



Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter - July, 2014

* General Meetings *

Tuesday, July 15th: Pot Luck Poetry Party!

At the Witte Museum, Memorial Room, dinner at 6 pm, program 6:30-8:30 pm. Please bring a tasty dish for the potluck dinner. This is our 3rd annual summer eco-poetry event. We are very happy to welcome back contributors:

- San Antonio's inaugural poet laureate Carmen Tafolla
- Bryce Milligan, eco-balladeer and Wings Press publisher
- Carol Reposo, editor of the arts-literary journal *Voices de la Luna*
- Jim LaVilla Havelin, San Antonio National Poetry Month organizer and Gemini Ink and Bihl Haus Arts poetry teacher
- Lahab Assef Al-Jundi, poet author of *No Faith At All*
- Mobi Warren, our emcee and Alamo Chapter poetess

Rose Catacalos, Texas Poet Laureate, has been invited and we hope she will join us also. These are top San Antonio poets that have previously read and really love this event. They are enthusiastic about returning. Their work often expresses deep connections to and concerns for the natural world. Participants will be led by Mobi to contribute to a collective poetry-writing experience by crafting a line on a poetry banner.

Tuesday, August 19th: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland plus Svalbard Archipelago (Norway)

Alan Montemayor and Cheryl Hamilton, will provide wonderful exploration of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, and the Svalbard Archipelago, including the Northernmost Point, just 540 nautical miles from the North Pole, land of the polar bear, beluga, walrus and reindeer. This expedition will be on Spitsbergen Explorer.

Tuesday, September 16th: Chief Sustainability Officer for San Antonio's Office of Sustainability

Doug Melnick comes to San Antonio from Albany, NY. Under his leadership, Albany was recognized recently by Governor Cuomo as one of six cities in New York to have participated in the Climate Smart Communities Certification Program, which you can read about [here](#). Mr. Melnick's bio can be found [here](#).

Times, maps and speaker bios are on our Events page.

A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

The Alamo Sierra Club supports VIA's multi-modal transit plans, including the streetcar segment. Opponents of these plans are coalescing and mounting a noisy and determined campaign to bring down these plans. VIA has tried hard to provide for public education, forums, and surveys. It seems everyone with an opinion has made it known—*The Express News* alone has published dozens of commentaries and letters. This has helped raise the level of attention and scrutiny and is a great opportunity to learn diverse needs and perspectives. But the level of misinformation, due to incomplete analysis, ignorance and intention is clouding the issue and is unfair and biased. Decision makers should not be intimidated by the threats and contentiousness or veer from choosing a path that will bring the greatest future good to the broader Alamo community. We need Alamo Sierrans to help make this happen.

So what are some of the demands of those who oppose streetcars?

- "Don't disrupt transit to put in streetcar tracks," but some will then advise that inner-city streets be expanded for more cars, trucks and buses, as Lamar Smith did. We can disrupt business and transit for a limited time putting in streetcars (and the rest of a multi-modal system for the future) or suffer increasing and perpetual disruption from congestion, gridlock and pollution as traffic grows along with the population and density. Even if we add more lanes, we know from transportation studies that building more lanes to relieve congestion will fail, since additional traffic will rise until congestion returns—which we have seen on roadways in San Antonio, as on 1604.
- "Get developers and businesses to pledge the streetcar funds." Then why not demand the same from them and property owners for all the other costly and controversial tax and ratepayer funded transit, water, sewer, electric, gas, and water systems that serve those areas?
- "Let people vote." Opponents created a political action committee and claim to have the signatures to put streetcar funding to a vote, knowing that there is no legal basis for this. Lamar Smith even advises we do this on all "costly and controversial projects." If that happens, then we are headed for more gridlock of the political kind. What is to stop a referendum on every project that meets that standard? 110? 135? 1604? 281? Wurzbach

Parkway? In fact, this could open the door for votes on CPS Energy, SAWS and private projects too. "The people" can't vote on all these projects, especially when there is so much advocacy misinformation on all sides and Big Money in referendum campaigns. This is why we have professionals to design plans, elected leaders to make decisions, input from citizen committees, and public outreach forums--VIA has held 220 public meetings on the streetcar.

- "Buy more buses or hundreds of rubber wheeled trolleys." Opponents claim they work better, safer, faster, and cheaper than streetcars with no disruption. If any of them actually read complete analyses they would know that this is untrue. Also if they used the VIA bus system regularly to get around, like those demographic groups who don't drive, they would know that the system is inadequate and that, especially downtown, the VIA buses (that run on diesel or compressed natural gas) already produce considerable congestion, noise, and pollution in some areas. Only electric streetcars can reduce noise and pollution and accommodate high passenger numbers that enter and exit quickly at sidewalk level, more comfortably, with lower operational cost.
- "Don't waste taxpayer money on a streetcar," yet they have no problem with tax and rate payers spending funds and subsidizing the bills for the much higher per capita costs and greater risks of unsustainable highway and utility expansions crisscrossing new sprawl over the aquifer, farm and ranchland, enhancing their net worth and auto-dependent life styles. Loop 1604 cost hundreds of millions. Just the recent expansion of a 10-mile stretch of West 1604 from 2 to 4 main lanes with 5 overpasses cost about \$200 million. Planned, untolled expansion of Hwy 281 north to Bulverde, just a 7.3-mile project, was estimated in 2013 at \$448 million (or over \$60 million a mile). By contrast, VIA's six mile streetcar line is a bargain at \$280 million, and its users will pay fees.
- "Use our tax dollars wisely." Everybody has their notion of a wise way to spend tax dollars. But are they for the future common good or for narrow or selfish reasons? Roger Gray argues, if the city wants denser development, spend the money directly on incentives for real estate developers (like himself). David Straus, founder of Paseo del Rio, argues spend it on "major restoration of Alamo Plaza." Red McCombs, a car dealer, is not in favor knowing that his sales will suffer.

San Antonio is such a sprawling, car dependent city that suburbanites outnumber urbanites. Suburbanites want transit funds to ease their journeys, but this just enables more rural development, much of it over the aquifer recharge and contributing zones, greater vehicle miles traveled that feed climate change, and higher per capita infrastructure costs. Meanwhile, sustainable transport planning relegates funding for single occupant vehicle transit improvements to the lowest priority, and we are witnessing this change here, slowly.



The disputed funds are earmarked for the streetcar. Local, state, federal agencies—VIA, TXDOT and DOT—made these monies available in recognition of the need for our multi-modal transit system plans and this segment designed for the city center. Only about 11% is funded by the City of San Antonio, which is a bargain investment for the wide-ranging benefits and tax revenues the system can bring. There are growing numbers of people who don't drive or who want to reduce automobile use--conscientious urbanites, Millennials, students, empty nesters, tourists, conventioners, and the elderly, disabled, poor, and carless—who await a better alternative transit system.

San Antonio has a growing mobility problem that won't be resolved by adding more lanes or downtown buses. San Antonio adopted sustainable development as a policy goal. That means we intend to reduce vehicle miles traveled by limiting sprawl and encouraging more density and redevelopment, especially of the underutilized areas inside Loop 410. We cannot afford to let the public remain ignorant of the limits to growth and sustainable solutions, or allow vested interests to impede these changes.

Unfortunately streetcar supporters have generally remained outside the fray. I urge Alamo Sierrans to act now. Please let VIA, City Council and the Bexar County Commission, as well as the media, know of your support for VIA's multi-modal plans, including the streetcar leg. Phone, send letters or emails or make an appointment now.

For more information, here are three links:

- [VIA's modern streetcar](#)
- [Light rail vs streetcars](#)
- ["Evaluating Rail Transit Criticism"](#) by The Victoria (Canada) Transport Policy Institute

by Margaret Day, Executive Committee Chair

Lion's Field Events

Monthly films and presentations for your edification and enjoyment

Wednesday, July 23rd: **Forks Over Knives**

Excellent film on how to eat for health and for a healthy planet. A nutritional study of 800,000 subjects yields many interesting findings. Is food medicine and can it prevent and reverse disease? What about organic?

Our Lion's Field events are **free** and open to the public. They occur on the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Lion's Field Adult Center, 2809 Broadway @ Mulberry. Programs begin at **6:30 p.m.**

Visit our Lion's Field Events page for a map and additional information.

Climate change a huge economic risk

...Is the title of a [USA Today article 6/24](#) about a bi-partisan report framing climate change in stark economic terms.

Climate change poses profound risks to the U.S. economy and needs to be addressed immediately, says a bipartisan report Tuesday by a coalition of financial leaders that includes three former Treasury secretaries. Two of the most severe impacts — sea level rise and extreme heat — will likely cost billions of dollars in annual property loss, threaten human health, lower labor productivity and endanger the nation's electricity grids, says the report by the Risky Business Project.

"The risks are more perverse and cruel than we saw with the financial crisis, because they accumulate over time," Henry Paulson Jr., the Treasury secretary for President George W. Bush, told reporters Tuesday, noting heat-trapping carbon dioxide emissions linger in the atmosphere a long time.

"The good news: If we act immediately we can avert the worst outcomes," Paulson said, adding U.S. businesses need to unite and lead the push for national change. "We need to take out an insurance policy. It's that simple."

"We cannot afford to waste another minute," said Michael Bloomberg, GOP mayor of New York City from 2002 through 2013. He said rising sea levels will make storms like Sandy, which devastated his city and parts of New Jersey in 2012, worse. "We have to plan for risks," he said. "Climate is one of them."

Paulson and Bloomberg, along with billionaire former hedge fund executive and Democrat Thomas Steyer, led the project that produced the report, compiled by climate scientists and the economic research firm Rhodium Group. Their committee also includes George Shultz, Treasury secretary for President Richard Nixon, and Robert Rubin, Treasury secretary for President Bill Clinton.

Also covered by [NPR Morning Edition 6/24](#), note the link to the 3:31 audio clip. Likewise, in [The Wall Street Journal 6/23](#). Here's the [report itself](#), titled *Risky Business: The Economic Risks of Climate Change in the United States*. There is an executive summary followed by the six sections of the report, last of which is conclusion, with a download link.

by Kevin Hartley, Newsletter Editor

The Coming Climate Crash

...Is the title of [an article on the New York Times opinion page 6/21](#), by Henry Paulson Jr (note reference in the previous article). The following is the beginning of the article:

There is a time for weighing evidence and a time for acting. And if there's one thing I've learned throughout my work in finance, government and conservation, it is to act before problems become too big to manage. For too many years, we failed to rein in the excesses building up in the nation's financial markets. When the credit bubble burst in 2008, the damage was devastating. Millions suffered. Many still do. We're making the same mistake today with climate change. We're staring down a climate bubble that poses enormous risks to both our environment and economy. The warning signs are clear and growing more urgent as the risks go unchecked. This is a crisis we can't afford to ignore. I feel as if I'm watching as we fly in slow motion on a collision course toward a giant mountain. We can see the crash coming, and yet we're sitting on our hands rather than altering course.

by Kevin Hartley, Newsletter Editor

Social Events

[meet and greet your Sierra Club friends](#)

Friday, July 25th, 6-8 PM: **Chris Madrid's**

A good place to have a tasty burger, salads, cold beer, and wine. 1900 Blanco Rd.

Friday, August 22nd, 6-8 PM: **Blue Star Brewing Co.**

Good choice of cold, micro-brewed beers along with great salads, sandwiches & soups. 1414 S. Alamo St.

If you're not busy on these days, then get out of the house and join us for a meal and a chance to "meet and greet" some of your fellow members. If you would like to be reminded about our upcoming Socials, email [Lloyd Cortez](#). Then one week before the next Social, you will receive an email notice.

Visit our Social Events page for maps, times and more information about these gatherings.



Hello from the Inner City Outings (ICO) committee!

Our next meeting is Tuesday, July 1st 7 pm, at University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell at Shook next to Trinity University. Park behind the church, come up the middle set of outside stairs and follow the sign in the courtyard to the right.

We meet the first Tuesday of every odd month; remaining 2014 meeting dates will be September 2nd and November 4th.

Welcoming a New Agency Partner

ICO San Antonio is now partnering with St. PJ's, a foster home just south of downtown, and we have scheduled several upcoming trip dates, with locations to be discussed at our July 1 meeting:

Upcoming Outings Dates

All of our outings through the end of September will include either paddling, swimming, early morning hiking while it's cool, or a combination. Final venue selection will depend on water conditions that week.

- June 28 – Blanco River (fully staffed with volunteers)
- July 19 – Friedrich Park (need volunteers)

- July 26 – Eisenhower Park (need volunteers)
- August 2 – Water Location TBA (need volunteers)
- September 27 – Location TBA (need volunteers)
- October 25 – Location TBA (need volunteers)

New Name for Inner City Outings

Sierra Club National is changing our name from Inner City Outings to “Inspiring Connections Outdoors” (to maintain the “ICO” acronym). We also have the option to use “Sierra Club Youth Outdoors” in our local branding. Send us your thoughts, and we’ll discuss at our upcoming meeting.

Amazon.com Fundraising Program

A reminder that you can help us raise money to keep the fun completely free for the kids by using the San Antonio ICO portal when you make purchases through Amazon.com. We earn commissions ranging from 4-7% each time you buy. Please bookmark and use this [link](#).

Happy trails!

by [Anne Pearson](#), ICO chair, (210) 408-6321

Want to work for Sierra Club in Austin?

The Sierra Club is looking for a leader to step into the role of Senior Organizing Manager in Austin, Texas. In this role you’ll be able to establish community organizing objectives for our campaigns to curb climate change, while working with passionate staff and volunteers to see those objectives through!

You’ll have the opportunity to design and implement strategies to build community power and partnerships to protect the environment and advance social justice. We’re looking for someone with 5+ years in leading community-based campaigns and strong prior knowledge of what it takes to effectively guide and manage staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders.

Are you ready to lead a team to change the world? [Here is a link](#) with are all the details and information about how to apply.

In Concert: A New Name for a Paradigm Shift in Transportation

At a recent VIA meeting in April, Clay Smith, a VIA engineer who used to work at TxDOT, reported that money for road building, or expanding roads, will decline incrementally, as it is more cost-effective in the future to use commuter rail, light rail transit, bus rapid transit, and High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes within the new Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) boundary. This new program of transportation options and making connections within options is called In Concert. This is the new 21st Century transportation, much of it electric-powered and on steel tracks. The AAMPO boundary now includes Kendall, Comal, and Guadalupe counties, in addition to Bexar. Most large cities have more than one county in their MPO boundary.

In Concert is a paradigm shift from the old scenario of roads to cul-de-sac neighborhoods with separated functions of residential, stores, and workplaces. Accessibility and connectivity will be important in the future. Connectivity refers to seamless, integrated transportation, where a resident may connect from one transportation mode to another efficiently. One could connect at a hub to catch the Amtrak to Chicago, all while leaving the car at home. Possible future commuter rail on the LSTAR from Austin/SA may also become a reality. The LSTAR may have double decker dome cars and a separate car for bike storage, according to Joseph Black, Rail Manager of the Lone Star Rail District. Note that Austin will also have Urban Rail handy at its end, while San Antonio will have its streetcar connection.

An additional innovative and cost-effective idea presented to the Sierra Club last fall by John Dugan, city Planning Director, involves Town Centers. Town Centers can be built on old strip center parking lots along arteries inside Loop 410. These will provide residences, retail, and riders for LRT or BRT along these old arteries, essentially creating efficient Transit Oriented Development (TOD). The Town Centers will be park-like and connected to nearby neighborhoods for local shopping by walking or biking. Plus, there will be transit stations. Walk, shop, or ride. Residents who live in Town Centers can also leave their car at home all week and just use it on the weekend. Buses can also be realigned to circulate in neighborhoods to connect passengers to transit stations. Note that bus ridership increases as feeders to transit trunk lines.

Dugan and the Planning Department will have details for Town Centers ready to show in a couple of years. The planners are also busy studying ways to encourage more smart growth, and revising land use codes so that sensible planning can occur. Since this is a transition time, I suspect the federal government through HUD may provide more incentives to builders in the future to build Transit Oriented Development along LRT or BRT lines. Also according to Dugan, future fringe areas will be walkable with a transit stop.

Increasing density inside Loop 410 is the first goal, according to VIA’s Clay Smith. Note that the MPO, VIA, Metro Health, the Planning Department, and the city’s Transportation and Capital Improvements (formerly Capital Improvements Management Systems or CIMS) are all on the same page regarding seamless, integrated multimodal transportation and efficient connections, TODs, Town Centers, and walkable communities. The needs are pressing and change is exciting.

Note also that agencies within cities are now encouraged to step out of their silos and work together to solve problems of obesity, sedentary lifestyles, poor planning decisions of past, reduce vehicle miles travelled and emissions to prevent non-attainment, and create a seamless multimodal system of connections that are efficient and cost-

effective for the city and its residents. Seems to me as if we are headed in the right direction.

by Barb McMillin, Transportation Chair

Sign Up for Action Alerts

The Sierra Club is all about citizen action on critical issues. Quick citizen input often spells the difference between victory and defeat for important measures at the local and state levels. Sign up now to receive our local e-mail Conservation Action Alerts and let your voice be heard. **Call (674-9489) or email Loyd Cortez** and we'll add your name to our growing list of environmental activists.

Global warming: what is actually going on?

I recently did an Earth Day presentation on global climate change, so to prepare thought I'd better research a bit into what the science really is. Learned a lot. It isn't too hard to understand but isn't quite as simple as I had presumed. I think I can explain some of this in a series of articles.

This article: the basics of the global warming mechanism. *Next month:* greenhouse gases: what they are and how they work.

Simply speaking

The key factor is the greenhouse effect, which is increasing absorption of Earth's radiation by greenhouse gases. What has changed since the beginning of the industrial revolution is the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

The primary factor is not the direct absorption of radiation by the Sun, but instead is the increasing absorption of the Earth's own radiation in the infra-red portion of the light spectrum by greenhouse gases. This is an increasingly serious crisis now as the level of greenhouse gases has accelerated sharply in the last fifty years.

The global warming mechanism

The Earth directly absorbs the Sun's light, much of which is in the visible portion of the spectrum. This heats the Earth, which radiates energy in the infra-red portion of the spectrum. Some of this infra-red energy is absorbed by the atmosphere. Some atmospheric components that exist in very low concentrations, the "greenhouse" gases, absorb this infra-red energy far more effectively than oxygen and nitrogen, which comprise 99% of the atmosphere.

The concentration of these greenhouse gases has risen sharply since the beginning of the industrial revolution. So their contribution to the heating of the atmosphere and therefore the Earth has likewise risen sharply. Please read the article next month with some details about greenhouse gases.

Below is a good graphic from the National Academy of Sciences illustrating the greenhouse effect. This came from a Pew Charitable Trusts report, [Climate Change 101: Understanding and Responding to Global Climate Change](#). The whole report is available from the download link at the right of the page. This is from 2006, but the science has not changed, it has only gotten more obvious and urgent.

The Greenhouse Effect



This graphic illustrates the greenhouse effect. Visible sunlight passes through the atmosphere without being absorbed. Some of the sunlight striking the earth (1) is absorbed and converted to heat, which warms the surface. The surface (2) emits heat to the atmosphere, where some of it (3) is absorbed by greenhouse gases and (4) re-emitted toward the surface; some of the heat is not trapped by greenhouse gases and (5) escapes into space. Human activities that emit additional greenhouse gases to the atmosphere (6) increase the amount of heat that gets absorbed before escaping to space, thus enhancing the greenhouse effect and amplifying the warming of the earth.

The Earth's albedo

How much of the Sun's radiation the Earth reflects back into space is another factor in global warming. This is the Earth's albedo, or reflectivity. There is a nice PBS web page [Earth's Albedo and Global Warming](#) that talks about this; note the link to the background essay down the page.

The Earth's albedo is decreasing with the melting of polar ice caps and glaciers. Clouds, ice and snow can reflect up to 90% of sunlight; in comparison the average for the entire Earth is 30%. So as glaciers and polar ice melt further global warming due to greenhouse gases accelerates even more.

The US Navy predicts the Arctic Ocean could be ice-free by 2016. Here's an article [West Antarctic Ice Sheet collapse is under way](#), thought to take centuries, but significant changes are occurring now. The Earth's albedo will decrease significantly with the disappearance of this ice, along with consequent substantial sea level rise.

There was some research done during the US aviation shutdown after the 9/11/2001 attacks. Planes' exhausts result in contrails which are actually thin clouds of ice crystals. In the absence of these contrails the Earth's albedo was slightly diminished and a significant extra warming of the Earth was measured. Or, should we say, a more normal level of warming in the absence of these clouds created by our technology.

Food for thought

When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.

- John Muir

Geoengineering solutions to increase the Earth's albedo

There is a lot of research going on around increasing the Earth's albedo with engineering solutions. The seriousness of what we are facing with global warming is illustrated by how much effort is being focused on these technologies. We hope these do not become an excuse to avoid dealing with the sources of the problem, which are primarily population growth and our inefficient largely carbon-fuel based global economy resulting in soaring concentrations of greenhouse gases.

Some of these solutions would have been thought absolutely crazy and pointless just a few years ago. Now, we should be very concerned that some of these will have unintended environmental consequences in spite of benefit. For example.

For example. ["Albedo Yachts" and Marine Clouds: A Cure for Climate Change? A deep dive into one of the least scary geoengineering schemes to control global warming](#), from Scientific American. [Geo-engineering: the key to the future?](#), a UK website on the whole topic. A National Academy of Sciences article on [spraying sulfate aerosols in the upper atmosphere](#). Sounds familiar... sulfate aerosols! This is about intentionally creating upper atmosphere smog. Also, releasing foil confetti in the upper atmosphere. Reflective panels in orbit. Just to mention a few of the ingenious and maybe scary concepts under development.

by Kevin Hartley, Newsletter Editor

Outings: Beautiful Central Texas Weather Beckons

Visit the [Alamo Sierra Club Outings page](#) on Meetup for detailed information about all of our upcoming Sierra Club Outings.



Bring Your Used Batteries to the General Membership Meeting

Don't throw those small batteries in the trash bin where they will end up in our landfills. Bring them to the monthly general meetings where we will have a container for you to place them in. Thanks to Gay Wright for coordinating this recycling effort.

