

Group sues Tracy over growth guidelines

It claims future impacts weren't properly studied

By Jake Armstrong, Record staff writer

Stockton Record, Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2006

TRACY - An environmental group is suing to reverse the city's approval of the plan that will guide growth and the extension of essential city services over the next two decades.

The Urban Environmental Affairs Council claims city leaders failed to adequately study the impact future growth would have on population, traffic, air quality and municipal services, and faltered in finding ways to alleviate the impact.

The lawsuit, filed in San Joaquin Superior Court Aug. 23, did not specify how the plan was inadequate.

Councilman Brent Ives, who voted in favor of the plan when it came to a final vote in late July, said each of the group's concerns were adequately addressed during the General Plan's approval process which took several years.

"I guess the term adequacy is a relative term," Ives said. "It's not like we threw this thing together."

The approval included more than 20 public meetings and the Urban Environmental Affairs Council was one of 23 individuals, organizations and state and local agencies that commented on the environmental portion of the report.

In a 12-page letter sent to the city in November, however, a representative with the group questioned and criticized a wide range of the plan's elements - from land use to population calculations.

The representative, Steven Hamilton, said allowing construction on urban reserve lands conflicted with the open space and conservation portions of the general plan. He also questioned the methodology used in assuming that industrial development will follow the pace it did between 2000 and 2005, and that the traffic impacts were derived from a partial build-out of the general plan.

Mark D. Johnson, an attorney representing the Urban Environmental Affairs Council, did not return calls requesting comment Friday and Tuesday.

Councilwoman Evelyn Tolbert questioned the motivations behind the little-known group's suit against the growth plan.

"What else could we have done?" Tolbert asked, adding she had not heard of the group or reviewed its lawsuit. "I would like to see what specific things in the EIR they are protesting."

Assistant City Attorney Dan Sodergren said the city plans to defend the general plan and its environmental impact report, both of which the lawsuit seeks to set aside.

Bill Reeds, director of the city's Development and Engineering Services department, said he believes the issues the Urban Environmental Affairs Council brings up are adequately addressed in the environmental report.

The group also alleges the city "improperly rejected" alternatives to the adopted plan.

Reeds said the alternatives would not have made a difference in population growth for the 20-year period.

Cities encourage commuters to take to the water

By Jennifer Saranow, The Wall Street Journal

In the Fresno Bee, S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Tuesday, September 5, 2006

As congestion worsens on roadways, bridges and tunnels, more cities and states are turning to waterways as a potential way to alleviate tie-ups for commuters.

The growing efforts to encourage more people to get out of their cars and take to the water include expanding ferry and water-taxi services, offering free passes for ferry rides, and developing quicker and easier ways for passengers to buy tickets.

This fall, the Miami-Dade Metropolitan Planning Organization plans to present proposals to county commissioners and other officials for a water-transit system that, if approved, could come as early as 2008 and include water-taxi and water-ferry routes on Biscayne Bay. The District of Columbia's transportation department is planning a pilot project it describes as a "bus on water," set to begin service in the spring on the Anacostia and Potomac rivers. In Hawaii, a new ferry designed to carry commuters to Honolulu from West Oahu is set to be launched early next year. The San Francisco Bay Area Water Transit Authority plans to add about eight new ferry routes over the next two decades, the first coming in 2008 between Oakland and South San Francisco. More stops or boat times for commuters have been added by the

Wendela Sightseeing Co.'s Wendella RiverBus in Chicago and Ed Kane's Water Taxis service in Baltimore.

The focus on ferries represents a return to earlier centuries before major bridges and tunnels when water was an essential artery for transportation. It also presents a relaxing alternative to being stuck in a interminable traffic jam on the approach to a city bridge. Jim Healy, a corporate-training consultant in Alameda, Calif., started taking the ferry to work in San Francisco about a year and half ago rather than drive his Toyota Tacoma pickup truck or take a bus. "I may read, I may stare at the beautiful San Francisco Bay or I may pull out my computer and work," he says. "It's really quite luxurious."

Still, commuting by water has its drawbacks. There can be logistical hassles like no service during the winter months and figuring out how to get from a ferry dock to the office. Commuters who take the water also aren't immune to high fuel prices since some ferry operators are adding small fuel surcharges to their tickets.

Indeed, higher gas prices are spurring many ferry operators, generally private, nonsubsidized ones, to raise prices, which could hurt ridership. The faster the ferry, the higher the price, generally. For the high-speed Baylink ferry service linking Vallejo, Calif., with San Francisco, fares went up about 15 percent on Sept. 1. The price of a round-trip day pass rose to \$19.25 from \$17. By comparison, commuters could instead take a bus from Vallejo to San Francisco, with a round-trip bus ticket the same price as the ferry, according to Baylink.

Similarly, on June 1, NY Waterway raised some prices 25 cents to \$1 per ride depending on the route. A one-way ticket from Weehawken, N.J., to midtown Manhattan, for instance, went up 25 cents to \$6 and a monthly pass went up to \$211 from \$200. In contrast, to get from Weehawken to Manhattan by rail would cost about \$3.25 per ride and about \$93 a month, but would include a train transfer in Hoboken, according to NJ Transit. The monthly NY Waterway fare from Belford, N.J., rose to \$572 from \$550. To get a train from the area to Manhattan costs \$297 per month.

Such hurdles mean it remains to be seen whether water commuting will truly catch on. According to figures released last week by the U.S. Census Bureau, 43,868 workers out of about 133.1 million typically got to work via the ferry last year, a fraction of the roughly 116.7 million that commuted via car, truck or van. Still, ferry ridership is up from about 37,497 workers in 1990, according to the Census.

At the federal level, the latest transportation bill authorized more funding for ferries than the previous bill - \$335 million over five years, up from \$220 million in the previous bill. Other states and cities working on developing or boosting ferry and water-taxi service include St. Louis, Oklahoma City and Bridgeport, Conn., which finished a report in August showing a high-speed ferry service between Bridgeport, Stamford, Conn., and New York City would be financially feasible.

Besides the new water-transportation options, existing services in cities from New York to Seattle are expanding and trying to spur ridership. Earlier this year, the privately owned New York Water Taxi, which serves commuters crossing the East River with yellow taxilike boats, started forming partnerships with new apartment developments and giving new tenants discounts and free passes. Another private ferry operator NY Waterway, with 18 local routes, painted two of its ferries last month to resemble yachts and plans to put the finish on all 34 ships it operates. In August, Washington State Ferries started testing letting riders buy tickets online and is working on enabling monthly pass holders to get fees automatically downloaded to pass cards each month.

In the San Francisco Bay area, the local water-transit authority estimates that 332,857 riders traveled on the six ferry routes in the area in May, up 40 percent from 238,202 in May 2005. In June and July, when three ferry operators offered six free days during periods of unhealthy air pollution along with other forms of public transport, usage rose even more from a year earlier.

Across the 10 routes offered in Washington, there were nearly 1 percent more passengers in July from a year earlier and the number of passengers on the Bremerton-Seattle route rose 4.5 percent in the period. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey estimates that there are about 37,000 daily weekday trips across 22 routes in the area, up from about 33,000 trips daily on 14 routes before the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks. The agency, which has started working on a study that could lead to a regional ferry plan, predicts growth of 3 percent to 5 percent over the next few years, with ferry service set to be launched between Yonkers, N.Y., and Manhattan in the spring and from Edgewater, N.J., to lower Manhattan later this year.

In the Boston area, the closing of one of the Big Dig tunnels, additional service to Boston Logan International Airport and higher gas prices combined in July to lift commuter boat usage. Ridership from Quincy, Hull and Hingham to Boston rose 14 percent from July 2005 to 113,250 riders in July 2006, according to the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

Elsewhere in Massachusetts this summer, service from Salem, Mass., to Boston was launched - and Plymouth, Mass., is studying the feasibility of a ferry for commuters to Boston. Last week, Rep. William Delahunt, (D., Mass.) sent a letter to the governor proposing to boost ferry service even further.

The biggest hurdles to ferry ridership may be getting from the dock to the office and, in the winter months, suffering a cold trip across the water or finding ferry service at all. In Honolulu, a short-term pilot ferry a few years ago linking the city with the west didn't attract a lot of ridership partly because there wasn't adequate land transportation linking to the ferries, says Toru Hamayasu, chief planner for the city's transportation department. He says the new permanent service will have about three city buses waiting to shuttle arriving passengers.

Similarly, Ed Kane's Water Taxis in Baltimore, which runs spring through fall and started commuter service before 10 a.m. last year, is working on adding jitney buses to its service as early as next year. The buses could transport passengers further inland so the taxis can serve more commuters than just those who work by the harbor. NJ Transit in New Jersey has also over the past year adjusted some of its commuter-bus routes so they link up better to ferries going to New York.

While ticket prices for boat and ferry rides may be on par or even higher than other forms of public transportation, ferries can be faster and also often offer other perks like a view of the sea, wireless access, television sets, bars and comfortable seats. There is also evidence ferries may be safer. A recent study, for example, for the San Francisco Bay Area Water Transit Authority found that ferries had lower fatality and patron-injury rates than rail and roadway transit systems.

Ferries also can serve as an important form of backup transportation, for instance, during blackouts or after terrorist attacks. After Sept. 11, 2001, large numbers of people were evacuated from lower Manhattan in boats and extra ferry service in the area until late 2003 helped to make up for shuttered commuter-train service.

UC Davis takes stock of its own air impact **School with a reputation for environmental study tallies its greenhouse emissions as part of a climate registry program.**

By Edie Lau -- Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee Tues., September 5, 2006

At the University of California, Davis, which prides itself on environmental research, eight cents of every research dollar goes to air-quality studies. Yet the university does not know how much its campus contributes to global warming pollution.

An answer to that question is coming.

As one of the newest members of the California Climate Action Registry, UC Davis is in the midst of calculating its own emissions of greenhouse gases.

Once an obscure exercise done mainly by organizations most interested in environmental stewardship, taking inventory of greenhouse gases is going mainstream.

With the Legislature's adoption last week of mandatory greenhouse gas limits backed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, California is poised to require big industries to account for their climate-changing emissions and then ratchet them down.

The climate registry was created by state law in 2000 as a strictly voluntary program for businesses, governments and organizations wishing to measure their output of carbon dioxide and other gases that trap heat in the atmosphere.

Today, its members -- numbering 88 at last count -- stand as examples of how the state can begin to counter climate-changing pollution.

"Now (the registry) is the foundation for a statewide greenhouse gas program," said Dan Sperling, a professor of engineering and environmental policy and director of UC Davis's Institute for Transportation Studies. "Because you have to know what the emissions are and where they're coming from before you can do anything about it."

Sperling was one of about a half-dozen people who pushed UC Davis to join the registry. Although educational institutions do not come under the new global-warming mandates, Sperling and others thought the university had good reason to participate.

"We like to think of ourselves as the environmental campus, and many of us are very much involved in energy and climate change research," Sperling said. "We said, 'Well, this campus should step forward.' I don't know why it took us this long."

To date, only two other UC campuses are part of the registry: UC San Diego, a charter member; and UC Santa Barbara.

"I give them a lot of credit because they're willing to do this," said Joel Levin, the registry's vice president of business development. "Some of the campuses are very reluctant to turn the microscope on themselves."

This is despite avid support by the UC Office of the President for systemwide participation.

Maric Munn, associate director of energy and utilities for the UC system, said many of the campuses are growing, and officials are nervous that their global-warming emissions are rising as a result.

"They're afraid of criticism from the outside," Munn said. "That's been a huge impediment."

Moreover, the majority of buildings being built are laboratories, which Munn said use four to five times as much energy as classrooms and offices.

Kristine Haunschild, a UC Davis undergraduate engineering student hired to conduct her campus's inventory, isn't nervous about finding out how much her school emits -- and considering its reach, from a medical center in Sacramento to a marine lab in Bodega Bay to a mosquito research center in Bakersfield, she expects it to be huge.

"(Having) this big a footprint, we hope we can do something substantial (to reduce emissions)," she said.

In large part, taking inventory of greenhouse gas emissions is an exercise in accounting. Consumption of energy derived from fossil fuels is responsible for the bulk of carbon dioxide emissions, which are measured by the metric ton.

For Haunschild, who began the job this spring and expects to have a rough total on 2005 emissions in a few weeks, coming up with the numbers requires poring over utility bills and vehicle fuel records, among other data.

Some tasks are incomprehensibly arduous. For example, although most of the central campus's electricity consumption is reflected on one utility statement, a few departments, such as music, get individual bills.

"We haven't gotten to the bottom of that one yet," Haunschild said with a laugh.

Other tasks that would be challenging aren't required. Personal vehicles, for instance -- whether cars driven by staff, students or visitors -- need not be included in the inventory.

Under registry protocol, only pollution sources over which the member has financial or management control must be counted.

The campus also need not count emissions from its dairy herd -- at least not yet, despite cows' reputation for producing methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

One reason is that the registry hasn't figured out how to account accurately for livestock gases.

In addition, registry members aren't required to account for all their greenhouse gases right away, just carbon dioxide. Under the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement to combat global warming, five other gases are considered contributors to climate change, as well: methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride.

Novel as it may seem to measure greenhouse-gas output, Victoria Evans, assistant director of the UC Davis Air Quality Research Center, said it's really no different from taking inventory of standard pollutants such as ozone, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide, as industries and governments have been doing for years.

Sperling, the engineering and environmental policy professor, said he expects greenhouse-gas inventories to become as commonplace as recycling.

"It used to be that no one did recycling," he said, "and now many organizations consider it standard behavior."

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wednesday, September 6, 2006:](#)

Why fight it?

Jeff Hopper (letter Aug. 11) describes Al Gore's movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," as "fearmongering." He seems to believe that because the hottest day on record for Aug. 1 occurred

in 1914, we can ignore all evidence of global warming. Mr. Hopper dismisses evidence accepted by every legitimate scientist around the globe. Global warming may not cause a one-day, record-setting temperature, but temperatures are now much hotter and remain hot over longer periods of time.

Why is Mr. Hopper so vehemently opposed to reducing greenhouse emissions? Shouldn't he want to use clean burning fuels to lower greenhouse emissions, cut down on air pollution and reduce our dependence on Middle Eastern oil? Does he believe that we should continue burning fossil fuels forever, forcing higher prices at the pump so that companies like Chevron, Exxon and BP can make billions more dollars?

Or perhaps he would truly enjoy a future where our free market will bring alternative fuel sources like liquid nitrogen and ethanol 85. For \$1 a day, he might even drive a vehicle powered from electricity generated from solar, wind and hydroelectric. Why would anyone fight that?

George Garrigus, Fresno