

Public input sought on new Wal-Mart reports

BY JAMES GELUSO, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, June 7, 2007

The battle over Wal-Mart is back on. New environmental studies of two Wal-Mart supercenters that have been stalled for years are now out and the Bakersfield Planning Commission is poised to take public comment on them tonight.

An appeals court threw out environmental impact reports the city approved for the projects in 2003, agreeing with a citizens group that argued the documents were inadequate.

Development of the two Wal-Marts -- a 246,000-square-foot store near Panama Lane and Highway 99, and a 232,000-square-foot at Gosford and Pacheco roads -- was stopped and new environmental reports ordered. Both would be supercenters that put grocery stores alongside goods found at regular Wal-Marts.

Construction on the building at Panama and 99 had already begun when the court ruled and the building has sat unfinished. In both cases, surrounding stores were allowed to open.

"I hope they get it done," said Jamie Cox, a 37-year-old construction company owner. "Wal-Mart is cheap and they don't give you a hassle when you return stuff."

Matthew Gonzales would rather not see a Wal-Mart in southwest Bakersfield.

"There is enough of the stores here," said Gonzales, a 28-year-old business consultant. "I would go for a Target."

Despite the new environmental reports about the stores, members of the Bakersfield Citizens for Local Control are still opposing the supercenters. The citizen group sued the city after the Bakersfield City Council approved construction of the stores.

"The traffic on Panama in the past years has gotten worse," said Jared Foster, a member of the group. Putting two supercenters so close together "will only make traffic horrible."

The new reports

In the new EIRs, consultants answered concerns raised by the Bakersfield Citizens for Local Control and seconded by the 5th District Court of Appeal.

They include:

Urban decay -- The court ruled the city didn't consider whether the stores could cause a "downward spiral of retail closures and consequent long-term vacancies that ultimately result in urban decay."

To answer that concern, the city's consultant hired a real estate firm that concluded Bakersfield's retail market is strong enough to survive the two Wal-Marts. Even vacant retail spaces do not exhibit signs of urban decay and they tend to fill quickly, according to the report.

Cumulative impacts -- The first EIRs didn't consider enough how the two stores' impacts would add to the impacts of other development, both existing and future, according to the court.

The new EIRs include what the consultant calls the most comprehensive cumulative impact analysis conducted in a Bakersfield EIR, considering everything that is likely to be built by 2030.

Health impacts -- The court ruled the old EIR didn't address the health impacts resulting from the stores' effects on air quality.

The new EIRs conclude the pollution would not have a significant impact on health.

Kit fox -- The old EIR for the Panama Lane Wal-Mart didn't show adequate consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about the San Joaquin kit fox, the court ruled.

The new EIR spells out how developers must deal with kit foxes and their dens, such as only hand tools can be used when dens are being destroyed.

[Air quality](#) -- The old EIR for the Gosford Wal-Mart showed the project would have significant air quality impacts, but wouldn't interfere with implementation of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's air quality plan. The court ruled those two conclusions didn't match up.

The new EIR points to agreements between the developers of both stores and the air pollution district that say developers will use programs elsewhere to make up for the pollution that the stores produce.

Railroad spur -- The court ruled the old EIR didn't address the potential impacts from a railroad spur that could be built. The new EIR says the old EIR was wrong to even refer to a railroad spur, as there's no legal ability to build it.

The city hired a consulting firm to create the new EIRs, and that firm in turn hired consultants to help with specific parts of the report. The EIRs were paid for by the developers.

The Bakersfield Planning Commission is scheduled to take public comment on the documents at its meeting at 5:30 p.m. tonight. The commission is not expected to vote on the projects themselves until September or December.

People who can't attend tonight's meeting have until July 2 to send comments by mail or e-mail to the city planning department.

Other items on the Planning Commission's agenda tonight include:

Sports village

The commission will take public comment on the EIR for the planned Bakersfield Sports Village. A proposed 222-acre complex of fields and retail space north of the city's Wastewater Treatment Plant 3. The report focuses on impacts to noise, [air quality](#) and traffic.

The site was used as a spreading ground for treated wastewater until 2002.

Airport zone

The commission will look at a change that would allow residential development near the Bakersfield Municipal Airport, along Panama Lane just west of Cottonwood Road.

The city is proposing shortening the airport's "approach zone" from 10,000 feet to 7,000 feet. The 3,000-foot difference would mean homes could be built in the area no longer under the approach zone.

The state's handbook on airport planning now recommends that for an airport this size, restrictions are only needed out to 7,000 feet, said Jim Movius, the city's planning director.

Some homes already exist inside the 7,000-foot zone. Those were built before the airport plan was adopted in 1994, Movius said.

The commission will take public comment on the move today before voting on whether to approve the change.

Zone changes

Also on the agenda is a 3-acre change from estate zoning to commercial zoning on the southwest corner of Brimhall Road and Renfro Road.

And there's a proposed 5-acre change from neighborhood commercial to regional commercial zoning on the southeast corner of Calloway Drive and Brimhall Road. There are already restaurants under construction in a retail area there, Movius said, but the proposed zone would allow alcohol to be served.

How to participate

Tonight's meeting starts at 5:30 p.m. in City Hall council chambers, 1501 Truxtun Ave. You can also watch proceedings live on KGOV, the local government TV station. KGOV also broadcasts meetings live on the Internet.

The meeting agenda can be found on the city's Web site at www.bakersfieldcity.us.

Comments on the Wal-Mart EIR can be mailed to the City of Bakersfield Development Services Department, 1715 Chester Ave., Bakersfield, CA, 93301, or by e-mail to DevPln@bakersfieldcity.us.

The deadline for comments is July 2.

Languishing landmark up for sale again

BY RYAN SCHUSTER, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, June 7, 2007

The venerable downtown Padre Hotel building finally may be coming back to life after years of delays during a half-finished renovation.

The Padre is back up for sale for \$5.6 million less than a year after a potential local buyer cut off talks about purchasing the building from owner Pacifica Enterprises LLC, a San Diego area property management company.

City officials hope that a new buyer will finally complete a long-discussed renovation of the historic building that has towered over the city's downtown skyline since 1928.

"I'm antsy," said Donna Kunz, the city's economic development director. "I'd like to see something happen. I'm happy to see some activity on it. I'd like to see it come back to life."

Pacifica Enterprises is abandoning a renovation project to add condos to the building, an effort that has dragged on for five years and been delayed by a lawsuit [after workers were exposed to asbestos](#).

Neighboring businesses have also complained that discarded junk and rubble from the renovation left in a fenced parking lot next to the building created an eyesore. The trash has since been cleaned up, but not much else has happened to the building in recent months.

"It's disappointing when a developer promises that progress is going to be made and then it doesn't happen," said Bakersfield City Councilwoman Sue Benham, whose 2nd Ward includes downtown. "I'm excited to hear that something good may be happening at the Padre. I would love to see an owner come in and put the Padre back into action."

The building has been approved for condo use by city planning commissioners. Other potential uses include apartments, offices and a hotel. The ground floor likely would be dedicated to retail space.

A listing of the property marketed by Phoenix-based Hendricks & Partners says Pacifica has sunk more than \$4 million into renovating the once dilapidated eight-story, 72,800-square-foot building.

The exterior has been refinished, windows have been replaced and the electrical and water lines have been updated. But the building is in shell condition and is vacant with the exception of two first-floor tenants, a beauty salon and a barbershop, which are on month-to-month leases.

"(Pacifica is) going in a new direction with their business," said Paul Runkle, who is handling the marketing and sale of the Padre as a real estate broker with Hendricks & Partners. "They are probably not the best people to take this project forward in Bakersfield. It's just better for everyone involved for them to sell it right now."

Paul Holling, director of asset management with Pacifica Enterprises, declined to comment Wednesday.

Open houses to show the Padre to prospective buyers have been scheduled for June 18, June 21 and June 26. Runkle said offers are due by June 28 and the sales process could take two to four months.

Kunz, the economic development director, said a conservative estimate of the cost to complete the renovation may be higher than the asking price of \$5.6 million.

[Runkle said some asbestos remains in the building, which he said could cost \\$250,000 to remove properly.](#)

[Pacifica has settled a lawsuit related to asbestos removal in the building.](#) Kunz said a new owner would not bear liability over the botched removal of asbestos that led to the suit.

The Padre has been a downtown landmark for decades. Former owner Milton "Spartacus" Miller fought the city over a variety of issues and once erected signs with the words "Alamo" and "Tombstone," on the hotel's roof. The signs remained atop the building for years after Miller's 1999 death.

Miller's wife, Lora Gordon Miller, sold the Padre to Pacifica.

Kunz said the city's redevelopment agency would be willing to partner with a potential buyer and she said she hoped a local group would come forward.

"It's a key property," she said. "It has so much potential. It could be a shining star in downtown. If it cleans up and is successful, it could be a catalyst for the rest of downtown."

Spare the Air season blows in

Stockton Record, Thursday, June 7, 2007

The 2007 Spare the Air season began Tuesday in the San Joaquin Valley, meaning residents will be asked to help improve air quality.

On Spare the Air days, officials ask residents to consider sharing rides to work or taking mass transit, postponing the use of gas-powered lawn equipment and making sure their cars are tuned up, among other things.

Employers can sign up to receive e-mails and faxes each time a Spare the Air day is forecast. They can pass that information on to their employees.

Members of the public can get latest smog conditions by calling the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District at (800) 766-4463 or by visiting www.valleyair.org.

Valley ready to 'Spare the Air'

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri-Valley Herald, Wednesday, June 6, 2007

TRACY — As warmer temperatures return to the Central Valley, so do the prospects for unhealthy air quality.

On Tuesday, the San Joaquin Valley Air District launched its annual "Spare the Air" program in an effort to curb pollution on days when the air is deemed unhealthy.

The San Joaquin Valley's "Spare the Air" season usually runs through September, with the air district typically issuing upward of 20 to 45 air quality warnings during that period.

The primary air pollution problem in the Central Valley during the summer months is ozone, which is the main ingredient in smog.

With cars, trucks and other mobile sources contributing more than half of the smog-forming pollutants in the Valley, encouraging residents to stay off the roads on unhealthy days is crucial to maintaining clean air.

Because commercial and residential traffic does not fall under the jurisdiction of the air district, officials say voluntary programs such as "Spare the Air" are an invaluable component in reaching federally mandated deadlines for achieving clean air.

"Spare the Air is a popular program that always generates a high degree of public participation," said Air District representative Jaime Holt. She also noted "employers are a crucial link in conveying this important air-quality information."

To that end, when the Air District forecasts a "Spare the Air" warning, e-mail or fax notices are sent out to businesses that register as part of the program. The idea is that they will notify their employees and encourage them to adopt "air-friendly behaviors that will help reduce pollution levels." The program is free of charge for local businesses, which will also be provided with brochures, notification posters and other incentive items.

Employers wishing to participate in the program can contact the Air District at (559) 230-6000 or visit them on the web at <http://www.valleyair.org>.

Daily air quality status reports can be heard by calling the district toll-free at 1-800 SMOG INFO (1-800-766-4463).

Power panel hears community concerns

Dozens pepper Energy Commission with comments, questions about Hayward proposals

By Martin Ricard, STAFF WRITER

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, June 7, 2007

HAYWARD — The California Energy Commission provided an opportunity Wednesday to scrutinize two proposed power plants, bringing all parties — including Hayward leaders and citizens — to the table to address concerns that have left both projects in limbo.

Unresolved issues involving the Russell City Energy Center and Eastshore Energy Center, both natural gas-fired plants proposed just north of Route 92 on the west side of town, brought more than 30 people out to the first half of the four-hour status conference.

During the second half, more than 100 people showed up to voice their concerns. They packed Hayward city hall, some sporting neon pink and green signs reading "Stop Tierra/Eastshore Plant" and "No power plants in Hayward" to communicate their concerns to the CEC.

Leading up to Wednesday's meeting, both companies behind the proposed plants had expressed concerns about possible barriers that could cause further delays in the approval process.

In exploring those concerns, CEC officials met with representatives of the companies and agencies involved in hopes of bringing some clarity to the issues delaying the projects and how both would fit into Hayward's landscape.

The CEC has yet to come to an agreement with Calpine Corp., the San Jose-based company that wants to build the 600-megawatt Russell City plant close to the city's shoreline, about how to reduce air-quality problems associated with the plant. Concerns about the potential effect of the plant's stacks on air quality have worried the company that it won't be able to complete its project on time as spelled out in its agreement with Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

Calpine representatives reported to the CEC that the company had met a majority of the standards set for the project, but that air-quality concerns were still being evaluated.

"We are very anxious that the project will be approved in a timely manner to bring it on line in the summer of 2010," the scheduled deadline for construction, said Calpine counsel Gregg Wheatland.

Most of the scrutiny centered on Eastshore Energy Center, Texas-based Tierra Energy's 115-megawatt peaker plant proposed for Clawiter Road, and its inconsistency with the city's general plan.

Commissioners John Geesman and Jeffrey Byron questioned why the company didn't look at alternative sites, and called it a "fatal flaw" that Tierra didn't take into consideration the proposed site's impact on the city.

Jane Luckhardt, counsel for Tierra, said the company did look at other sites and determined that building the plant on Clawiter Road would have the least impact on the surrounding area.

"We do not believe it will have a significant environmental impact for the location at this site," Luckhardt said.

During the first half of the conference, much of the ire was directed at Tierra and PG&E because of the site chosen for the Eastshore plant, and because neither fully disclosed its reasoning behind the decision.

Both companies have said PG&E wants them to build plants in that area, but only Tierra Energy has been criticized for its lack of communication with the public.

Until recently, much of the information about the plant was kept under wraps, but a PG&E representative explained Wednesday — although still in vague terms — that building the plant on the Clawiter Road site was crucial to generating power for the Bay Area.

"In this case, there was a need for power in the Bay Area, and the Russell City and Eastshore projects both met that need," said PG&E counsel Scott Galati. "We're not in the business anymore to say, 'This is a good place for a power plant.' We made the decision to choose the site, quite frankly, because it was the best choice for our customers."

While there were two people at the evening session who expressed their support of the two plants, one of whom represented the Hayward Chamber of Commerce, most urged the commission to reject both projects.

Assemblywoman Mary Hayashi, D-Castro Valley, submitted a letter to the commission expressing her concerns about the health and environmental impacts the Tierra Energy plant could create.

"The residents of Hayward — and the surrounding communities — have done their fair share in shouldering the burden of local power plants," Hayashi wrote in the statement. "I urge you to reject Tierra Energy of Texas' application to build the Eastshore Energy Plant in Hayward."

Others piggybacked on Hayashi's concerns about the plant's potential impact on air quality, air traffic, homes and schools.

Hayward resident Rachel Henderson said the company's plan to buy credits elsewhere to offset the pollution its plant would create in Hayward doesn't make her and her neighbors feel any safer or better about their health.

"It seems to me it's cheaper for Tierra and PG&E to put power plants in Hayward," she said. "But we don't want to pay for it with our health."

Hermes Aleman, a resident who lives a few feet from the proposed plant site, said he hopes the CEC ultimately rejects both plants because the impacts on people's health far outweigh the profits the companies would eventually reap. And to ignore it simply because Hayward is mostly a suburban, working-class city, he said, would "ruin our American Dream."

At the end of the meeting, commission staff concluded that the next step will be to wait for staff assessments from both companies on the projects, which are expected to be finished within the next several weeks. The commission also will continue to hold hearings on new developments.

The commissioners assured the audience that the process was only beginning, and all the residents' opinions would be taken into consideration.

"Although we may disagree with which inning we're in here, the score is still tied 0-0," Byron said. "And if I could steal the words from our governor, we'll be back."

A look inside the curious world of pollution credits

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Tri-Valley Herald, Thursday, June 7, 2007

What do an old can company, a San Francisco power plant and your home's wood-burning fireplace have in common?

The pollution caused by each is supposed to be shut down by two power plants proposed to be built in west Hayward.

If the state allows the plants to operate, their owners will have to buy credits to reduce pollution elsewhere.

That's because air pollution in the San Francisco Bay Area Air Basin, of which Hayward is a part, persistently exceeds the environmental standards that state and federal laws have established.

If the plants create emissions above the standard, which both are expected to do for certain pollutants, they must seek credits to mitigate regional pollution at a rate above what they produce. Proponents of the system say it allows businesses to keep expanding while gradually reducing net emissions.

But how the trade is regulated and which pollutants are considered more problematic than others depends on market conditions, what credits developers can find, and the priorities of regulator organizations such as the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the California Energy Commission.

In the case of Texas company Tierra Energy's proposed Eastshore Energy Center, one of the leading pollutants that will be produced by the plant at a level exceeding state standards is nitrogen oxide. At full operation, the plant can produce about 18 pounds per hour normally and 132 pounds per hour during a cold start.

The nitrogen oxides are created during combustion and have been associated with ozone, acid rain, asthma and other problems.

But Tierra instead may be able to buy credits to reduce a different kind of pollution. The air district, according to data provided to The Daily Review, would allow Tierra to purchase credits offsetting about 150 tons of precursor organic compounds (POC) every year. POC is a different type of pollution from nitrogen oxides, although they both contribute to Bay Area ozone levels.

Tierra's credits would go to the following sources:

The largest credit, worth 71 tons of POC, was banked more than 20 years ago when a Continental Can Co. plant in Union City shut down in 1986.

The second-largest exchange reduces 38 tons of POC from the Tri-Valley Growers Association in Fremont: 22.7 tons went toward three die presses the company modified, and the other 15 tons to offset the emissions of two proposed projects that were never actually built. The other credits were for a San Leandro paper company that closed a printing facility in the 1980s, ending POC emissions caused by ink use, varnish and cleanup solvents; a foil-producing plant in Cupertino that closed down in 1990; a Milpitas company that closed two of its pollution sources in 1997; and U.S. Pipe and Foundry Co. in Union City, which stopped using solvent-based coating to paint pipes and switched to a water-based coating.

Greg Trewitt, a vice president of development for Tierra, said the company tried to look for credit sources located as close to Hayward as possible, in order to mitigate pollution that happened more locally.

In order to reduce particulate emissions, another pollutant that is a more serious problem during cold months, that company might also contribute to a program to retrofit Hayward-area fireplaces.

In fact, both Eastshore Energy Center and the other proposed power plant, Calpine Corp.'s Russell City Energy Center, might have to pay to retrofit area fireplaces to make up for the particulates they release into the air.

Russell City Energy Center also would be forced to make up for its nitrogen oxide emissions — though with fewer and more expansive credits than those purchased by Tierra.

Calpine intends to mitigate pollution by buying credits for the past shutdown of two major sources:

In 1985, operators of the Potrero Power Plant in San Francisco banked credits for the shutdown of two units of the plant. In 1991, Pacific Refining Co. in Hercules was shut down and credits banked.

The California Energy Commission has yet to come to agreement with Calpine about how to reduce air quality problems, leading to delays in the approval process. Some of those issues are meant to be resolved at the meeting tonight.

Tax on gas-guzzlers up for vote

Proposal would reward buyers of fuel-efficient vehicles with rebates.

By Chris Bowman / The Sacramento Bee

In the Fresno Bee, Thursday, June 7, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- Here's one way to combat global warming: Take \$2,500 out of the pockets of new Hummer owners and give it to buyers of the Toyota Prius.

That's essentially the proposal set for a vote today or Friday on the Assembly floor of the California Legislature.

The same body that passed the nation's first law curbing climate-altering or "greenhouse" tailpipe exhaust is debating a system of fees and rebates to coax some of those emission cuts from new car buyers.

The bill by Assembly Member Ira Ruskin, D-Redwood City, is considered one of the top global warming bills of the session.

The measure would require buyers of gas guzzlers, which emit high levels of greenhouse gases, to pay a surcharge of up to \$2,500.

The revenue would be used to reward buyers of more fuel-efficient models with rebates of up to \$2,500.

The measure, Assembly Bill 493, would take effect in the 2011 model year.

"This will change many people's behavior and, more importantly, change the automakers' behavior to make cleaner cars for everybody, which is what they should have been doing all along," said Dan Kalb, policy director for the Union of Concerned Scientists, a public health lobby that is sponsoring the legislation.

Of course, that's not how the automotive lobby sees it.

"This will penalize large families and the working men and women of California who depend on larger vehicles for their way of life," said Charles Territo, spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, which represents Detroit automakers and Toyota, among others.

The trade group ran a full-page ad Tuesday in The Bee, urging readers to tell their Assembly representatives to kill the bill, calling it a "car tax." "Californians already pay about \$1,500 in taxes

when they buy a new vehicle," the ad states. "Now, the Assembly is trying to more than double that." The ad pictures a young couple getting out of a minivan toting toddlers and groceries, a hay farmer with a pitchfork and a hard-hatted construction worker balancing 2-by-4's on his shoulder.

The headline: "Thought the car tax was dead? Think again!!! It's baaaack!" The "car tax" refers to a measure pushed by then-Gov. Gray Davis that increased vehicle registration fees. The tax became a political albatross around Davis' neck in the 2002 recall election that unseated him.

Bush seeks to mediate on climate change

Ahead of G-8 summit, he says U.S. can be a bridge between states who want action now and nations that need persuading.

By James Gerstenzang, Times Staff Writer
L.A. Times, Thursday, June 7, 2007

ROSTOCK, GERMANY — President Bush presented himself Wednesday as caught in the middle of the international climate debate, fending off allies' calls for mandatory steps to reverse global warming while encouraging major developing nations to join eventual climate negotiations.

The dispute over how to respond to the world's changing climate is emerging as a focal point of the annual Group of 8 summit that began Wednesday night in Heiligendamm, a resort village on the Baltic Sea. The gathering has drawn tens of thousands of protesters to this northeastern corner of Germany.

White House officials predicted Wednesday that Bush would emerge from the three-day summit with an agreement to hold formal negotiations to establish medium- and long-range targets, reaching out more than 40 years, for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Critics of the president's position argue that voluntary targets are not enough and fixed limits are needed.

Sitting on the grounds of the castle-like Kempinski Grand Hotel, where the summit is being held, Bush told reporters that "the United States can serve as a bridge between some nations who believe that now is the time to come up with a set goal ... and those who are reluctant to participate in the dialogue."

"We all can make major strides, and yet there won't be a reduction until China and India are participants," he said. His comment reflected a view shared by other critics of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol: that its limits on greenhouse gas emissions target the most economically advanced nations while giving the developing world a pass.

Carbon dioxide, given off when fossil fuels are burned, is one of the main greenhouse gases blamed for an increase in global temperatures.

Bush has objected to the central element of a plan proposed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the summit host, and supported by most European leaders. Under it, by 2050 participating nations would reduce their emissions to half of what they were in 1990, with the goal of curbing the increase in global temperatures to no more than 3.6 degrees.

As the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Italy, Japan and Russia joined Bush and Merkel for an informal dinner before the official meetings began today, police used water cannons to turn back demonstrators. At noon, authorities briefly closed the only two checkpoints leading to the area because 6,000 demonstrators were blocking them.

Demonstrators tramped through nearby fields to thwart police efforts to contain them, and pushed toward the 12-foot razor-wired fence establishing an 8-mile perimeter around Heiligendamm.

Police spokeswoman Jessica Wessel told The Times that 166 protesters had been arrested and

16 police officers injured. She said she didn't have information on the extent of the injuries.

White House officials said Bush did not encounter the protesters, who disrupted travel, at times blocking the road to the small airport nearby used by arriving leaders, and that they had no effect on his activities.

Merkel has built the summit around the issues of poverty, particularly in Africa, and climate change.

Speaking during a photo session after lunch with Bush, Merkel hinted at the ongoing disagreement with the president, saying they had "a very good debate" and "there are a few areas here and there" on which they need to continue to work.

Merkel's proposal aims to carry the nations most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions beyond the Kyoto agreement, which expires in 2012. The United States, under the Clinton and Bush administrations, never ratified the pact.

Bush proposed new negotiations a week ago, and has called for greater reliance on technology to reduce the emissions while avoiding specific, internationally mandated restrictions.

This position has drawn protest from environmental organizations. On Tuesday, Larry Schweiger, president and chief executive of the National Wildlife Federation based in Virginia, said, "Rather than embrace Chancellor Angela Merkel's proposal to set mandatory pollution targets, the Bush administration is opting to stall."

National security advisor Stephen J. Hadley predicted that the summit's planned climate change report would find consensus on several key elements, among them recognition that global warming is a problem that needs to be addressed and a focus on a post-Kyoto agreement that would bring the 15 nations responsible for 85% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions to negotiations. The former is a step Bush resisted for some time after taking office; the latter has been a central goal of the administration.

On climate change, Bush found something of an ally in Russia.

Dmitri Peskov, a spokesman for Russian President Vladimir V. Putin, said in a conference call with reporters that the Russians found Bush's proposal putting off specific targets "very pragmatic and interesting."

In a brief session Wednesday evening, Bush met with the musicians Bono and Bob Geldof. Bono issued a statement afterward praising the president, as he has in the past, for U.S. efforts in Africa, in this case for Bush's proposal to spend \$30 billion over the next five years on global HIV/AIDS programs.

Lawmakers Oppose House Emissions Plan

By KEN THOMAS, The Associated Press

Published in the Washington Post

Thursday, June 7, 2007; 1:29 PM

WASHINGTON -- Several lawmakers said Thursday they would try to prevent a House energy plan that seeks to block California and other states from regulating tailpipe emissions.

During a hearing, several House Democrats joined opposition from House [Speaker Nancy Pelosi](#), D-Calif. They said they could not back legislation that would limit California's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate them.

"This bill is cutting the legs out from under the states just as they are starting to sprint forward on carbon pollution regulation," said [Rep. Edward Markey](#), D-Mass.

[Reps. Jane Harman](#) and [Henry Waxman](#), D-Calif., said they support a proposal next week that would attempt to strip away the provision preventing California from regulating the vehicle emissions.

The comments came at the start of a lengthy hearing on a comprehensive energy plan that would propose that the auto industry meet gas mileage standards of at least 36 miles per gallon for passenger cars after 2021 and 30 mpg for trucks after 2024. It would also create a low-carbon fuel standard and push the auto industry to boost their production of vehicles running on alternative fuels such as ethanol.

California has asked the federal government for a waiver for two years to implement a state law that would cut greenhouse gas emissions, mostly carbon dioxide, by 25 percent from cars and 18 percent from sport utility vehicles beginning in 2009. At least 11 other states are ready to follow California's lead.

The House bill, drafted by [Rep. Rick Boucher](#), D-Va., would prohibit the EPA from issuing a waiver a state would need to impose auto pollution standards if the new requirements are "designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California and the governors of Arizona, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Washington released a letter to Boucher on Thursday opposing the plan. "Congress must not deny states the right to pursue solutions in the absence of federal policy," they wrote.

Some lawmakers said the bill would also attempt to overturn the findings of a Supreme Court decision in April that said the EPA has the authority to regulate greenhouse gases from cars and trucks. But supporters of the bill said it would preserve the ability of states to regulate toxic air pollutants from motor vehicles.

Boucher, who heads a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee that is developing the plan, has said it is important to have "unified regulations" for sources of carbon dioxide emissions. During Thursday's hearing, he said it would "respond to the regulatory confusion" following the Supreme Court decision.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Thursday, June 7, 2007:](#)

Deal with diesel

Infrastructure construction can't ignore dangers of sooty air.

Over the next 20 years, Californians will see increased levels of construction activity because of the \$42.7 billion in infrastructure bonds that voters approved in November.

Get ready to see fleets of bulldozers, cranes and earthmovers doing the gritty work of upgrading the state's transportation network, improving levees and building new schools.

That's fine. People and workers near these construction sites can put up with a little dust and inconvenience to help improve the state's public works. But they shouldn't have to breathe clouds of toxic diesel soot from this equipment -- especially when contractors have access to technology that can reduce pollution.

This week in Sacramento, lawmakers and the Schwarzenegger administration are fighting over the diesel pollution that could waft from infrastructure spending.

In its budget bill, the Senate has proposed that all contractors receiving funds from the infrastructure bonds use diesel-particulate-matter filter devices on their older equipment. According to testimony provided to the Senate, such filters cost about \$7,000 to \$20,000 per piece of equipment. Studies show they can eliminate 85% of diesel soot -- highly toxic particulates that, when inhaled, lodge deep in the lungs and are particularly dangerous for children and the elderly.

The Senate proposal offers both exemptions and incentives to deal with the state's mix of large and small construction firms. The proposal exempts contractors who can demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the California Air Resources Board, that available filters are incompatible with their equipment.

The bill also adds \$20 million to the existing Carl Moyer program to retrofit diesel trucks and construction equipment. The extra money would help small contractors offset the cost of installing filters.

Even with those concessions, the construction industry and some of its friends in the administration are fighting the Senate proposal. Officials with Caltrans and the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency say the measure could limit the contractors eligible to bid on the bond projects, and drive up costs.

There's no doubt that cleaner air comes with a price, but clouds of diesel pollution are also costly. The Air Resources Board says uncontrolled diesel soot adds to premature deaths and ailments that cost billions of dollars.

Ballot arguments for Proposition 1B -- the \$19.9 billion transportation and congestion bond that voters approved in November -- promised that the measure would "reduce air pollution and improve air quality."

If lawmakers don't adopt the Senate language, they will break their promise to voters and ignore some of the most valuable infrastructure in California -- the health of its 37 million residents.