

Bike to work day set this week

Modesto Bee, Monday, October 06, 2008

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District invites residents to take part in Bike to Work Day Tuesday, rescheduled from July due to bad air quality caused by forest fires. At 7:15 a.m., Modesto police will conduct a bike escort to and from Tenth Street Place, where the city will offer Rideshare information.

Air quality officials studying impact of wildfires

The Associated Press

In S.F. Chronicle, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Tuesday, October 07, 2008

FRESNO, Calif.—Air quality officials are trying to determine whether wildfires left untended in the Sierra Nevada contribute to ozone violations in the San Joaquin Valley.

Officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District say September's ozone violations were the worst in five years. Around that time, U.S. Park and Forest Service officials were letting the remote Tehipite fire burn more than 11,000 acres, in part because of potential risk to firefighters. They say fires are natural events that clear brush and rejuvenate forests.

Air quality officials will study data to determine whether that fire and another fire officials opted to extinguish contributed to bad-air days across the Valley. Federal air violations don't count if fires caused them.

Meetings planned on Bay Area clean air plans

By Denis Cuff

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, October 7, 2008

The public is invited to make suggestions on how to get cleaner air in the Bay Area in a series of public meetings this month on preparing a new regional air quality plan.

Regional air pollution, transportation and planning agencies are joining forces to prepare a unified plan to control smog, fine particles, toxic air contaminants, and global warming gases.

The meetings are scheduled as follows:

- San Jose, 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, San Jose City Hall, room W119 and W120, 200 East Santa Clara St.
- Pleasanton, 6 p.m. Oct. 23 at the Pleasanton Senior Center, 5353 Sunol Blvd.
- San Leandro, 5:30 p.m. Oct. 27 at the San Leandro Public Library, Estudillo Room, 300 Estudillo Ave.
- San Francisco, 5:30 p.m., Bayview/Anna E. Waden Public Library, 5075 Third St.

For more information, go to www.baaqmd.gov/ and click on 2009 clean air plan.

UN calls for review on biofuel subsidies

By Marta Falconi, Associated Press Writer

Modesto Bee, Tuesday, October 07, 2008

ROME -- A U.N. agency on Tuesday called for an urgent review of agriculture and biofuel subsidies and trade barriers, saying their removal would increase opportunities for developing countries to take advantage of rising biofuel demand.

The Food and Agriculture Organization said in a newly released report that keeping the trade barriers may prolong and deepen the food crisis.

"Current policies tend to favor producers in some developed countries over producers in most developing countries," FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf said. "The challenge is to reduce or manage the risks while sharing the opportunities more widely."

Growing demand for biofuels, which are made from crops such as sugar cane and corn, will contribute to food price increases, but can also promote rural development in poor countries - provided that small farmers gain access to markets and receive support to boost their production.

The Rome-based agency also said in its yearly report that biofuels, although environmentally friendly, will not necessarily contribute as much as previously thought to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Their impact depends on how and where biofuels are produced and brought to the market, it said.

Diouf said the transition to second-generation biofuels, which hold promise for [reducing gas emissions](#), should be sped up. Such biofuels, using wood, tall grasses, forestry and crop residues, are being developed but are not commercially available.

The U.N. has called on the international community to issue guidelines to ensure biofuel crops do not compete with food crops and do not encourage deforestation.

Biofuel production based on agricultural commodities, which more than tripled from 2000 to 2007, covers nearly 2 percent of the world's consumption of transport fuels, the agency said. While the growth is projected to continue, the contribution of liquid biofuels - mostly ethanol and biodiesel - to transport energy will remain limited, it said.

Diouf said it was too early to assess the impact of the current financial crisis on developing countries and humanitarian agencies, but he expressed "great concern" that a recession would shift governments' priorities on food aid.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2008:](#)

High-speed rail pays off

New study says Valley will greatly benefit from building system.

A new study clearly defines the benefits to the Valley of the proposed high-speed rail project -- and the tally is in the billions of dollars.

The report, authored by Shawn Kantor, a professor at the University of California at Merced, says the direct economic benefits of savings in the Central Valley -- which includes the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys -- would total \$3 billion annually.

Some of those benefits would come in the form of savings of time and money as passengers shift from cars and airplanes to the less-expensive trains. There would also be savings in travel time, reduced freeway and airport congestion, lowered accident risk and productivity gains from train travel -- it's easy and safe to use a laptop or a phone on a train; it's not advisable from behind the wheel of a car on Highway 99.

Economic benefits would include thousands of new jobs, many very well-paying, both in construction and subsequent operation of the trains. Kantor points out that the Valley -- where the longest single stretch of tracks will be -- would absorb somewhere between 15% and 40% of the \$40 billion it's estimated the system will cost to build.

Building the system would have a "pronounced effect" on service, communications, utilities, finance, insurance and real estate sectors of the Valley economy, Kantor found.

It gets better. The high-speed system will permit the Valley to more fully participate in the statewide economy, Kantor said. "Market integration" would mean as much as \$48 billion annually in new income.

Kantor's study bolsters the argument in favor of Proposition 1A, the \$9.9 billion bond measure on the November ballot that would jump-start the construction of the nation's first true high-speed rail system.

We have long maintained that all the regions of the state -- even those not directly served by high-speed rail -- would benefit from its construction, but we've also felt that the Valley stands to gain the most. We'll see enormous economic benefits, from the jobs created to build and operate

the system to greater connectivity with the rest of the state. We'll see cleaner air as many drivers and air passengers choose the high-speed alternative.

And we'll start to get those benefits sooner than most. The system's first stretch of track is likely to connect Bakersfield and Merced, through Fresno. The trains must be tested and certified before the system opens, a process that will take two to three years. And the only place in the 800-mile system where the trains will run at top speed -- about 220 miles per hour -- is through the Valley. So that test track, which will later form part of the full system, will be built here.

The economic case for high-speed rail is well-established. It's even more important in tough times like these, when there's such a great need for jobs and investment.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2008:](#)

Vote no on Props. 7 and 10

The fine print makes both measures disingenuous

We're all for saving the environment and developing cleaner energy. But poorly conceived or even disingenuous proposals should not be written into state law. That's the case with Propositions 7 and 10 -- both billed as pathways to a cleaner environment and less polluted future. Voters should reject both.

Proposition 7

Environmentalists, industrialists, municipal and private utilities, labor unions and scientists all have linked arms to oppose this plan. Why would such a diverse group put aside their huge differences to gang up on a proposition that purports to help clean up bad air and reduce global warming? Because it is more likely to have the opposite effect.

The heart of Proposition 7 requires all electricity providers to get 50% of their power from renewable sources by 2025.

State law requires investor-owned utilities such as Pacific Gas & Electric to get a portion of their power from renewable resources. Proposition 7 would extend the requirement to smaller public utilities.

In many cases, that's unfair, because most already generate a significant portion of their electricity through the most nonpolluting means possible -- hydroelectricity. But they would get no "green credit" for that power. Nor would they get any green credit for investing in additional hydro power.

It gets worse. Under the proposition, utilities would get credit only for green power generated at plants producing 30 megawatts or more. That would mean any help given to homeowners to install solar panels wouldn't count for green credit. If it doesn't count, what incentive does any utility -- private or public -- have for helping to solarize homes or for creating biomass generation on farms?

This proposition has a host of similar problems. Worse yet, if passed, it would take a two-thirds vote to fix them.

Proposition 10

T. Boone Pickens has made a lot of money speculating on oil. Now he's speculating on the desire of voters to go green. He wants California to pony up \$5 billion in bonds (which will require \$10 billion to repay) to help him sell more natural gas.

You won't find that expressed in the proposition's language. Instead, you'll find an enticement --- nearly \$3 billion in rebates -- to buy cars and trucks that use alternative energy. But there's a catch. This proposition would allocate the greatest proportion of those incentives to vehicles powered by natural gas. And where will the owners of these new vehicles get that gas?

Well, that's where Pickens' speculation pays off -- he owns a natural gas company.

There are other concerns. Along with short-changing buyers of electric or hybrid cars, it provides much higher incentives to businesses than to those buying passenger vehicles. And it has no provisions to keep people from getting rebates here, then driving to another state and selling the vehicle -- in effect negating any advantage.

Here in the San Joaquin Valley, where the air is frequently dangerous to breathe, we're keenly aware of the necessity to cut vehicle pollution. We just think there are better ways to do it -- ways that will make winners of us all, and not just T. Boone Pickens.

[L.A. Times editorial, Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2008:](#)

Coal and votes

Obama and McCain's embrace of coal is mostly about pandering to swing-state voters.

The political dilemma over coal resurfaced in last week's vice presidential debate, when Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Sarah Palin got into a tiff over Biden's stance on clean coal. Earlier, at an Ohio rally, Biden had told a reporter, "We're not supporting clean coal." Apparently, he hadn't checked with his running mate -- Obama disagrees. Biden rushed to cover his gaffe; during the debate by saying his remarks had been taken out of context.

The talk about clean coal is similar to an earlier political fracas over clean cars. Faced with calls for tighter fuel economy standards, Detroit responded with ad campaigns pointing out all the money it was spending to develop cars that would run on hydrogen fuel cells, which would emit nothing but water. In other words: We don't need to clean up now, because the car of the future is on the way. Never mind that the hydrogen fuel cell is a speculative technology that may never arrive.

Coal producers are similarly trying to head off future greenhouse-gas regulation by marketing so-called clean coal, which relies on the notion that we eventually will be able to liquefy carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants and pump the waste underground, a process called "carbon sequestration." Even if all the bugs can be worked out -- and there are serious concerns that the underground carbon would leak into the atmosphere -- this would be an extremely expensive process that might never pencil out economically.

Coal backers rightly point out that even without carbon sequestration, new technologies have reduced some emissions. But this is sort of like tobacco companies claiming that filtered cigarettes are "safe"; just because it's cleaner doesn't make it clean. From extraction to combustion, coal is an environmental catastrophe. It is the most carbon-intensive fossil fuel, the top source of mercury pollution and among the top causes of global warming. Particles and soot from burning coal kill thousands of Americans every year. And its extraction ruins ecosystems as mountains are blown apart and the rubble is tossed into streams.

McCain and Obama back coal because they want to win key coal-producing swing states such as Virginia and Pennsylvania. Yet their embrace of a 19th century solution to a 21st century energy problem is an embarrassment to both campaigns.

[N.Y. Times editorial, Monday, Oct. 6, 2008:](#)

Cut the Sprawl, Cut the Warming

For years, while Washington slept, most of the serious work on climate change has occurred in the states, and no state has worked harder than California. The latest example of California's originality is a new law — the nation's first — intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by curbing urban sprawl and cutting back the time people have to spend in their automobiles.

Passenger vehicles are the biggest single source of carbon dioxide in California, producing nearly one-third of the total. Meanwhile, the number of miles driven in California has increased 50 percent faster than the rate of population growth, largely because people have to drive greater distances in their daily lives.

The new law has many moving parts, but the basic sequence is straightforward. The state's Air Resources Board will determine the level of emissions produced by cars and light trucks, including S.U.V.'s, in each of California's 17 metropolitan planning areas. Emissions-reduction goals for 2020 and 2035 would be assigned to each area. Local governments would then devise

strategies for housing development, road-building and other land uses to shorten travel distances, reduce driving and meet the new targets.

One obvious solution would be to change zoning laws so developers can build new housing closer to where people work. Another is to improve mass transit — in woefully short supply in California — so commuters don't have to rely so much on cars.

The bill contains significant incentives, including the promise of substantial federal and state money to regions whose plans pass muster. In addition, and with the consent of the environmental community, the state will relax various environmental rules to allow "infill" — higher-density land use in or near cities and towns.

The bill's architect, State Senator Darrell Steinberg, worked closely with developers and environmental groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council. The measure is the latest in a string of initiatives from the California Legislature, including a 2002 law that would greatly reduce carbon emissions from automobiles, and a 2006 law requiring that one-fifth of California's energy come from wind and other renewable sources.

Given California's size, these and other initiatives will help reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. Even more progress would be made if others follow. New York and 15 other states have already said they will adopt California's automobile emissions standards when the federal government gives them the green light — which the Bush administration has stubbornly refused to do.

There is, of course, no substitute for federal action or for American global leadership on climate change, both of which the next president will have to deliver.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses documentation proves the impact of cargo and cruise ships on atmospheric pollution. For more information on this Spanish clip, contact Claudia Encinas at (559) 230-5851.

Documentan la Carga de Contaminación Atmosférica de las Grandes Embarcaciones

PR Newswire-HPRW

Radio Bilingüe, Monday, October 6, 2008

Un nuevo informe publicado revela que las grandes embarcaciones oceánicas, como cruceros y buques de carga de contenedores, que navegan aguas estadounidenses son grandes emisores de gases que contaminan el aire. Estas embarcaciones liberan peligrosos agentes contaminantes diesel que amenazan la salud de las comunidades portuarias en Estados Unidos, constituyen una gran fuente de niebla tóxica en las ciudades y son unas de las principales emisoras de gases que producen calentamiento global.

El informe presentado por el Fondo para la Defensa del Medioambiente, titulado "Floating Smokestacks: A Call for Action to Clean Up Shipping Pollution", analiza también la contaminación en los puertos de la región baja de Mississippi, Seattle/Tacoma, Los Ángeles/Long Beach, Nueva York/Nueva Jersey, Houston/Galveston y los Grandes Lagos. Artículo completo en: <http://media.prnewswire.com/en/jsp/main.jsp?resourceid=3832617>