

EPA's new regulations: Traffic stoppers

The Environmental Protection Agency last week hoisted a sword of Damocles over the heads of the nation's traffic officials by instituting tough new regulations that would virtually eliminate private auto use in some of the country's most congested areas unless new ways are found to control pollution there. However, EPA Acting Administrator Robert W. Fri said many of the proposals would probably never be implemented.

Under court order to apply provisions of the Clean Air Act more strictly than previously, the EPA approved five traffic plans submitted by the cities themselves, sent another 10 cities' proposals back for reconsideration, and proposed its own plans for 23 other cities. Four cities' plans came in too late for immediate action and Los Angeles was considered separately because of another court decision.

EPA approved plans for New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, Mobile and Birmingham. The New York City plan, if implemented, would eliminate on-street parking in the Manhattan central business district, establish exclu-

sive bus lanes on major streets, restrict daylight truck deliveries and limit taxicab cruising. Tolls would be established on East River bridges, and tough auto and truck maintenance and inspection regulations would be imposed. The aim would be to cut downtown traffic by half.

After holding hearings during February and March on what should be done about Los Angeles, EPA announced that the only way it saw to meet the present standards of the Clean Air Act would be to stop gasoline sales in the area altogether, and to reduce diesel powered vehicles by 60 percent. But in announcing this plan, Fri added, "I'm not sure these are the results that Congress intended."

Fri expects to recommend to Congress specific changes in the Clean Air Act to allow certain cities more time to comply with the act and to permit development of pollution control technologies. He is expected, for example, to recommend an interim goal of 30 percent auto use reduction in Los Angeles.

"We're basically attacking the problem by asking people to change their habits—their long-standing and intimate relation to private automobiles," Fri said. Specifically, he hopes that the new regulations, modified where necessary, can provide an incentive for cities to develop more mass transit systems and for drivers to establish car pools.

In the meantime, however, some of the nation's most populous areas must try to comply with the present, rigorous standards. Congress clearly has its mind elsewhere and Fri is not expected to suggest revisions to the Clean Air Act before fall. Some local administrators have already called the EPA proposals unworkable, and with the agency admitting its own misgivings, confusion is sure to mount.

Cities that the agency said had basically good traffic control plans but some procedural deficiencies include: Phoenix, Washington, D.C., Virginia suburbs of D.C., Portland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Salt Lake City, Seattle, Spokane and Chicago. Under the court order, EPA had no alternative other than to propose substitute plans

for these cities, but the agency made clear it would reconsider plans submitted by those cities in the near future.

EPA found inadequate, however, the plans submitted by Baltimore, Maryland suburbs of D.C., El Paso, Austin, Corpus Christi, Houston-Galveston, San Antonio, Belmont, Tex., and Dallas-Fort Worth. No plans were submitted by some cities and EPA initiated its own regulations for them. These cities include: San Francisco, San Diego, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Calif., Indio, Calif., Indianapolis, Boston-Springfield, Minneapolis, Newark, Camden-Trenton, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo and Fairbanks, Kansas City, Kan., Kansas City, Mo., Baton Rouge and Denver submitted plans too late for present consideration. □

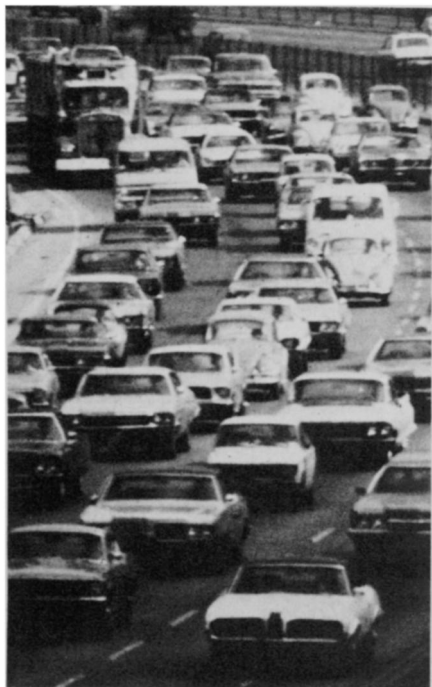
LMFBR: Environment statement required

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia last week ruled that a previous lower court decision allowing the Atomic Energy Commission to continue research and development work on the liquid metal fast breeder reactor (LMFBR) without filing an environment impact statement was invalid.

Taking into account the magnitude of the project, its controversial nature and the rate at which the program has moved "toward creation of a viable, competitive breeder-reactor electrical-energy industry," the court ruled an environmental impact statement should be filed.

The court cited in its opinion, an unnamed commentator who wrote: "Since . . . determinations are presently made within small closed circles of experts who have a vested interest in the technology, the basic question is whether the public itself would be willing to assume [the] risks and burdens for the sake of obtaining the promised benefits."

The opinion said that the required environmental impact statement would help the public make just that decision. □



Documerica—Daniels

New rules would affect Los Angeles.