

Wishful Greening

By Don Willenburg

Under the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, California is to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. This is a noble goal, and the California Air Resources Board last month released a 93-page draft "scoping plan" about ways to help lower the state's greenhouse gas emissions.

Tellingly, Page 2 — the first page after the pretty cover — and at least four other pages of the report are marked "This Page Intentionally Blank," an inexplicable waste of paper (and the water to produce it, and the energy, and the associated greenhouse gases) in a document ostensibly about "greening" California. Unfortunately, there are some inexplicable blanks in the analysis as well, with even more serious consequences.

The draft plan identifies the main greenhouse gas culprit. Like President Bush and Osama bin Laden, however, the scoping plan pays lip service to arresting that culprit, but rather than doing so instead vents on easier targets and asks for as little sacrifice and change by the population as possible.

The main culprit: transportation (read: cars). The draft plan acknowledges that transportation is the single largest contributor in the state, accounting for 38 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. But the plan does not address the reduction of car traffic except incidentally, such as a factor in planning new community developments. Instead, the plan pins all hope on lighter-carbon fuel and more fuel-efficient vehicles. All to be hoped for and worked toward, but population growth alone is likely to outstrip many such efficiency gains in vehicles. Further, increased car traffic has a variety of other negative impacts, including: in-

creased road construction and maintenance costs; time wasted in traffic; traffic fatalities and injuries (one of many sad facts: Auto accidents are the No. 1 cause of death for U.S. children ages 3-14); the tens of thousands of dollars many consumers must spend on fuel and maintenance and repair and insurance rather than food, housing, medicine, college and investments. Some of these, of course, have greenhouse gas issues themselves (e.g., road construction).

The draft plan avoids the words "public transportation" all together, and mentions bicycles only as an aside. These are two proven methods for reducing car traffic. Taking public transportation rather than driving greatly reduces per capita greenhouse gas emissions. Bicycles involve zero greenhouse gas emissions (at least once they have been built and delivered to the store).

The scoping plan's failure to feature these as means of reducing greenhouse gases is inexplicable other than to say: Business as usual, cars uber alles. "Trust in the same market forces that got us into this mess to get us out. Consumers need do nothing but wait for the market to provide the solution. The answer lies in: shopping! Until then, and after then, keep driving."

The plan should, instead, set real goals for investment in public transportation. The plan should also endorse policies like those embodied in the Congressional resolution (Resolution 305) sponsored by Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., which calls for increased and improved bicycling programs at the local, state and national levels. "If you build it, they will come." If we build roads, there will be more cars. If we build bike trails and bike routes on traffic streets, there will be more bicycle riders. Ask people in Davis, or Santa Monica, or

Berkeley, or Sausalito, or anyplace else it has happened. In San Francisco, for example, the number of bicyclists using a street increases as much as 300 percent when a bike lane is striped. In Portland, Ore., bike ridership is up 400 percent after such improvements. In Minneapolis, after investment in nonmotorized infrastructure, almost 20 percent of all trips are now walking or by bike. Imagine if that were true in Los Angeles.

Blumenauer's resolution (which has passed the House and is awaiting Senate approval) recognizes that many car trips are only a mile or two — distances most everybody could cover in a bicycle, with multiple benefits. Not the least of which is reduction in greenhouse gases.

The scoping plan could and should call for funding and incentives to create more bicycle trails and routes; to allow and facilitate bicycles aboard rail and bus systems; to provide safe bike parking at destinations; to put a bike or bike/pedestrian lane on all portions of all major bridges in the state.

The scoping plan also goes after other big players in the greenhouse gas arena, and in fairness, it should. No one sector — industry, buildings, agriculture, water, etc. — should either escape or bear the brunt of new regulation. But failure to address transportation issues by reducing car use, in favor of wishful thinking that technology will solve everything (Just wait for the new generation light bulb! Just wait for the new generation car engine!) disservices the goal of the scoping plan and California legislation.

The draft-scoping plan is a worthwhile start down a necessary path. But it — and we — cannot simply ignore known, effective answers to the single largest greenhouse gas problem in the state and hope to achieve the goal of greening California.

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