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Highway 50 carpool plan snagged in court

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Published 12:00 am PDT Thursday, July 17, 2008

Caltrans' plans for a carpool lane project on Highway 50 in Sacramento stalled in court this week.

Ruling on an environmental lawsuit, Superior Court Judge Timothy Frawley said the state didn't adequately analyze the project's impacts, including potential greenhouse gas emissions.

The state Transportation Department has planned to build seven miles of high-occupancy lanes in each direction on Highway 50 between Sunrise Boulevard and Watt Avenue. Carpool lanes exist on the freeway between Sunrise and El Dorado Hills boulevards.

The Environmental Council of Sacramento and others sued, arguing they believe carpool lanes increase car usage, and contending that Caltrans failed to present analyses that showed otherwise.

Caltrans said its environmental review was sufficient.

Greenhouse gas emissions have become a hot issue in California the last few years as the state seeks to fight global warming by cutting emissions. But agencies planning new projects have been uncertain when and how to measure and mitigate for those emissions.

The governor's Office of Planning and Research and the state Air Resources Board say they're working on guidelines.

"This is new territory," said Lisa Page, a Governor's Office spokeswoman. "We are learning as we go."

Caltrans officials declined to comment Wednesday, saying they just received the ruling.

Environmentalist Eric Davis said the ruling was a step in group's efforts to halt freeway expansion in Sacramento.

"We want an honest discussion of the value of this project," he said.

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