Valley air pollution rule that developers warn could add thousands of dollars to the price of a new home is facing another legal challenge, this time in federal court.

But environmentalists typically at odds with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District this week defended the new rule.

"It's going to take everyone recognizing that they have to change business as usual," said Paul Cort, an attorney with Earthjustice in Oakland.

The National Association of Home Builders sued earlier this summer to block the "indirect source" rule, which requires developers to use bike paths, pedestrian-friendly shopping centers or other strategies to reduce the amount of pollution from traffic resulting from new construction.

That, or developers can pay fees that are used for other pollution reduction programs, such as replacing farmers' diesel irrigation pumps.

The rule was approved in 2005; developers first sued in 2006. The latest lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court in Fresno on June 6.

Environmentalists filed court papers Wednesday saying that a rising number of asthma cases combined with the economic impact of air pollution - an estimated \$3.2 billion - make the new rule a wise one.

Home builders have called the regulations "complicated, burdensome and expensive."

"It will certainly be ironic when home buyers are forced to purchase less expensive new homes outside the air district and commute back into the area, bringing even more tailpipe emissions with them," National Association of Home Builders President Brian Catalde said.

About the rule

- Developers are encouraged to reduce air pollution by putting homes or businesses near bus stops, building bicycle paths and sidewalks, increasing energy efficiency and undertake other strategies.
- If after these actions are taken emission levels are still above a certain threshold, the developers pay a fee. The amount depends on the quantity of pollution.
- The money the district collects is used to prevent pollution elsewhere.
- The program also includes schools, government buildings, hospitals and industrial buildings.

Lawyer sues over plans for Keyes ethanol plant

Environmental report sought for Keyes plant

By TIM MORAN

Modesto Bee, Saturday, August 11, 2007

Environmental attorney Richard Harriman has made good on his pledge to sue Stanislaus County over its fast-track approval of an ethanol manufacturing plant near Keyes.

Harriman, representing a group called Valley Advocates, is challenging the county's decision not to require a formal environmental review of the project, which is under construction at Jessup Road and Highway 99.

The project is a 55 million-gallon-a-year ethanol plant adjacent to the A.L. Gilbert grain mill. The plant will process 571,000 tons of corn a year to make ethanol and produce 306,000 tons of wet distiller's grain as a byproduct to be used as cattle feed.

The developer is Cilion Inc., a partnership between Western Milling, a California grain milling company, and Khosla Ventures, a venture capital firm.

The project had received approval from the county Planning Commission to move the property line between the Cilion and A.L. Gilbert properties. It also approved where a storm drain basin could be placed. No environmental reports were done.

Harriman used those OKs to launch his fight. He unsuccessfully challenged the decision and then appealed to the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors. He was turned down by the board on June 5.

Harriman vowed then to sue the county to require the environmental review.

His lawsuit asks the court to require an environmental impact report on several aspects of the project, including traffic safety, air emissions and water supply.

Harriman earlier had filed a similar lawsuit in Fresno County over the same issues, [naming the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

The lawsuit is about following proper procedures rather than money or stopping the project itself, Harriman said.

"This sets a really bad precedent for the valley," he said. "There are eight to 10 of these plants coming in, and almost all of them are coming in with an (environmental impact report)."

Ethanol plants are a good idea, and the location of this one is appropriate, Harriman said. But the county must consider the environmental ramifications of the project, he said.

Assistant County Counsel Jack Doering said Friday that the environmental report was not needed because the land is zoned for industrial uses, which includes ethanol plants.

Environmental issues were considered when the land was zoned, he said.

"The county made the decision many years ago that this would be an industrial area," Doering said.

"Mr. Harriman feels that because it is an ethanol plant, that changes the equation. The county doesn't feel that way."

The issue of setting a precedent for other plants cuts both ways, Doering said.

"The county doesn't want to set a precedent for full-blown (environmental reports) in areas where uses are already zoned," he said.

A court-required settlement conference will be scheduled soon and the county will file an answer to the lawsuit in the next month or two, Doering said.

Harriman's lawsuit against the air pollution board is the subject of a motion to dismiss on Aug. 24, and a hearing date for trial is scheduled on Oct. 7.

"I would like to let the applicants know that we are not going away," Harriman vowed. "We will go to the appellate court and the Supreme Court if we have to."

Valley partnership offers proposals for tough issues

Group focuses on water, air, transit as top priorities to tackle in the region.

By Sarah Jimenez / The Fresno Bee

Saturday, Aug. 11, 2007

HANFORD -- Air, water and transportation.

Those are the top priorities for the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, members agreed Friday.

The challenge now: tackling the complicated issues, which will require detailed plans, a lot of money and sticking together as a region.

The 30-plus member partnership held its all-day quarterly meeting at the Hanford Civic Auditorium. Members talked about an array of issues facing the Valley, including education, economic development and housing.

Gov. Schwarzenegger formed the partnership in June 2005 to address Valley needs.

Its members come from private and public entities and represent eight counties -- Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare.

On Friday, members spent most of the day talking about the Valley's most pressing needs: improving air quality, securing water and upgrading highways.

Appointees gave detailed reports about solutions for those priorities.

Air

Peter Weber, a co-chairman of the Fresno-area Regional Jobs Initiative and partnership member, said he's confident the Valley can meet smog cleanup requirements sooner than a 2024 deadline approved by the California Air Resources Board.

Improvements will come through offering incentives to businesses to use cleaner trucks and developing technology to reduce ozone.

Weber said speeding up attainment will be tough but "the energy is there to say 'what else can we do?' "

Water

The partnership signed off on a resolution supporting the governor's plan for a \$6 billion water bond on the 2008 ballot.

James Tischer, program manager for the Center for Irrigation Technology, said the governor's bond outlines plans and money for four main water issues: storage, restoration of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, conservation and cleaning up ground water.

Tischer said the partnership and water officials hope the governor and Sen. Don Perata, D-Oakland -- who has proposed a \$5 billion water plan -- can combine the best of both plans.

Transportation

Malcolm Dougherty, director of the Caltrans district stretching from Madera County to Kern County, talked about improvements along Highway 99.

The goal is to make the entire 275-mile highway at least six lanes within the next decade. Only 42% of the corridor meets that goal.

Officials expect construction on a 17-mile stretch in Madera and Merced counties along with another pending upgrade of 43 miles -- supported by \$825 million from Proposition 1B, approved in November -- will make 64% of the highway meet the six-lane mark.

During a meeting Thursday, some partnership appointees also discussed plans for high-speed rail.

Appointees agreed the Valley must come up with a regional plan for rail if any counties are going to see tracks laid, said Kirk Lindsey, a partnership appointee and California Transportation Commission representative.

The group next plans to meet on Nov. 9 in Stockton.

Smoke blocking tonight's meteor show

Staff reports

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Sunday, August 12, 2007

The annual Perseid meteor shower is expected to put on a great show tonight, but don't expect much of a view from Tulare County.

Jim Dudley, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford, said smoke from a wildfire in northern Santa Barbara County has blown into the San Joaquin Valley. Tulare County's sky, in particular, is covered in smoke.

"If it wasn't for the smoke, I'd head up to Three Rivers," Dudley said. "But the way the smoke is headed in, it doesn't matter which way you go."

The annual Perseids meteor shower is expected to reach its peak after midnight. It should be a decent show because the shower is taking place on a moonless night.

Dudley said the meteor shower can normally be seen in any part of the sky - preferably a darker area, less polluted by light. The smoke will probably ruin the view in Tulare County.

"If the wildfire burns at the current pace, we will have that smoke coming in most of the evening," Dudley said.

To see a satellite image of the smoke, go to:

<http://sat.wrh.noaa.gov/satellite/loopsat.php?wfo=hnx&area=west&type=vis&size=2>

Experts differ about ethanol-water usage

By NATE JENKINS, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, Friday, August 10, 2007

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. — The growing thirst for ethanol takes a lot of water to quench, but less than many people believe and not enough to cause serious problems, experts told farmers.

Last year in Nebraska, the nation's third-leading ethanol producer, it took 2 billion gallons of water at 15 ethanol plants to churn out 676 million gallons of the alternative fuel, Derrel Martin, an irrigation and water resources engineer said Thursday.

But roughly 900 billion gallons of rain water falls annually in Lincoln County, Martin said, addressing the public perception that ethanol production takes an inordinate amount of water.

"These plants are not consuming a huge amount of water," he said.

Martin spoke during an agriculture conference in North Platte that focused on water. Nebraska is aggressively pushing development of ethanol plants and is poised to become the second-leading producer in the country later this year. At the same time, it is struggling to meet water demands of its farmers and those in neighboring states who rely on water that passes through Nebraska.

A longtime analyst of ethanol production disagreed with Martin and questioned his figures, saying it takes an average of about 15 gallons of water to produce a gallon of ethanol - much higher than the roughly three gallons of water per gallon of ethanol Martin cited.

Groundwater tables in some states, including Missouri, have been drawn down to dangerously low levels near some ethanol plants, said David Pimentel, an ecology and agriculture professor at Cornell University.

The figures cited by both Martin and Pimentel include only a plant's production of ethanol, not the water it takes to grow corn. After adding that, about 1,700 gallons are needed to produce every gallon of ethanol, Pimentel said.

The entire water-use picture, coupled with the fuel it takes to produce ethanol, makes long-term, mass production of ethanol unsustainable, Pimentel said.

"I wish it were sustainable, I'm an agriculturalist," he said. "I wish this whole ethanol deal was a major benefit, but you've got to be a scientist first and an agriculturalist second."

Martin said the question of whether increased corn production and the irrigation it requires will overburden the state's water supply is an important one that does not yet have a clear answer.

Moratoriums on new groundwater wells are already in place in some regions, such as along the Platte River, and the Republican River basin has caps on groundwater use.

The state faces a test over whether it will control water use in fragile areas or succumb to the financial allure of planting more irrigated corn to meet ethanol demands, Martin said.

Corn prices have risen with ethanol production. There are 19 percent more acres of irrigated corn this year across the country, including about one million more irrigated acres in Nebraska, he said.

Plans designed to curtail water use in some basins could become "toothless tigers" in the face of such market pressures, he said.

Health Highlights

California Farming Town Has Most Polluted Air in U.S.

Washington Post, August 11, 2007

The central California farming town of Arvin has the worst air pollution in the United States, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

The town itself produces little air pollution but is surrounded by mountains that trap pollutants blown in from large cities, the Associated Press reported.

Many Arvin residents say the air in their town smells toxic and, on hot summer days, airborne particles coat homes and streets and obscure the view of the nearby Tehachapi mountain range.

Between 2004 and 2006, ozone in Arvin exceeded acceptable levels an average of 73 days a year. Ozone is the primary component of smog. By comparison, there were an average of four days per year of unacceptable ozone levels in the San Francisco Bay Area over the same period, the AP reported.

Beijing To Test Plan to Cut Cars Measure Intended For '08 Olympics

By Edward Cody, Washington Post Foreign Service
Washington Post, August 11, 2007

BEIJING, Aug. 10 -- Despite official hesitation, more than a million cars will be barred from Beijing's streets next week in a test of radical anti-pollution measures for next summer's Olympic Games, the city announced Friday.

The sweeping restrictions, set for Aug. 17 to Aug. 20, illustrate China's determination to be seen, at home and abroad, as doing its utmost to combat the capital's noxious air pollution in preparation for the Games.

The Communist Party government has vowed to make the Beijing Olympics a success, hoping they will become a shining moment in China's emergence on the world stage. But Jacques Rogge, the International Olympic Committee president, suggested Wednesday that some events, such as long-distance races, might have to be postponed if smog is too heavy during the competition.

Rogge's comment, in a CNN interview, diverged from repeated assurances by Beijing officials that air quality here is improving and will be acceptable for the two-week Olympic period starting Aug. 8, 2008. Wang Wei, an executive vice president of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games, reiterated the assurances at a news conference two days before Rogge's warning.

As Wang spoke, however, the city was blanketed by a thick haze of humidity, dust and exhaust fumes. The pollution was also visible during ceremonies televised worldwide from Tiananmen Square on Wednesday evening to launch the one-year countdown.

Beijing's Olympic committee has pledged that cars will be restricted during the Games as one of several steps to reduce pollution, predicting that a third of the 3 million vehicles ordinarily on the capital's streets would be banned. Officials from the committee and the Beijing traffic department said last month that a test ban would probably be enforced this Aug. 7 to Aug. 20, roughly matching next year's Olympic period. But that plan was rejected and next week's four-day test -- including a weekend -- was announced instead.

Olympic anti-pollution planners had sought a week-long test, including workdays as well as a weekend, according to He Kebin, a professor in Tsinghua University's environmental science and engineering department and an adviser to the planners. But the government cut it back, he said, out of concern for Beijing commuters.

"I think people's lives will indeed be affected because of the traffic controls from Aug. 17 to Aug. 20, and more people's lives will be affected during the 2008 Olympics," He said. "But many Chinese people have said they would be willing to sacrifice convenience for a clean 2008 Olympics."

Du Shaozhong, deputy director of Beijing's Environmental Protection Bureau, told reporters that only cars with license plates ending in odd numbers will be allowed on the streets Aug. 17, only those with even numbers will be allowed Aug. 18, and so on through Aug. 20. There will be even stiffer restrictions on government cars.

Police cars, taxis, ambulances and buses will not be affected, he said. And Liu Xiaoming, deputy director of the city's transport committee, promised increased bus and subway service during the test period.

The test measures will keep up to 1.3 million cars off the road, Du predicted. While restrictions are in force, experts will conduct tests around the city to see how much pollution is reduced, he added.

Environmental activists have long urged Beijing officials to cut the number of cars on the streets, which increases by 1,000 each day. But despite acknowledging that pollution is a major problem, the government has been reluctant to act. One reason is the economic clout of the auto industry. Another is that buying a car is a big part of the march toward middle-class ease on which the Communist Party has based its rule in recent years.

Officials nevertheless have high hopes for next week's experiment because pollution dropped significantly during November's Sino-African summit, when police restricted the number of private cars to allow participants to escape traffic jams.

Beijing drivers, who endure some of the world's most clogged streets in addition to the foul air, said they could see the logic of banning cars for the Olympics, but they were quick to point out that many suburbanites are forced to drive to work because of infrequent bus service in outlying areas.

"At least the government is trying, which is good news," said Deng Xiaorong, an editor.

"It's hard for those colleagues who live far away from the company," objected Li Haibin, a cellphone engineer.

Zhang Ge, a computer salesman who lives in the outer suburbs, said officials had come up with a merely cosmetic solution to Beijing's long-term pollution problem as a way to please foreigners coming for the Olympics. What is needed is a long-term solution, he said.

"And no one mentioned what the punishment will be if we violate the rule," he added. "Is it coercive or voluntary? Few people will follow the rule if there is no sanction. Anyway, I will drive even if they punish me during the test period, because I really need a car."

Pauma Indians propose big casino in north San Diego County

San Diego Union Tribune,

Modesto Bee, Thursday, August 9, 2007

PALA, Calif. — The Pauma Band of Mission Indians plans to replace its 1,090-slot casino in north San Diego County with a 23-story, 400-room hotel that would have twice as many slot machines.

The proposed \$300-million dollar resort is a bid to compete against casinos operated by neighboring tribes such as Pala and Pechanga.

The 66-acre Pauma resort would replace an existing gambling hall, which will continue to operate out of large metal-framed tents during construction. The tribe hasn't decided what to call the new casino or when it will open.

The proposed casino would feature 110,000 square feet of gambling space, with room for 2,500 slots, though the plan calls for it to open with 2,000.

Details of plans are in a draft environmental impact report, released Wednesday, that says the project would negatively affect traffic, air quality, noise and public safety, but finds that all those issues can be dealt with.

The head of a local planning group welcomed the tribe's plans to improve state Route 76 by adding a traffic light and turning lanes at the reservation road leading to the casino.

"It all comes down to what can be done about Highway 76," said Joe Chisholm, chairman of the Pala-Pauma Planning Group.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Aug. 13, 2007:](#)

Such a small cost

Fresno County air quality comes down to what we are willing to pay for living here. The California Institute for Rural Studies' report on dairy emissions in the county puts the cost of substantially reducing dairy emission precursors to smog and fine particulate pollution at \$66 per milk cow, or about three cents per gallon of milk, which would significantly reduce the \$1,124 yearly cost per Fresno County resident of health-related costs for high asthma rates, lung disease, cardiac arrest and premature mortality.

While subsidies have been discussed for the cost of retrofitting diesel engines in new statewide regulations, the county Planning and Development Department does not even seem to be able to require, in proposed regulations for dairy and feedlot facilities, the installation of enclosed, cooled barns with biofilters and covered anaerobic digesters that are currently the best available technology for reducing dairy emissions.

Let the industry pass on the cost of adopting these mitigating measures. Three cents per gallon of milk is nothing compared to our health-related costs. If competition is the problem, find another way to reimburse them for their largesse in helping us live healthy lives while enjoying the benefits of a thriving, safe dairy industry.

*Georgia Sisson, retired environmental health specialist
Fresno County*

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sat., Aug. 11, 2007:](#)

Hear the high-speed message

Garamendi stumps for a real 21st century transportation system for California.

It's been nearly 20 years since California began the process of building a high-speed rail line to link the various regions of the state.

Two decades -- and not a single inch of track has yet been laid. That's a sad contrast to the state's long history of accepting great engineering challenges and delivering on them.

Lt. Gov. John Garamendi is no stranger to high-speed rail. As a state senator, Garamendi -- along with Rep. Jim Costa, then a Fresno Assemblyman -- authored the original legislation in 1988 that established the state's High Speed Rail Authority. Both men have been strong advocates for the system ever since.

Garamendi was in Hanford Thursday to bring the message to the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley board of directors. We hope they heard it. The partnership's board includes the cabinet secretaries in Gov.

Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration, and the governor, curiously, has become the principal obstacle not only to moving high-speed rail ahead, but to keeping it alive at all.

Truth be told, there wasn't much new in Garamendi's remarks. That's because the case for high-speed rail is as self-evident and strong as it was 20 years ago.

We can't continue to build new freeways to solve the transportation demands of a rapidly growing population. Expanding freeways and airports to meet the new needs would cost three times as much as building a high-speed rail with the same passenger capacity.

Building more and more freeways is utterly contradictory to the need to reduce vehicle emissions -- something the governor says is near and dear to his heart.

If we had begun high-speed rail 20 years ago, when Southern California's aerospace industry began its precipitous decline, many of those jobs and much of that expertise could have easily shifted to the engineering and manufacturing of the rail system.

The high-speed rail system would be an enormous economic development boost for the Valley, the fastest growing region in the state. It would mean hundreds of high-paying jobs for construction, initially, and then for maintenance and development of subsequent generations of rolling stock and other equipment.

But now funding for the system is hung up in the budget crisis in Sacramento, and dangling by a thread. The governor proposes barely over \$1 million in funds for the effort; it should be closer to \$100 million. Garamendi suggested using Proposition 1B money to jump-start the high-speed project. That's a very good idea.

Garamendi offered the partnership directors an important reminder. California is the state that built vast water projects, magnificent bridges and world-class university systems -- all in less than 20 years. Have we lost that vision, and the will to pursue it?

[Bakersfield Californian Editorial, Monday, August 13, 2007:](#)

Warning: Jogging can be dangerous

Kern County's childhood obesity problem would seem to have a simple, sensible solution: Put down the joystick, kid, and go play outside.

That can be more challenging than it might seem, as many parents in the Central Valley can attest.

Now this: Bad air can make strenuous outdoor exercise harmful. On the dirtiest of days, your kid might actually be better off chained to his video-game console. You might be, too.

A 2004 review of pollution studies worldwide conducted by Australia's University of Brisbane, and reported by *The New York Times*, concluded that low concentrations of air pollution inhaled during exercise caused the same sort of lung damage as that caused by high concentrations in sedentary people.

A February article in the New England Journal of Medicine, using data from the Women's Health Initiative, and also reported in the *Times*, revealed that women who live in communities with relatively high levels of particulate matter, or soot, were much more likely to die of heart attacks than women whose communities had cleaner air. Since outdoor exercise delivers elevated doses of particulate matter, active women -- active people in general -- ought to pay attention.

Experts say people shouldn't stop exercising outdoors just because of pollution. They should just be more cognizant of the best time and place to do so. Avoid getting too close to exhaust-belching automobile traffic, for example, and consider air-quality forecasts before setting out.

Smoking, to put all this in perspective, is much more harmful than air pollution. And one form of exercise can actually help clean the air: Bicycling to and from work every day takes one more car off the road and provides a great workout.

Bakersfield, the third-sootiest city in America (coming in right after Los Angeles and Pittsburgh) needs to take note. Just as pollution can be particularly detrimental to outdoor exercise, so can outdoor exercise be helpful in fighting pollution. Something to think about on your next jog.

[Sacramento Bee, Guest Commentary, Friday, August 10, 2007](#)

Hotter weather can cause health woes

By Dr. Jason Eberhart-Phillips -

Summers around here are hot, and they may be getting hotter. What does this mean for human health?

Average maximum temperatures were 1.2 degrees Fahrenheit above normal in the Sacramento area during the summer of 2006, according to a new report released by Environment California. The group said that last summer was the second warmest on record for the lower 48 states, based on data routinely collected by the National Climatic Data Center.

These findings follow a report by the Associated Press that deaths statewide during last July's heat wave had spiked to 466 more than the average for the previous six years. Public health officials had earlier estimated that last July's triple-digit heat had claimed 143 lives, but they acknowledged that this was probably an undercount.

Carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere capture the sun's energy and warm the Earth. Without this "greenhouse effect," temperatures on the planet would be too cold to support life.

But in the last 150 years, human activity -- particularly the burning of fossil fuels -- has increased the concentration of these gases, trapping more heat close to the Earth's surface. The result is a changing climate and the destabilization of many natural ecosystems, from arctic glaciers to alpine wildfires to tropical coral reefs.

While much attention has been focused on the harmful consequences of climate change for the natural world, there is now increasing awareness that it may also be bad for human health. The potential health impacts of climate change in our communities are numerous:

Heat waves -- Periods of extreme heat are likely to increase in frequency and severity. If so, we can expect more cases of heat stroke and heat exhaustion, especially among the elderly and people with heart problems, as the cardiovascular system has to work harder to keep the body cool during extreme heat.

Air pollution -- Warmer temperatures increase the concentration of ozone at ground level. Ozone can damage lung tissue, and it worsens breathing problems for people with asthma and other respiratory conditions.

Infectious diseases -- Hotter temperatures and changing patterns of humidity can alter the geographic range of mosquitoes and other insects that carry diseases such as malaria, encephalitis and dengue fever. Warmer weather also speeds up the life cycle of infectious agents like West Nile virus, making transmission to humans more efficient.

Weather disasters -- Climate change can increase the occurrence of severe storms in some areas, leading to increased deaths, injuries, infectious diseases and stress-related disorders. Floods, a particular concern for Sacramento, could trigger outbreaks of intestinal diseases, as well as exposure to toxic chemicals from agricultural runoff and contaminated urban stormwater.

Uncertainties about the health effects of climate change remain, but the potential risks are serious and should motivate us all to take a hard look at ways we can reduce emissions of harmful greenhouse gases. The health of the planet and its people are intricately linked.