



Billboard campaign criticizes use of Chinese steel on Bay Bridge

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OAKLAND, Calif. —

A group based in Washington, D.C., that represents manufacturers and steel workers unveiled two billboards in Oakland Monday that criticize the use of steel from China for parts of the new eastern span of the Bay Bridge.

Scott Paul, the executive director of the Alliance for American Manufacturing, said, "It was a stupid, shortsighted decision" to use steel from China for the bridge project.

Paul said he doesn't think using steel from China will save taxpayers any money and if Caltrans had used steel from the U.S. thousands of jobs would have been created for American workers.

One of the signs is east of the Bay Bridge toll plaza and the other is off Interstate Highway 880 near High Street in Oakland.

The billboards feature a bright red Chinese flag and say, "The Bay Bridge 100 percent foreign steel" and include the alliance's website.

Paul said the alliance's "Should Be Made in America" campaign is aimed at sparking changes in federal, state, and local procurement policies.

He said the U.S. needs to repair trillions of dollars in crumbling infrastructure over the next decade, including nearly \$500 billion worth in California alone, and the campaign is arguing that the most effective boost to the U.S. economy would be to ensure that U.S. firms are given the work whenever permissible under existing trade obligations.

Paul said 20 U.S. states are currently considering, or have recently passed, legislation to provide preferences for American steel and manufactured goods in state-level procurement.

John Goodwin, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which helped coordinate funding for the Bay Bridge work, said the billboards have misleading information.

He said 76 percent of the steel used for the new eastern span was fabricated in the U.S.

Goodwin said the only portion using steel from China is the self-anchored suspension span, which is 2,047 feet long.

Goodwin said the main contractors for the eastern span are two American companies, Fluor, which is based in Texas, and American Bridge, which is based in Pennsylvania.

He said those companies, not the MTC or Caltrans, chose ZPMC, which has a steel fabrication plant in Shanghai, to supply the steel for the self-anchored suspension span.

Caltrans spokesman Bart Ney said ZPMC was chosen because no American companies had the capacity to provide the steel needed for the span.

He said having an American company provide the steel "was not a possibility then and still isn't a possibility now."

Paul said he thinks the Bay Bridge project has been "a fiasco" because of several delays but Ney said he thinks it is "a success story."

Paul said the alliance supports federal legislation that would strengthen "buy America" requirements for transportation and infrastructure projects.

But Randal O'Toole, a transportation expert for the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank based in Washington, D.C., said such requirements "only make infrastructure more expensive and therefore make infrastructure spending less effective."