

Entities Seek to Combine Suits Against LAX Plan

Thursday, Feb. 17, Los Angeles Times

Attorneys involved in lawsuits challenging the city's modernization plan for Los Angeles International Airport asked a judge Wednesday to consolidate the four cases and transfer the lawsuit to Riverside County.

The cities of Inglewood, Culver City and El Segundo, Los Angeles County and several community organizations agreed the lawsuits were similar enough to warrant consolidation.

All four cases argue that environmental studies do not adequately address noise, traffic and pollution that would result from the \$11-billion project.

Energy-saving task force is given a green light

By Cameron Jahn

Wednesday, Feb. 16, Sacramento Bee

The county spent more than \$25 million on electricity and natural gas last year. Energy costs have jumped 30 percent in the past three years, even as the county's energy consumption dropped 20 percent.

With cost-cutting in mind, the Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to establish a task force in the coming months to set up guidelines for creating buildings that conserve water and electricity, use renewable energy, minimize greenhouse gas and recycle construction waste. Simple things like motion-activated lights are under consideration, as well as more complex solar heating techniques.

Supervisor Don Nottoli, a strong advocate of environmentally friendly building practices, bristled when told that the county's most expensive current construction project - an expansion of Juvenile Hall with a price tag approaching \$100 million - will not be part of the green energy policy because it's too far along in the planning process.

"Right up front, from the get-go we should be looking at this," he said. "We miss the mark when we don't design that in upfront."

As county buildings age, maintenance and operation costs rise significantly and, while green building techniques often cost more upfront, they save money in the long run, said Randall Angeloni, the county's energy program manager.

"You have to balance what you get out of them versus what you pay to install them," he said.

Regardless of the price, Supervisor Illa Collin said building with an eye on saving energy is worth it.

The county administration building, for example, "lights up like a lamp in terms of energy consumption," she said. "Every dollar you can save can be spent on employees and services for people."

Local governments in the Bay Area and Portland, Ore., already have adopted green energy policies.

Sacramento County is shooting for the silver standard established by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program, which can be achieved through conserving water, recycling, maximizing use of daylight, among other things.

Retrofitting all 7.7 million square feet of institutional, shop, office, airport and correctional space operated by the county may prove too expensive for the county's tight budget, officials said.

Instead, the new policy is aimed mainly at new construction, such as the new Terminal B planned for Sacramento International Airport, which could cost as much as \$1 billion.

Montreal to Host Climate Conference

Wednesday, Feb. 16, San Francisco Chronicle

An international conference focusing on the longer term global approach to climate change after 2012 will be held in Montreal in December, Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin said Wednesday.

"Canadians want us to prepare for the future. That means an environmental commitment to clear air, clean water and good health," Martin said, announcing the conference just hours after the Kyoto global warming pact official took effect.

The Montreal Conference on Climate is expected to be attended by more than 10,000 delegates, media and observers.

The Kyoto protocol, negotiated in Japan in 1997, calls on 35 industrialized countries to curb the release of carbon dioxide and other gasses that scientists blame for rising world temperatures, melting glaciers and rising oceans. It sets a deadline for compliance by 2012.

The accord was ratified by 140 countries, including Canada. But the United States, the world leader in greenhouse gas emissions, did not sign the agreement, saying it was lopsided.

Bus exhaust retrofitted

By Cathy Locke -- Bee Staff Writer

Thursday, Feb. 17, Sacramento Bee

El Dorado County Transit announced that it has retrofitted seven diesel commuter buses with a new emission-control system designed to improve air quality by reducing soot and smog.

Installed on the buses' exhaust systems, the system is expected to cut emission of particulate matter by 85 percent and nitrogen oxides - a prime contributor to smog - by 25 percent.

Particulate matter and smog have been linked to asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

Funding for the systems included a grant from the El Dorado County Air Quality Management District and local transportation funds.

[Letter to the Editor in the Los Angeles Times, February 17, 2005](#)

Port Pollution Is a Complex Problem

Re "Meeting Delay for Hahn Task Force Stirs Concern," Feb. 10: Once again The Times has missed the point in claiming that the ports are the largest source of air pollution in the region. If only it were that simple.

The reality is the ports are made up of thousands of enterprises and operations that carry goods into and out of the ports. There are thousands of ship visits, truck trips and rail moves every year. There are thousands of pieces of equipment — from tugboats to forklifts — that provide the cargo-handling needs and support the movement of goods into the region.

There are thousands of vessels that provide leisure and recreation for millions of people, including cruise ship passengers, visitors to Catalina and whale watchers.

To characterize this as a "single source" terribly understates the complexity of the issues. There is no single source and therefore there is no single solution. This does not mean the problems are insurmountable.

The good news is that for each source there are solutions already underway. A broad range of regulations and laws is coming into effect that will significantly improve the air quality at the ports.

And the individual companies that operate at the ports are also making major voluntary investments in new ships, efficient terminals and new, cleaner equipment and fuels.

T.L. Garrett
Pacific Merchant Shipping Assn., Long Beach

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thurs., Feb. 17, 2005:](#)

Tax on cars using drive-throughs might help clear the air

At one time soda pop cans weren't taxed and the roadsides were cluttered with them. So maybe a grocery bag tax might help [letter Feb. 9].

Then we might consider taxing all cars that use drive-through windows. Many times we see drive-throughs jammed with cars. No one turns off their engines. They keep running and exhausts keep spewing carbon monoxide into our already polluted air.

I often wonder how the service people keep from getting gassed.

Taxing each transaction 50 cents might help clear a little air. Some people might park and walk 20 feet to avoid the tax. Those who want to keep driving through would provide the towns, cities, county and state with much-needed revenue.

Andy Garfield Porterville

[Thursday, Feb. 17, Lodi News Sentinel, Letter to the Editor](#)

We are responsible for air we breathe

If the "Clear Skies" initiative passes, it will gut the Clean Air Act. It will literally repeal protections for our national parks, delay deadlines to meet the act's health standards, relax pollution reduction requirements for power plants and other major pollution sources, and, to top it off, it ignores global warming.

This plan was rejected by congress twice already.

Now, with the jimmed political districts, the big boys think they can slip this past us.

Contact your reps in Congress to deny major polluters this free pollution pass. You and I are responsible for the air we breathe.

E. Michael Pearl
Lodi

[Wednesday, Feb. 16, Los Angeles Time, Editorial](#)

Opposite of 'Clear Skies'

The proposed Clear Skies Act that faces a Senate committee vote today differs from President Bush's original initiative, which would have eroded current clean-air regulations.

The new version is worse.

The president's proposal two years ago never made it to a committee vote. Emboldened by Republican gains in the November election, though, Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) introduced a new version that lets even more polluters off the hook.

As of Tuesday, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works appeared evenly split on Inhofe's bill. A deadlock would keep the bill from going to the Senate floor unless GOP leaders pulled some rare maneuvers, which isn't expected. The chief question is whether Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-R.I.), who has favored a more stringent approach to pollution control, will toe the party line to give the bill the votes it needs.

We hope he doesn't. The proposed act has all the flaws of its ancestor, failing to control carbon dioxide emissions, allowing increases in several other types of pollution for years and, according to an Environmental Protection Agency analysis, putting off meaningful reductions in various pollutants for two decades. In some cases, even those reductions are weaker than is reasonable and economically feasible. A National Academy of Sciences report says the proposal would do a worse job of reducing pollution than the existing Clean Air Act does.

The old version of Clear Skies allowed power plants to trade pollution credits with each other, with polluters paying a heavy economic price. The Inhofe measure would extend that trading system to a host of other facilities, including incinerators, chemical plants and refineries, but would let them choose whether to opt in or not. Thus, polluters would get to pick whichever regulatory scheme was the weakest — an oil refinery facing state regulation more restrictive than Clear Skies could go for the federal program instead. In the end, the power plant trading system probably would degenerate into chaos and confusion.

Inhofe made some minor changes to his bill Tuesday in an effort to win the crucial extra vote. That's not the way to go about it. There's room for real, from-the-ground-up negotiation on the Clear Skies program. Emissions-trading programs have reduced sulfur dioxide and could succeed in lowering other industrial emissions. But they work only if they're structured properly and represent an improvement over existing regulations. The new version of Clear Skies fails on both counts.

[Wednesday, Feb. 16, New York Times, Editorial](#)

Clear Skies, No Lies

By Gregg Easterbrook

SUPPOSE Al Gore had become president and proposed a law to cut pollution from power plants by about 70 percent at a low cost, to discourage the lawsuits that often stall clean-air rules from being enforced, and to serve as a model for a future system to regulate greenhouse gases. Chances are Mr. Gore would have been widely praised. Instead George W. Bush got the White House and announced a plan to do those very things, yet it has been relentlessly denounced by Democrats, environmentalists, editorial pages and even characters in a *Doonesbury* cartoon.

Critics both real and drawn assert that the program, which is called Clear Skies and is scheduled to be voted on by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee today, is a shocking assault on clean-air law, an insidious weakening of environmental protections wrapped up with an Orwellian label. These criticisms are off target, except it is true that Clear Skies is a really dumb name.

Mr. Bush's proposal would cut by more than 70 percent the amounts of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and mercury emitted by power plants. The first two substances cause acid rain and contribute to respiratory disease; the third is a poison. The plan would also permanently cap plant emissions nationwide, meaning that pollutant levels must not rise no matter how much more power is generated in the future. The proposed cap for sulfur dioxide is 90 percent lower than the amount emitted in 1970; the cap for nitrogen oxide is 94 percent lower than 1970.

So, under the Bush plan - supposedly a sellout to industry - sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide, the two power-plant emissions of most concern to public health, would be nearly eliminated as compared with levels in 1970. Clear Skies would also moot the long-running controversy over the "new source review" rule, which may require operators of the old power plants in the Midwest to add pollution controls when those plants are modified. Those plants too would have to participate in the 70 percent overall reduction, a deeper cut than required by any interpretation of the "new source" standard.

Opponents of Clear Skies rightly note that existing Clean Air Act language already mandates somewhat greater reductions than the Bush plan - for instance, a 93 percent cut in sulfur dioxide from the levels in 1970, versus Clear Skies' 90 percent - and that the reductions must be complete by 2012, rather than by 2018 as in Mr. Bush's bill. But here's the rub: the existing Clean

Air Act, though successful, is a complex set of rules that requires a case-by-case drawing up of plans for states, localities and even individual power plants. A raft of lawsuits often accompanies every Clean Air Act regulation - it is common for both industry and environmental organizations to sue to block the same set of rules. This is why, on average, it takes about a decade to complete a Clean Air Act rulemaking.

The Clear Skies plan would replace that case-by-case system with a streamlined "cap and trade" approach. This plan simply sets an overall reduction for the power industry as a whole, then leaves it up to companies and plant managers to decide for themselves how to meet the mandates, including by trading permits to one another.

In practice, cap-and-trade systems have proved faster, cheaper and less vulnerable to legal stalling tactics than the "command and control" premise of most of the Clean Air Act. For example, a pilot cap-and-trade system, for sulfur dioxide from coal-fired power plants, was enacted by Congress in 1990. Since then sulfur dioxide emissions have fallen by nearly a third (the reason you hear so little about acid rain these days is that the problem is declining - even though the amount of combustion of coal for electricity has risen.)

A pleasant surprise of that 1990 program was that market forces and lack of litigation rapidly drove down the predicted cost of acid-rain controls. Now Mr. Bush proposes to apply the same cap-and-trade approach to the entire power industry, in the hope that market forces and fewer lawsuits will lead to rapid, relatively inexpensive pollution cuts.

Here is the real beauty of the Clear Skies plan, something that even its backers may not see: many economists believe that the best tool for our next great environmental project, restraining greenhouse gases, will be a cap-and-trade system for carbon dioxide. Should President Bush's plan prove that the power industry as a whole can be subjected to a sweeping cap-and-trade rule without suffering economic harm or high costs, that would create a powerful case to impose similar regulation on carbon dioxide, too.

Though you'd never know it from the press coverage, the administration's idea has respectable support - from the National Research Council, which is a wing of the National Academy of Sciences, and from the former Environmental Protection Agency administrator Christie Whitman, who since leaving the administration has become a leading critic of the Republican right.

Yes, as in any lawmaking, there is a legitimate danger that factions in Congress will insert into the Bush bill language that does dilute environmental protection. But the underlying idea of the president's proposal is sound and deserves support, even from the comics page.