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Auto execs to meet again with President Bush

BYLINE: By TOM KRISHER, AP Business Writer
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President Bush and top executives of Detroit's three automakers plan to meet again in Washington later this month to discuss increased use of flexible and alternative fuels.

No date has been set for the meeting, to take place at the White House, but Colin McBean, manager of Washington communications for DaimlerChrysler AG, said the talks likely will center on alternatives to gasoline and diesel fuel such as ethanol and **biodiesel**-powered vehicles.

"There's interest among the respective parties to discuss flexible fuel as well as alternative fuels," McBean said Friday.

The White House would not confirm that the meeting is on Bush's schedule, but a spokesman said the administration stays in contact with the automakers on alternative fuels and other issues.

"We look forward to working with them to reduce gasoline usage," said spokesman Alex Conant.

Bush last met with General Motors Corp. Chairman and Chief Executive Rick Wagoner, Ford Motor Co. CEO Alan Mulally and DaimlerChrysler AG's Chrysler Group CEO Tom LaSorda in November, promising continued dialogue on trade, health care and other issues.

The president was criticized by Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., for not meeting with the executives sooner.

Since then, Bush, in his State of the Union address, proposed reducing gasoline use by 20 percent over the next 10 years. He called for ramping up the production of alternative fuels such as ethanol made from new, non-corn feedstocks, and he called on Congress to require the annual use of 35 billion gallons of ethanol and other alternative fuels such as **biodiesel** by 2017, a fivefold increase over current requirements.

Earlier this month Bush arranged with Brazil for the two countries to share ethanol production technology.

Next week, the president is scheduled to tour two Kansas City, Mo.-area auto assembly plants and discuss his plan to reduce fuel consumption.

Spokesmen for Ford and GM would not say Friday whether a meeting between the president and the auto executives had been arranged.

Stabenow said another meeting is a good step, but she said Bush needs to allocate more money to alternative fuel and battery technology development.

"We need to see a boldness coming from the president's budget on alternative fuels," she said.

She expects the executives and Bush to discuss increasing the number of filling stations that have ethanol and biofuels. While incentives have been successful in developing alternative fuels, the infrastructure isn't in place to get them to consumers, she said.

Conant said Bush is taking action on alternative fuels, making energy independence a priority in his State of the Union address and is working with Congress on gasoline use reduction goals.

Last year the leaders of GM, Ford and DaimlerChrysler said that by 2010 they would double their production of flexible fuel vehicles, which can run on blends of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline.

They have targeted building 2 million of these vehicles a year by 2010, but note the lack of fueling stations that carry the ethanol blends. Less than 1 percent of the nation's 170,000 gas stations offer E85, and most are found in the Midwest.

On the Net:

General Motors Corp.: <http://www.gm.com>

Ford Motor Co.: <http://www.ford.com>

Chrysler Group: <http://www.chrysler.com>

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