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Group Gears Up for Road Battles

Traffic: Business backing sought for 'Ending Gridlock'

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Everybody may talk about L.A.'s traffic nightmare, but now an organization has been formed to try to get the business community to do something about it.

David Murphy and Robert Carpenter are launching a non-profit organization called Building L.A.'s Future: Ending Gridlock in Los Angeles.

Murphy, former [staffer with the] Valley Industry & Commerce Association, and Carpenter, a former White House aide, co-founded the group to get local business leaders involved in transportation issues.

"Our vision was to take the bull by the horns and address things," Murphy said. "It's all about rallying the business community to say 'enough is enough.'"

The organization, which organized in February, has scheduled its first big event Wednesday in downtown Los Angeles. It's unclear exactly what steps the business community could take to help solve L.A.'s infamous traffic congestion, but the group hopes to mobilize leaders and create a plan. Later, the group hopes to form an advocacy organization that could get involved in the political process.

David Fleming, chairman of the Los Angeles County Business Federation and an environmental and land use attorney at Latham & Watkins LLP, and Robert Lowe, chief executive of real estate investment firm Lowe Enterprises, will be among the featured panelists on Wednesday.

"This is the first time CEOs are gathering to talk about issues that they are often the hardest hit on," Carpenter said.

The organizers expect 100 business leaders to attend. It's one example of the new group's desire to mobilize the local business community on the issue.

Carpenter and Murphy also want Building L.A.'s Future to neutralize the impact homeowners associations and environmental advocates have on road and rail projects.

But Mike Eveloff, president of homeowners association Tract 7260, said homeowners shouldn't be blamed for opposing solutions to traffic problems that were created by developers.

“To point to NIMBYs is unfair,” Eveloff said. “This is an overdevelopment and out-of-control development problem.”

Carpenter agrees that not all homeowners groups want to prevent the city from moving forward with transportation projects. “But there are certain groups who aren’t helping the cause,” he said.

Opposition groups

Well-organized homeowners associations, along with the Greater West Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, were instrumental in battling Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa’s plan to remove street parking along parts of Olympic and Pico boulevards during rush hour to speed traffic through the westside.

In May, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge John Torribio delayed the plan, ruling in favor of opponents who asked for a study on the impact the change would have on businesses and residents.

In addition to local residents, business owners along Pico have also opposed the plan because they claim removing street parking will keep their customers away.

The opposition of the Olympic-Pico conversion by local businesses also speaks to the tension that exists between business owners and efforts to alter or expand transportation routes.

Brendan Huffman, president of VICA, said organizations like Building L.A.’s Future are key to cultivating a consensus among business leaders.

“The business community hasn’t been on the same page in a long time, but that is starting to change,” Huffman said.