

Viewpoints: California's green thinking should include shredded tires

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Earlier this month, [California voters](#) resoundingly reaffirmed their commitment to the environment by defeating Proposition 23, which would have suspended the state's climate-change law. This commitment continues a long tradition of environmental stewardship. Today [California](#) leads the nation in waste diversion, and we recycle more cans, bottles, computers, batteries, and paper than any other state.

We're "green." Everybody gets that. But we still have a strong love affair with our cars. In 2007, there were more than 33 million registered vehicles in our state – almost double the 18 million registered in [Texas](#). All of these cars generate about 34 million waste tires every year that are no longer road-worthy.

While it's no surprise that [California](#) is also a national leader in tire recycling, turning worn tires into playgrounds, turf and even roads, we still dispose of about 11 million tires a year in landfills. We need new markets and more recycling opportunities for waste tires. One product that is promising but has been a tough sell is the use of tire-derived aggregate in [construction projects](#).

Tire-derived aggregate – or [TDA](#) – is simply tire rubber that is shredded to meet project specific standards, and used as a replacement for soil or naturally mined materials such as gravel. It is safe, reliable and, above all, an extremely cost-effective option that keeps waste tires out of landfills.

Because [TDA](#) is light, more can be transported per truckload. That means fewer trucks per construction project, less [fuel consumption](#) and overall lower costs. And using this recycled tire product has some significant engineering benefits. It increases stability of embankments because of reduced settling, has superior draining qualities for use in landfill systems and provides excellent vibration dampening in light-rail construction.

CalRecycle has recognized the benefits of [TDA](#) for years, and our engineers have worked to promote its use. In 1999, the department funded field tests that ultimately resulted in the use of [TDA](#) on the [Bay Area's](#) Valley Transportation Authority rail lines racking up savings of more than \$1 million.

More recently, CalRecycle funded studies to demonstrate to the [Federal Transportation Authority](#) that tire-derived aggregate works, and continues to work without settling, as an optimal vibration dampening material in rail construction. As a result, the [Federal Transportation Authority](#) recently decided [TDA](#) can be used in a planned BART extension project. The project, expected to begin in 2012, will keep 250,000 tires out of landfills and save \$1.5 million.

Our golden opportunity for [TDA](#) goes beyond light-rail expansion, roadway embankments and landfill drainage systems. It also has the potential to be incorporated into the highest-profile rail project – the [California High-Speed Rail Line](#). While only in the planning stages now, the high-speed line recently received more than \$700 million federal dollars, and the first rails will be laid in the [Central Valley](#). It's a forward-thinking project that would benefit from forward-thinking vibration mitigation.

If we used [TDA](#) along urban areas of the high speed line, we could save millions in [construction costs](#), raise awareness of this valuable resource and ultimately create [manufacturing jobs](#) by increasing demand for tire-derived aggregate. Just as important, hundreds of thousands of tires would be put to good use.

This of course is a long-term vision. But even in the near term, [California](#) municipalities can use [TDA](#) and save money in their own road stabilization and light-rail projects. [California's](#) tires are too valuable to waste. Learn more at www.PavingGreenRoads.com.

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