

A new paradigm



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Along with all the other changes in the supply chain, the goods movement industry is facing a new paradigm when it comes to community and environmental impact: Public permission to invest in new capacity is no longer assured.

While most community attention is focused on air pollution, other issues such as traffic congestion, noise, light, visual blight and loss of rural land are also drawing concern. Recent public health studies clearly link ailments such as asthma and reduced lung function in children with exposure to emissions from the diesel and bunker fuel that are the lifeblood of freight transportation.

Public awareness of, and alarm about, the impact of port operations comes just as most major U.S. gateways are experiencing dramatic growth in cargo volumes. Freeways clogged with container trucks serve as a daily visual reminder of the less-visible health impact.

There are air-quality standards designed to protect public health, but most major metropolitan areas do not meet them. As emissions from large sources such as power plants and refineries are better controlled, attention is focused more on the relatively unregulated cargo transportation sector. In California, recent efforts to address air-quality issues include:

- **The California Air Resources Board's Emission Reduction Plan for Ports and Goods Movement (draft, 2005; final, 2006).** One of its main goals is to reduce statewide emissions resulting from cargo transportation back to 2001 levels by 2010.

- **California's State Goods**

Movement Action Plan (Phase I, 2005; Phase II, 2006). This plan identifies ways to ensure "simultaneous and continuous improvement" of freight-related traffic congestion and environmental impact.

- **Port of Long Beach and Los Angeles Clean Air Action Plan (2006).** This plan includes specific measures to reduce port-related emissions. However, communities see a lack of accountability while business interests see a lack of emphasis on growth. Port officials maintain that the plan will be a "living document."

- **The South Coast Air Quality Management District's Clean Port Initiative (2005) and Air Quality Management Plan (draft, 2006).** The measures in these documents are intended to "backstop" efforts the ports take if they fall short of regional air-quality goals.

The 2005 adoption of "Good Neighbor Guidelines" by the Western Riverside (County) Council of Governments underscores the point that community impact is not only a port issue, but extends well inland, and to matters other than air quality. The guidelines suggest standards for warehouses and distribution centers with three or more loading bays or that handle more than 150 diesel truck trips daily. The recommendations include constructing buffer zones around warehouses, providing food or a convenience store on-site for truckers so as to eliminate extra trips through town, and restricting truck idling to 10 minutes or less.

A basic concern of communities is that further investment in infrastructure would allow more freight transportation and thus worsen cur-

rent effects. So they generally oppose such investment. Support may be fading for plans to locate new, much-needed rail intermodal capacity at near-dock locations. An industry group, Future-Ports, has formed to address the fact that the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach have not approved an environmental impact report for a major expansion in years.

There is substantial agreement among public, private and community sectors on a basic premise: that the private sector can and should help to pay for solutions. There is not yet agreement on exactly what the private sector should pay for, or how. Container fees were proposed — and vetoed — in California, but the sponsor will reintroduce the bill. And several recent public and private studies agree that the economic advantages of Southern California's ports and markets will not be eroded quickly by a fee. Fees, if adopted, would likely be only one part of a strategy that includes state bonds, federal loans, tax credits and private investment.

Reaching agreement on this matter will require new and unprecedented levels of collaboration and cooperation. Many participants are convinced that the only way to improve the current situation is to invest in congestion-relieving infrastructure and environmental cleanup.

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