

## **Schwarzenegger wants guarantees of support for high-speed rail**

By The Associated Press - Steve Lawrence  
Madera Tribune, Thursday, January 17, 2008

SACRAMENTO - Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has dropped a request that lawmakers remove a \$9.9 billion high-speed rail bond from the November ballot but wants legislation that could tie spending the money to guarantees of support from the federal government and private sector.

Such a requirement could delay the project indefinitely even if the bond measure is approved by voters.

Officials with the authority charged with overseeing the high-speed rail line say they expect the state, federal government and private investors to each cover about a third of the cost of building the project. But they say private companies will not commit until they see the state making a significant investment.

"I have been talking to a lot of high-speed rail folks and, yes, they would love to invest in the project or be a partner with the state," said Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, a San Francisco Democrat who is a leading supporter of the project.

"But they need to know the state is committed to this project and we have done certain things to minimize the risk by, for example, doing engineering studies, environmental studies and buying right of way."

A Schwarzenegger spokesman, H.D. Palmer, said administration officials were drafting legislation to spell out "the things we have to have in place in terms of commitment from the federal government and non-governmental entities in terms of funding."

"How that language is going to look I can't tell you right now, but that's the goal," he said Wednesday.

The changes would "basically fulfill" what the governor talked about in an op-ed piece he wrote for The Fresno Bee last May. In that article, Schwarzenegger extolled the virtues of high-speed rail but said he wanted the state's high-speed rail board to develop a financing plan that would "identify with confidence" where the rest of the funding would come from.

Palmer said he did not know whether the change sought by the governor would force the state to delay selling the bonds - if voters approve them - until it gets financial commitments from the federal government and private investors.

"That's getting ahead of the people who are going to be drafting it," he said.

The legislation would need to be approved in both houses of the Legislature before the ballot measure language would be changed.

Some supporters of the high-speed rail project said they think Schwarzenegger really wants to pull the bond measure off the ballot, as the state has done twice before and the governor asked lawmaker to do last year.

Schwarzenegger wants the November ballot to include many of his own spending proposals. They would include a \$14 billion health care reform plan and \$38.3 billion in new borrowing for school and university buildings, water projects and courthouse construction.

In addition, the state is facing a \$14.4 billion budget deficit over the next year-and-a-half.

State Sen. Dean Florez, a Shafter Democrat whose mother is a member of the high-speed rail board, suggested Schwarzenegger is trying to kill the bond proposal despite his claims of supporting high-speed rail.

"The governor recognizes that he doesn't have the two-thirds vote necessary to pull it off the November ballot, so he's attempting to put a poison pill in this to say, in essence, if you don't have the federal or private funding for this, it's null and void...." Florez said. "Those kinds of modifications won't fly past the Legislature."

The state's high-speed rail board is recommending that California build a 700-mile rail system that would link the state's most populous cities with trains running at top speeds of 220 mph.

The bond measure would help pay for the first segment of the \$40 billion project - a line between Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area.

Mehdi Morshed, the rail board's executive director, said legislation that put the bond measure on the ballot already imposes a limit on the state's involvement by allowing the bond funds to cover no more than half the cost of building the Los Angeles-to-San Francisco segment.

"We don't get to spend the money until we match the bond money, dollar for dollar, with other revenue, whether it's private or federal or something else," he said.

Rep. Jim Costa, a Fresno Democrat who has introduced legislation in Congress to finance high-speed rail, said he takes Schwarzenegger at his word that he supports the project. But Costa said spending on high-speed rail should not be held up until all funding is secured.

"This effort should not be treated any differently than other forms of transportation," he said. "When we're talking about financing and authorizing a freeway project, we never wait until we have all the funding, do we?" he said.

## **Texas is top carbon polluter in U.S.**

By April Castro, The Associated Press

In the Washington Post, L.A. Daily News, San Diego Union-Tribune and other papers, Thursday, Jan. 17, 2008

AUSTIN, Texas - Everything's big in Texas - big pickup trucks, big SUVs and the state's big carbon footprint, too.

Texans' fondness for large, manly vehicles has helped make the Lone Star State the biggest carbon polluter in the nation.

The headquarters state of America's oil industry spewed 670million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 2003, enough that Texas would rank seventh in the world if it were its own country, according to the most recent figures from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The amount is more than that of California and Pennsylvania - the second- and third-ranking states - combined.

A multitude of factors contribute to the carbon output, among them: Texas' 19 coal-burning power plants; a heavy concentration of refineries and chemical plants; a lack of mass transit; and a penchant among ranchers and urban cowboys alike for brawny, gas-guzzling trucks - sometimes to haul things, but often just to look Texas-tough.

Debbie Howden, an Austin real estate agent, said her family of six has two pickup trucks, three SUVs, and no apologies. "I would definitely put size and safety over the emissions thing," said Howden, 55. She calls their high fuel bills a "necessary evil."

Anthony Nguyen attended the famously liberal University of California at Berkeley but drives a black Nissan Frontier pickup handed down from his dad, a liquor-store owner near Houston. Nguyen said his father hauled liquor around in the truck, but he admitted he has no practical use for its large bed.

"I think it's the idea that in Texas, everything is bigger," said Nguyen, 20. "I grew up here, and I think it's pretty cool."

While states such as California and New York are moving quickly to address global warming, the issue has prompted only scattered calls for reforms here. GOP leaders in Texas have refused to make emissions reduction a priority, and Republican Gov. Rick Perry has expressed doubt as to whether global warming is even a man-made problem.

Texas political leaders read "environmental protection as government activism" and want no part of it, said Jim Henson, director of the Texas Politics Project.

With all the don't-mess-with-Texas swagger he can muster, Perry has called Al Gore's mouth the leading source of carbon dioxide. As for the state's greenhouse-gas ranking, Perry's administration makes no apologies.

"Being that Texas is a heavily populated state, that it is the leading producer of energy, has the largest refining capacity and has the largest petrochemical industry in the nation, it would be expected that we would have the largest total of greenhouse gases in the country," Perry spokeswoman Allison Castle said.

Texas, the second-most-populous state, behind California, has 23.5million people and more than 20million registered vehicles, about one in four of them a pickup truck. California has a population of 36.5million and 33million registered vehicles.

Transportation accounted for 28percent of Texas' carbon emissions in 2003.

Texas consumes more coal than any other state. And its per-capita residential use of electricity is significantly higher than the national average, because of high demand for air conditioning during the hot summers and the widespread use of electricity for heating during the winter.

There is little doubt the state's stand on pollution reflects the influence of Texas' biggest and most powerful industry: energy.

"Decisions are not just made by politicians because of a lack of foresight, but in many cases, they have big contributors encouraging them to move in that direction," said Luke Metzger, director of Environment Texas.

Texans polled last spring listed the Iraq war and immigration as the nation's most pressing issues, with fewer than 4percent saying the environment was a top concern. Nationally, slightly less than half of Americans polled by the Pew Research Center last year rated global warming as a "very serious" problem.

Kirk Pingel, 28, said his Chevy Trailblazer gets about 18 miles per gallon on the highway, but high gas prices don't deter him: "I'd rather have the luxury of the car I want instead of a car that gets good gas mileage but maybe I didn't want that car."

Pingel coaches youth football and basketball teams and said the extra space in his SUV is useful for transporting sports equipment. His theory on why Texans love their trucks and SUVs? "The larger the car, the bigger you feel," he said.

There is some evidence that attitudes are changing, but only modestly.

The number of hybrid vehicles registered in Texas more than doubled last year, to 48,550. Still, that's only a fraction of 1percent of all vehicles registered in Texas.

"As more hybrids are added on, particularly hybrids that are trucks, you see a spike in those," said Kim Sue Lia Perkes, a spokeswoman for the Texas Department of Transportation title and registration division. "You might not get Texans out of their trucks, but they will buy their hybrid trucks."

The governor touts the state's leadership on renewable energy, such as wind. But environmentalists were outraged early last year when Perry signed an executive order to speed construction of 11 new coal-fired power plants. Plans for most of those plants were eventually scrapped after TXU - the state's biggest utility and the source of \$400,000 in contributions to Perry's political campaigns - was sold to a private equity firm.

## **Atomic power regains its glow**

Christian Science Monitor

In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, January 17, 2008

More than two decades after the Chernobyl meltdown, the world again is staring uneasily at the Janus faces of nuclear power. One offers an energy source that won't cause global warming. The other presents challenges in cost, safety, disposal, and nuclear proliferation.

Rising energy prices, and especially the need to find alternatives to fossil fuels that pour out greenhouse gases, have put a fresh focus on nuclear power. "We are facing a nuclear renaissance," the head of a French nuclear energy company said recently. "Nuclear's not the devil anymore. The devil is coal."

Today the world's 439 nuclear plants provide about 16 percent of electricity, a percentage that has altered little over 20 years. But that's changing.

Britain recently announced that it will look favorably on companies that apply to build new nuclear plants there. Finland and France already have active building programs. Italy, which banned nuclear plants after Chernobyl, is now engaged in a debate on the subject, and interest in the US appears to be reawakening, too. In all, more than 100 new plants are being built or planned, about half of them in developing nations such as India and China.

This nascent boom comes despite the known shortcomings of nuclear power. Radioactive waste from nuclear plants, such as plutonium-239, can remain toxic for thousands of years. And no permanent storage facility to keep it safely sequestered indefinitely has been built anywhere in the world. The American site at Yucca Mountain in Nevada has proceeded at a snail's pace and is opposed by that state's most influential politician, US Senate majority leader Harry Reid (D). Its opening remains at least a decade away.

Plant accidents remain a real concern, too, especially in developing countries where official corruption can go unchecked and safety standards and public accountability may be lacking. Reactors are tempting targets for terrorist attacks. And they have the potential to produce weapons-grade plutonium, another obvious concern.

Together, these considerations provide ample reason to give pause.

But the time for weighing alternatives is running out. Unabated building of coal-fired power plants would produce a level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that could usher in unacceptable changes to the world's climate. Technologies that could capture carbon emissions from coal plants and bury them underground are only in their experimental stages.

Some environmentalists argue that turning to nuclear power could siphon off government support for other fossil-fuel alternatives - wind, solar, geothermal, tidal, and so on.

That shouldn't be allowed to happen. Neither should it stunt initiatives to cut energy use through conservation and more efficient products. Ramping up efforts on these preferable alternatives can keep the building of new nuclear plants to a minimum.

Governments must take a gimlet-eyed look at nuclear power. They must insist that operators have strong safety plans and adequate funding for the entire life cycle of facilities, from construction to proper decommissioning and storage of hazardous waste.

Nuclear power is a friend that bears close watching.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the thousands of deaths that occur annually due to toxic chemicals. For more information regarding this and other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

### **Cobran químicos tóxicos miles de muertes anualmente**

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Wednesday, January 17, 2008

Un estudio de la Universidad de California, en Berkeley, confirmó que los químicos tóxicos cobran miles de vidas humanas anualmente y se traducen en gastos de más de dos mil 600 millones de dólares anuales en servicios médicos y pérdidas de productividad.

Encargado por la Agencia de Protección Ambiental de California, el estudio aconseja cambios en las leyes para regular la contaminación tóxica industrial en el estado.

El autor del análisis, Michael Wilson, de la Escuela de Salud Pública, dijo que la contaminación química tóxica influye en los 240 mil casos de asma infantil, en hospitalizaciones que

representan mil 400 millones de dólares y en tratamientos que cuestan otros mil 200 millones de dólares anuales.

Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses the Union of Concerned Scientists support for California's lawsuit against EPA.

### **Apoyan científicos demanda en California y otros estados contra la EPA**

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Tuesday, January 16, 2008

La mayor organización nacional de científicos en favor del medio ambiente apoya una demanda en California y otros estados contra la Agencia Federal de Protección Ambiental (EPA- por sus siglas en inglés) e inició una campaña pública para reforzarla.

La Unión de Científicos Preocupados, con sede en Berkeley, California, declaró en su campaña que la EPA no sólo está en contra de establecer objetivos históricos contra la contaminación del aire, sino en contra de los consejos de sus propios asesores.

La organización pidió a los electores estadounidenses que envíen a sus congresistas y senadores copias de una carta que acusa a la EPA de jugar políticamente con la salud y el medio ambiente.

##

Maricela Velásquez  
Senior Public Information Representative  
San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District  
1990 East Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726  
559.230.5849 FAX 559.230.6111  
www.valleyair.org