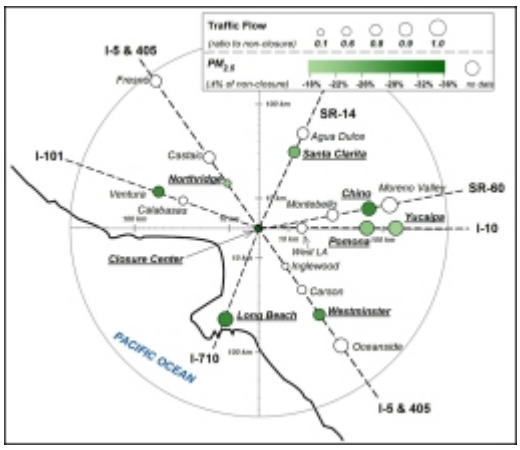

Regional Impacts of the Carmageddon I Closure

Drivers in LA may be holding their collective breath waiting for “Carmageddon II” to end, but a new UCLA study suggests that they may have it backwards. For those of you who don’t live with the traffic here in the City of Angels, this weekend a major artery was shut down to allow for removal of a bridge on the 405 freeway as part of an apparently endless road construction project. It is the second major shut down, the last one occurring over a weekend in July. A new study by UCLA professors Yifang Zhu in the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and Suzanne Paulson, who is also a professor of atmospheric and oceanic sciences, takes a look at what happened to air quality during Carmageddon I. Even they were surprised to discover that the closure of 10 miles of the 405 improved air quality near that area within minutes, reaching levels 83 percent better than on comparable weekends. And it wasn’t just a local effect. Areas in LA saw a 75% improvement, and even areas in Ventura and Santa Clarita some 50 miles away saw up to a 25% improvement. Life goes on though and our “normal” level of air pollution reappeared along with traffic after the closure. But Carmageddon gives us all an idea of what movement away from the internal combustion engine might look like.