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## **Editorial: Don't fund roads and rails at expense of health**

### **Governor should require air quality to be a factor in awarding Proposition 1B funds**

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Nearly every part of California feels the brunt of the state's congested ports.

The state's roads and rail systems can't quickly move the massive volumes of cargo that are being shipped from these international trade zones, adding to traffic congestion and air pollution.

People living near the ports – and associated freeways and railyards – bear a special burden. In Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland and other communities, diesel soot wafts from trucks, locomotives and forklifts, and it blows into nearby neighborhoods.

In 2006, voters agreed to combat those intertwined problems by approving Proposition 1B, a \$20 billion transportation bond that included \$2 billion for the "Trade Corridor Improvement Fund."

Proposition 1B made clear that projects receiving bond money would both improve mobility and reduce air pollution. Indeed, the name of the law was the "The Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality and Port Security Bond Act of 2006."

Yet now that the California Transportation Commission (CTC) is preparing to distribute this \$2 billion, there's a move afoot to limit air pollution as a factor in awarding these trade corridor funds.

The railroad industry, shipping interests and regional agencies are pressing the Schwarzenegger administration to distribute the money as quickly as possible. At the same time, Dale Bonner, secretary of the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, has been urging the CTC to limit air quality a screening criterion in the awarding of funds.

In a Nov. 6 letter, Bonner told CTC Executive Director John Barna he was "concerned" about air pollution being used as a screening factor. In this letter, Bonner argued that, if a rail expansion project were to reduce truck traffic in an area, "that should be sufficient to satisfy the air pollution criterion."

Nice try, Mr. Secretary, but forget it. Such an approach could compound the health risks that residents face when they are downwind of railyards and rail corridors. While increased movement of goods on trains could well reduce truck traffic – and possibly improve regionwide air quality – it could increase localized pollution from locomotives and other railyard equipment, harming nearby residents.

If the state is to use taxpayer money to help expand rail operations for goods movement – and arguably it should – then the railroad industry should be expected to mitigate any local impacts, and do it on the front end, not the back end.

Bonner's proposal, if implemented, would have recipients of bond funding figure out these mitigations after the money is already in their pockets, or heading toward it. That is unacceptable.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger needs to pay personal attention to this issue. While improved goods movement is a priority of his administration, it shouldn't come at the expense of certain communities that are already bearing the brunt of the state's cargo juggernaut.

The California Transportation Commission meets Tuesday to decide on criteria for the trade corridor funds. Schwarzenegger and his appointees, in no uncertain terms, should urge the commission to restore air quality as a factor in awarding these funds.

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