



Home > Transportation > L.A., Long Beach OK plan to achieve zero emissions on landside movements

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L.A., Long Beach OK plan to achieve zero emissions on landside movements

Multi-billion dollar measure calls for on-dock rail to handle half of all shipments, truck charge on BCOs with non-compliant vehicles.

By DC Velocity Staff

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The boards of the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach late yesterday approved a multi-billion dollar plan to dramatically cut greenhouse gas emissions on cargo moving through the nation's busiest port complex, steps that include shipping half the goods out of the facility via on-dock rail systems to reduce reliance on trucks.

The plan, which was disclosed in July and modified following industry comments, is the first major clean air compliance upgrade at the complex since 2006. It calls for zero emissions on all landside goods movement by 2035. To reach that goal, the ports said they will establish "clean engine milestones" for new trucks entering the drayage registries and create incentives to encourage investment in near-zero- and zero-emission trucks. In addition, they plan to develop a universal truck-reservation system, staging yards, and intelligent transportation systems, among other measures, to reduce emissions while improving cargo flow.

Beginning in 2020, terminal operators would be required to deploy zero-emission equipment, or to deploy the cleanest equipment available at the time, the ports said. The goal would be to transition all terminal equipment to zero emissions by 2030, according to the plan. Effective in 2019, the ports will work with marine terminal operators to ensure that equipment bought after 2020 is the cleanest feasible equipment, according to Port of Los Angeles spokesman Phillip Sanfield.

In addition, the ports assured terminal operators that zero-emission or near-zero-emission equipment purchased under the plan could be utilized for a full life span. This promise was designed to allay industry concerns that equipment already in use to comply with clean air directives would be rendered obsolete by the 2030 deadline, resulting in wasted or impaired assets.

The ports set a 2020 start date for requiring near-zero-emission trucks, with a new "truck rate" charged to beneficial cargo owners (BCOs) for trucks entering terminals. Exemptions to the charge would be granted to trucks certified as complying with zero- or near-zero-emission requirements. Industry responses to the port's original proposal centered in part on the preference to shoot for compliance with near-zero-emission standards rather than a zero-emission objective. The state is expected to establish standards for near-zero-emission trucks by 2019.

There is no specific time frame for meeting the on-dock rail objective, according to Sanfield. In a recent interview, Jon Slangerup, former executive director of the Port of Long Beach, estimated that one-third of box traffic leaves the complex via on-dock rail. The balance is still trucked to urban, near-dock truck-to-rail transloading facilities, he said. In a statement late today, Slangerup hailed the move, saying it will "yield extraordinary air-quality and road-congestion improvements" at the complex.

The ports said the plan would cost between \$7 billion and \$14 billion to implement. In late September, about 70 groups, including the shipper group National Industrial Transportation League (NITL), whose members are big users of the ports, raised concerns about the initiative's cost-effectiveness. The groups said the plan could increase supply chain costs by billions of dollars and make the ports less attractive to shippers and cargo owners.

The groups also said the ports did not fully address the commercial availability of specific technologies, were unclear about the project's total cost, lacked any assessment about the impact on the ports' future competitiveness, and didn't conduct a cost-benefit analysis of whether the improvements in air quality would be significant enough to justify the investment.

The plan calls for the ports to reduce greenhouse gas levels to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, and 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. The ports said they aim to cut emissions of diesel particulate matter 77 percent by 2023

The two ports handle approximately 40 percent of the nation's total containerized import traffic and 25 percent of its total exports. Trade that flows through the San Pedro Bay ports complex generates more than 3 million jobs nationwide.

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