

## **Chamber supports employer schedule flexibility bill**

By Jennifer McCoun

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Friday, March 21, 2008

The Tulare Chamber of Commerce has issued a letter of support for AB 2127 (Benoit), legislation that would allow employees and employers flexibility in work schedules to help accommodate the diverse family obligations, commuting issues and other personal obligations that employees face.

Under AB 2127, businesses with 25 or fewer employees would be allowed to agree to an employee's request to work an alternative work schedule and applies specifically to small businesses that are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement. Currently, employers and employees are not allowed to negotiate alternative work schedules without triggering overtime requirements, even if both parties agree that it would be mutually beneficial to do so.

This Small Business Family Scheduling Option would add a much-needed boost for employers that are struggling to find qualified employees in a shrinking pool of candidates, and would be of benefit to many employees who would like the flexibility to be able to attend to personal issues within the traditional work day.

This legislation would not apply to union employees and employers who are covered by a collective bargaining unit, and includes important protections for the employee, including:

- The request for the small business family scheduling option must be made in writing by the employee, and it must be made voluntarily.
- The employer is required to maintain a copy of the written agreement, as it would a personnel record, for three years beyond termination of the agreement.
- The agreement must be executed in writing.
- Either the employee or the employer can revoke the agreement at any time, provided they give seven days written notice.
- Any hours worked beyond the compressed workweek hours must be paid at normal overtime rates.
- The employer is prohibited from reducing the employee's regular rate as a result of the employee adopting an alternative workweek schedule.

If AB 2127 becomes law, there will be many other residual benefits, including [a reduction in traffic and frequency of long commutes at peak hours; reduction in carbon emissions with fewer trips to the workplace](#); improved health and morale in the workforce, which studies show results from allowing a flexible work schedule. In some cases, employees will be able to have up to 50 extra non-working days each year that they can spend with their families or on activities that allow them to relax and rejuvenate.

The Chamber feels that this proposed legislation is good for both small business owners and their employees, and ultimately for the economy of California. We will continue to monitor its progress and advocate strongly for passage.

*Jennifer McCoun is CEO of the Tulare Chamber of Commerce.*

## **Air board seats in limbo as appointing body bows out**

By Mark Grossi / The Fresno Bee

Friday, March 21, 2008

Threatened with legal action, the California League of Cities has decided to stop appointing city council members to the regional air district board, leaving two board seats in limbo.

The two empty seats are up for appointment at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which copes with one of the country's worst air quality problems. Eventually, the problem could affect a total of five board seats that the league would have filled.

The league has been picking city members for the board since the air district was formed in 1992, but last year it was caught in a political battle as activists successfully fought to get their

candidates on the board. This year, activists threatened to sue the league, saying that they couldn't get access to meetings about filling the next two seats.

Though the league's membership is made up of California city officials, it is not a government agency and is no longer the appropriate group to make the appointments, league officials said.

League Executive Director Chris McKenzie in Sacramento said his organization does not make such choices for other air districts in the state.

"We're a nonprofit corporation," he said. "We don't have the same authority as government agencies. This process may have matured to the point that an established government agency should be handling it."

The city-seat appointment process became contentious last year, perhaps for the first time since the league became involved. Two activist candidates, Raji Brar of Arvin and Henry T. Perea of Fresno, were elected by league members after an intense campaign.

This year, the league was supposed to name two additional city members, which a new state law last year added to the board to represent large cities such as Fresno, Bakersfield and Stockton.

In addition, the law, Senate Bill 719, added two other seats -- medical and science experts -- that have yet to be filled by the governor. The air board now has 15 seats, including a supervisor from each of the Valley air district's eight counties, five city representatives and the two experts.

County boards of supervisors name their board members, but the state law that created the district did not specify any group to fill city seats. The cities 16 years ago decided to have the League of Cities make the choices.

To back out of the arrangement, the league has asked for advice from the air district board, which under state law cannot make the city-seat appointments.

The board Thursday suggested that the league turn the appointments over to so-called city selection committees in each county. Such committees already exist in every county in the state and routinely fill seats on recreation boards, land-use commissions and other agencies. In Fresno County, for example, the panel is commonly known as the Mayor's Selection Committee.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, is proposing a law, Senate Bill 1548, that would help put the change into effect, setting up a process to use the committees. He said other air districts in California pick city representatives in this way.

No one knows when the issue will be resolved, but if it continues next year, it would affect the appointment for the seat being vacated by Perea.

City selection committees usually have representatives from each incorporated city in each county.

But the air board appointments would present considerable challenges, district officials said. The city seats would have to be rotated among the Valley's northern, central and southern regions, and no county could have more than one city representative at a time.

"Each time you make a decision on one city seat, it disqualifies other cities in the county from having a board member at the same time," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin. "This requires a coordinated approach, and we have made several suggestions."

Air board member Steve Worthley, a Tulare County supervisor, said the cities should also consider going beyond the selection committees and have each city council vote on nominees for the board.

"You can't be more transparent than that," he said.

## **LA Port approves plan for cleaner-running trucks**

By Michael Blood, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, Modesto Bee, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, March 21, 2008

Los Angeles (AP) -- Commissioners at one of the nation's major seaports unanimously approved a final prong of a landmark plan Thursday intended to clean up some of America's dirtiest air.

The 4-0 vote by the Los Angeles Harbor Commission would usher in a new generation of cleaner-running trucks to carry goods in and out of the Port of Los Angeles each day. Truck traffic — an estimated 70,000 trips daily at the adjacent ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach — is considered a key culprit in the region's notoriously polluted air.

But the plan and a key element — requiring thousands of independent drivers to become employees of licensed trucking companies — face an almost certain legal challenge that could delay environmental gains for years, as well as lead to higher prices for consumers, critics claim.

It's also unclear how the plan would dovetail with the neighboring port in Long Beach, which earlier adopted a plan that allows independent truckers to continue hauling goods, although with tough emission standards for their trucks.

"The next venue for the proposal will be in the court," Curtis Whalen of the Intermodal Motor Carriers Conference, an affiliate of the American Trucking Association, said in a statement. The Los Angeles plan will "undermine ... a workable clean-truck program."

At a news conference after the vote, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said the city's harbor was at the forefront of efforts to shift to cleaner energy in an era of climate change. He blamed pollution at the port for causing a raft of health problems for local residents.

Los Angeles "has said enough is enough," the mayor told a cheering crowd, as ship horns sounded in the distance. In just months, "children will breathe easier, and so will their grandchildren."

Convinced of the legal soundness of the approach, commissioners insisted it was the best way to regulate thousands of independent drivers while ensuring port security and good maintenance of the truck fleet.

Under the final of three pieces of the clean-air plan, nearly 17,000 independent truckers who work at the port would be required to become employees of trucking companies. The companies — licensed motor carriers — would be responsible for purchasing and maintaining trucks that meet tougher federal emissions standards.

To take effect, it must also be approved by the City Council.

The trucking companies will be eligible for grants covering up to 80 percent of the cost of newer, cleaner-burning trucks. And the port will also offer drivers \$5,000 to retire trucks built before 1989.

In time, port officials predict truck pollution could be slashed by as much as 80 percent in the region, known for its high rate of asthma, particularly among youth.

The current truck fleet is "made up of drivers earning low pay, driving dirty trucks and who may not meet security requirements," said commission President S. David Freeman.

Labor supports the plan. Some critics have charged it's little more than a thinly veiled effort to unionize low-wage drivers, a claim disputed by the commission.

"We want clean air, we want good jobs, we want to grow the port," said Maria Elena Durazo, head of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. "This proposal will give that to us."

In an editorial Thursday, the Los Angeles Times described that trucking plan as "an untested attempt at regulating the business that might run afoul of interstate commerce laws. By passing it, harbor commissioners will all but assure a legal battle that may go on for years."

In earlier vote, the sister ports each voted to require trucks to meet tougher 2007 federal emissions standards by Jan. 12, 2012, along with a \$35 cargo fee to pay for the newer, cleaner-running trucks.

Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster said Los Angeles' decision could open the way to a long, expensive legal fight that would undercut the purpose of the plan — cleaning up the air. Moreover, he said many independent drivers don't want to become trucking company employees.

"I think our plan is better. It doesn't place in jeopardy the clean-air program itself," Foster said.

## **Port of Los Angeles plan weighs on shippers**

**The Harbor Commission will require trucking companies to shoulder costs of the clean air program, a move rejected by Long Beach.**

By Louis Sahagun, staff writer

L.A. Times, Friday, March 21, 2008

The Los Angeles Harbor Commission on Thursday unanimously approved a clean air plan requiring shipping companies to buy and maintain a modernized fleet of big rigs and employ thousands of independent truckers who currently operate under contract.

A spokesman for the American Trucking Assn. derided the plan as a "scheme to unionize port drivers" and vowed that his group would sue the port. Spokesman Curtis Whalen said the plan violates court rulings allowing the trucking industry unrestricted access to markets nationwide. Nonetheless, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa told about 300 truckers at Banning's Landing Community Center in Wilmington, "It's a great day. In a few months from now, your children will begin to breathe easier, and so will your grandchildren.

"Today, Los Angeles has said enough is enough," he added. "When 1,200 lives are cut short every year by a barrage of diseases, ranging from emphysema to cancer of the mouth, we have a moral obligation to act fast."

The mayor's comments capped an emotional commission hearing marked by sharp comments directed by Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn at Port of Long Beach Harbor Commission President Mario Cordero, who was a guest.

Pointing a finger of blame at Cordero, whose commission recently rejected the employee provision on grounds that it would invite a lawsuit that could delay the clean truck program, Hahn said, "Shame on those who say 'no' to the relationship between labor and clean air."

"I want you to go back to your side of the bridge and urge your commissioners to do the right thing," said Hahn, whose district includes the L.A. port. "You have broken faith with us." Hundreds of truckers in the audience responded with loud applause, a standing ovation and an ebullient chant: "Janice! Janice!"

In an interview later, Cordero declined to comment, except to say, "The issues before us are political, and people who have a political agenda will be strong advocates."

The move by the Port of Los Angeles launches a landmark program to reform a broken freight hauling system and accelerate the replacement of a fleet of 16,800 trucks that spew harmful diesel emissions.

Both ports recently approved a progressive five-year ban on dirty trucks that starts Oct. 1. It aims to slash air pollution 80% in four years. But the ports parted ways over who should be responsible for ensuring that trucks meet air quality standards.

Los Angeles authorities believe the low-income drivers cannot afford the new \$100,000 trucks needed to achieve the desired environmental standards.

They also forecast a shortage of drivers because as many as 3,000 truckers are expected to fail pending federal background checks.

With the support of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, environmental groups and health advocates including the American Lung Assn., L.A. port commissioners unanimously adopted the employee model as the best strategy for achieving a stable work force and cleaner fleet.

"The existing system is a scam," Los Angeles Harbor Commission President David Freeman said in an interview. "It's a scheme by shipping companies to avoid responsibilities of an employer, and we're calling a halt to it."

But Whalen, the trucking association spokesman, called the plan illegal.

"We're going to go after Los Angeles with every thing we've got so their plan goes to hell in a handbasket," he said in an interview. "We will win and we will win handily."

Whalen said the association was working toward an agreement with the Port of Long Beach and that city's mayor, Bob Foster, whom he called "a reasonable guy, unlike that other one."

He was referring to Villaraigosa, who has long argued that port truckers deserve better wages and benefits.

"There may be lawsuits that will delay our effort, but we will not be deterred," Villaraigosa said in an interview. "We think we have a strong legal case, and we are moving ahead with the most ambitious plan to clean up a major port in the United States and perhaps the world."

## **Area leaders look for transit remedies**

By Sue Doyle, Staff Writer

In LA Daily News, Contra Costa Times and other papers, Friday, March 21, 2008

From Barstow to Beverly Hills, city leaders across the Southland met Thursday to discuss ways of improving transit for the region's 25million residents - and how to pay for it.

Roadway tolls and public-private partnerships took center stage as reliable revenue sources, as support fell for a half-percent sales-tax increase for Los Angeles County.

Over the past two months, county politicians have not mustered much enthusiasm for the half-percent hike and Metro's board members have not decided whether to put the issue on the November ballot.

"It's on the horizon," said Pam O'Connor, Metro board chairwoman, who supports the sales-tax hike. "It's a serious option to be considered."

O'Connor said the board has until August to decide whether to let voters decide the issue. Meanwhile, officials await the fate of a string of transportation-related bills in Sacramento.

Those measures include lowering bond approval margins to 55percent from a two-thirds majority and allowing the state to form public-private partnerships with local agencies.

Other bills include allowing Metro to adopt the half-percent sales-tax increase and extend it for 30years. Another permits the transit agency to charge carbon-emission fees for cars.

Combined, the two measures - which ultimately require voter approval - could generate up to \$1.6billion annually for the county to build transportation projects and fight air pollution.

Still, signs of a county in tough economic times were evident Thursday inside the Wilshire Grand Hotel, where Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa addressed the crowd, explaining that he was on a furlough day to save the city money. Facing a \$500million spending hole, the city is bracing for layoffs this summer.

However, Villaraigosa said the Southland needs to prepare for the millions more residents forecast to move in over the next few decades.

"We're at a crossroads," he said at the meeting hosted by the Southern California Association of Governments. "We need to rethink what our cities will look like."

Resurrecting calls to extend the Green Line to Los Angeles International Airport, Councilman Bill Rosendahl said improving mass transit to the airport adds to its modernization. Next step would be to add tolls to vehicles pulling into the airport, he said.

"We can begin to have a mass transit web that then makes congestion pricing something worth doing," Rosendahl said.

## **Chevron, foes spar over plan**

### **Richmond City Hall packed for hearing on refinery upgrade some say would lead to variety of health issues**

By Katherine Tam, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times, Friday, March 21, 2008

RICHMOND -- Chevron made its case before a packed house Thursday night for why its bid to upgrade equipment at the Richmond refinery should move forward, while opponents blasted the project as a public health hazard.

More than 250 people packed City Hall chambers and spilled out into the parking lot for the Planning Commission's decision-making public hearing. A crowd outside wore medical masks and carried signs reading "Chevron Lies" and "Clean Air, Healthy Kids."

Refinery officials contend that their project will pave the way for a better and more efficient facility.

"The refinery made substantial reductions in air emissions since the 1970s," said Bob Chamberlin of the Richmond refinery. "Our situation is not getting worse; it's getting better."

But environmental activists fear the project will increase air pollution and lead to health problems.

"It doesn't meet the requirements of environmental justice," said Henry Clark, leader of the West County Toxic Coalition. "It doesn't meet the spirit and requirement of the law."

Chevron wants to replace its hydrogen plant, power plant and reformer. The company would process the same amount of oil as it does now, but new equipment would allow it to refine a wider range of crude into gasoline, according to the environmental impact report released in January.

Chevron would produce 6 percent more California-grade gasoline a day. The oil company still would refine light to intermediate crude oil, but the sulfur content in the crude is expected to increase from 1.7 percent to as much as 3 percent, according to the report.

In a letter to the city, state Attorney General Jerry Brown raised concerns that the environmental report did not fully analyze some air emissions, greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation measures.

Ellen Garber, a consultant for the city, said an argument could be made that the environmental report is not complete in addressing greenhouse gas emissions, and that it must be recirculated.

The Planning Commission would have to certify that the document is complete before any permits are granted.

Opponents concur that the environmental report is incomplete; Chevron disagreed.

The Planning Commission was still hearing testimony and had not made a decision by late Thursday.

City planners had listed a series of measures intended to reduce pollutants and other impacts if the project is approved. Chevron would pay the city \$1.7 million to offset greenhouse gas emissions, \$600,000 for city employment and training programs, and spend \$400,000 to run an industrial job training academy. The oil company also would donate land to connect the Bay Trail to the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

Every year, Chevron would submit a report on how it has met these provisions, and the Planning Commission would hold hearings.

Refinery officials described the measures as "excessive" and that they would require Chevron to go above and beyond the mitigation measures outlined in the environmental report.

According to the report, annual emissions in three categories of air pollutants will drop if the project moves forward. Emissions in two other categories will increase at levels that are deemed

less than significant under state guidelines after mitigation measures are taken, the document states.

These include volatile organic compounds, which the draft environmental report estimated to be nearly twice what is allowed by law. Since then, Chevron agreed to put a lid on two tanks, which is expected to cut volatile organic compound emissions to a point where the effects would be less than significant, according to the final environmental report.

The project would produce as much as an additional 898,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions a year. The environmental report prescribes seven measures to mitigate that increase.

## **Amended Bill For Emissions Cuts Approved Goal Is 25 Percent Reduction In Greenhouse Gas Output**

By Lisa Rein, Staff Writer

Washington Post, Friday, March 21, 2008

The Maryland Senate gave preliminary approval yesterday to an ambitious set of controls on carbon dioxide emissions that are believed to contribute to global warming.

With passage likely in the House of Delegates and backing from Gov. Martin O'Malley (D), the Global Warming Solutions Act would make Maryland one of four states to pass laws that mandate caps on greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, cars, trucks and other energy consumers.

The bill would require carbon emissions to be reduced 25 percent statewide by 2020. It originally would have mandated a 90 percent reduction by 2050 but was amended to make that figure a "goal."

Supporters say much of the requirement could be met through already enacted environmental laws, including new regulations for power plant emissions and cleaner-burning cars, and pending proposals to increase energy conservation by businesses and homes. Proponents also say the bill would bring jobs to Maryland by luring "green-collar" companies that design technology to reduce power-plant emissions and enhance energy conservation.

But opponents, who expressed fears that factories would be put out of business and electricity prices would be forced up, succeeded in weakening the bill on the Senate floor.

Before advancing the measure for final passage today or Monday, senators approved an amendment that would give the General Assembly more power to reject strategies recommended by the Maryland Department of the Environment for how each industry would meet the targets.

Sen. Nathaniel Exum (D-Prince George's), who proposed the amendment, said lawmakers need to be more involved in carrying out such a major policy change. He compared the global warming bill to the 1999 vote to deregulate the electricity market -- a change many in the legislature regret because they gave up so much authority over the energy companies.

But Sen. Paul G. Pinsky (D-Prince George's), the bill's lead Senate sponsor, said the change would "emasculate" the state's environmental experts and "not allow them to function in protecting the air and the environment."

He predicted that lobbyists would pressure lawmakers to resist the government's proposals to meet the emissions targets.

"If you thought there were a lot of lobbyists during the deregulation debate, there will be three times as many down here now," Pinsky said.

The Senate also approved a change to allow the governor to block the carbon cuts if he or she determines that the costs to power companies would push up electricity rates.

"We've heard from scientists who do not say the sky is falling [from global warming], as we've been led to believe," said Sen. Nancy Jacobs (R-Harford), who unsuccessfully tried to exempt from the proposal the ArcelorMittal steel plant at Sparrows Point in Baltimore County.

Jacobs and other senators who represent the area said the jobs of 2,500 steelworkers could be in jeopardy if the company is forced to use less power from coal-fired plants.

Supporters said the environmental agency would carefully weigh whether the greenhouse gas caps would be so onerous on a business that they would threaten jobs.

"This legislation shouldn't be a popularity contest" among industries that seek exemptions, Sen. Brian E. Frosh (D-Montgomery) said. "Our collective house is on fire. Somehow everybody's got to contribute to carrying a bucket of water."

California, New Jersey and Hawaii have set strict reduction goals in recent years.

Maryland, with its thousands of miles of shoreline, is particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels caused by climate change, lawmakers and scientists have said.

Maryland has begun to clear the path for greenhouse gas reductions.

Two years ago, the legislature mandated reductions in pollution from large, coal-fired power plants. And last year, Maryland joined a group of states working to strengthen the effort through a system for buying and selling pollution credits, known as a cap-and-trade system.

Another law passed last year limits carbon dioxide emissions from car tailpipe. Maryland and other states are fighting the Bush administration in court to implement the law.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses that the industries for pollution control employ 32,000 people in the state of California. For more information on this or other Spanish clips, contact Claudia Encinas at \(559\) 230-5851.](#)

### **Ofrece industria del control a la contaminación, empleo a 32 mil en California**

Noticiero Latino

Radio Bilingüe, Thursday, March 20, 2008

La presidenta de la Oficina de Calidad del Aire de California, Mary Nichols calculó en un artículo que la industria del control a la contaminación del aire en este estado se traduce en cerca de diez mil millones de dólares anuales y ofrece empleos a unos 32 mil trabajadores.

El significado actual de esa industria es ahora aproximadamente 20 veces mayor que el que tenía en 1970, cuando la misma industria equivalía en California a 450 millones de dólares anuales.

Nichols destacó que desde el punto de vista de la economía estatal, controlar la contaminación tiene futuro, pues el 93 por ciento de los californianos continúa viviendo en zonas contaminadas, según índices federales, especialmente en el sur de California y el Valle de San Joaquín.

[Note: The following clip in Spanish discusses Port of Los Angeles plan weighs on shippers.](#)

### **Se avecina conflicto en puertos**

***En San Pedro exigen que choferes trabajen como empleados; dan versión de Programa Camiones Limpios***

Isaías Alvarado

La Opinion, Friday, March 21, 2008

A pesar de las amenazas de las compañías de transporte de responder con una demanda, ayer el puerto de San Pedro aprobó su versión del Programa Camiones Limpios, con un polémico capítulo "a favor" de miles de conductores.

Marcando distancia de sus vecinos de Long Beach, quienes optaron por continuar con el sistema de contratistas independientes, en San Pedro se exigirá que los conductores trabajen como empleados.

De esta manera, la responsabilidad de renovar la flotilla de camiones caerá únicamente sobre las empresas.

"Significa cambiar la lógica invertida en la que corporaciones millonarias evaden sus responsabilidades y le dejan la tarea de limpiar los camiones a los mismos choferes que ni ganan un sueldo para vivir", dijo el alcalde Antonio Villaraigosa.

El Programa Camiones Limpios y Seguros establece la renovación paulatina de 16,800 camiones a partir del 1 de octubre de 2008 al 1 de enero de 2012.

El objetivo es disminuir los niveles de contaminación de las comunidades aledañas.

Villaraigosa señaló que, independientemente de este propósito, no permitirán que las compañías dicten cómo se hacen las cosas en la terminal angelina y se beneficien "a costa de nuestra salud".

En Long Beach los choferes serán los responsables de adquirir por sus medios vehículos de modelo reciente, ya sea con subsidios o arrendamientos.

La concejal del distrito 15, Janice Hahn, hizo un llamado a los comisionados de aquella terminal para que reformen este capítulo, al considerar que "romperán" el curso del plan de limpiar el aire de la región.

El modelo que se aprobó ayer, recalcó Hahn, toma en cuenta el factor humano de la actividad comercial en los puertos, como consideró a los choferes y a la comunidad.

En algunos diarios se consignó que las empresas transportistas reaccionarían con una demanda en contra de las autoridades portuarias, con base en el argumento de que contratar a miles de choferes afecta severamente su situación financiera.

Cecilia Ibarra, vocera de la organización Camioneros de Harbor para un Futuro Sostenible (HTFSF), que aglutina a 60 compañías en ambas terminales, manifestó que este viernes se reunirán para discutir sobre la disposición aprobada en la referida terminal.

"No tiene sentido cambiar el sistema, porque así ha funcionado. No deben dictar quién o cómo trabajar, eso es detener el libre comercio", mencionó.

La Coalición de Puertos Limpios y Seguros indicó que, a pesar de las barreras que quieren imponer las compañías, el capítulo que defiende a los camioneros seguirá en pie.

"Me imagino que sí van a demandar, pero no van a provocar ningún cambio", dijo la presidenta de la coalición, Patricia Castellanos.

Los niños que viven cerca de los puertos pierden más de un millón de días de clase por enfermedades debido al asma, causada a su vez por la contaminación que se genera en el quinto complejo portuario del mundo.

Con el cambio de unidades de carga se reducirían 80% las emisiones de diesel, mientras que las emisiones totales en el puerto descenderían 45% para el año 2012.

"Este programa de Los Ángeles conviene más a las comunidades porque sí va a resultar en aire limpio no solamente en los próximos años, sino porque va a crear un sistema que va a funcionar sin necesitar fondos públicos cada cinco años", consideró Castellanos.

Cuando el alcalde Villaraigosa arribó a San Pedro, donde ofreció una conferencia de prensa, un grupo de choferes lo arropó con aplausos y vítores.

"¡Viva Villaraigosa!", gritaron guiados por un altavoz. "¡Nos quitaste la esclavitud de los troqueros!", se escuchó de una voz con acento caribeño.

"[Este programa] significa remover las cargas de los hombros de los choferes que con dificultades pueden mantener a sus familias. No estamos interesados en soluciones rápidas o a medias", manifestó el alcalde.

"¡Que Dios te bendiga, Villaraigosa!", expresó Raúl Agamenón, un conductor de edad avanzada que dice vivir en la miseria, debido a que tiene que desembolsar miles de dólares en el mantenimiento de su viejo camión.

"No he podido comprar mis medicinas para mi diabetes y la alta presión, no he sacado ni para la renta. Entre todos ellos me compran la comida, muchos estamos en la misma situación", lamentó.

Para Efraín Bardales, un conductor de origen salvadoreño, finalmente, después de años dedicados a mover contenedores por un pago mínimo, les hicieron justicia.

"¿Cuándo íbamos a pagar esos camiones? Con esto, creo que va a haber buenos cambios".

Dentro del Programa de Camiones Limpios se incluye además la construcción de un centro ferroviario en el este de Long Beach, que pretende suplir a por lo menos un millón de camiones de carga.

Se calcula que costaría unos 300 millones de dólares y abarcaría 150 hectáreas.

Sin embargo, el proyecto (que debió empezar a construirse este año) se ha topado con el rechazo de los residentes del área, porque se construiría justo frente a dos escuelas.

"Proponen una industria limpia y no hacen nada por arreglar el gran problema que ya tienen", reclamó Angelo Logan, portavoz de East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, una organización que se opone a la edificación del centro ferroviario.