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CEO UpDate

Commission Decision on Funds May Reduce Relief from Rail Freight Traffic



By CEO ROGER SNOBLE

You might have read about my disappointment this week at the way the California Transportation Commission chose to allocate funds from the Trade Corridor Improvement Fund, money designed to solve problems created by goods movement. Although Metro does not move freight, this is a crucial issue for us.

Our ports (Los Angeles and Long Beach) are the preferred deep-water port on the west coast. This means all the Pacific Rim trade, which is growing by leaps and bounds, comes into our ports and then has to travel through our region to get to the rest of the country.

Other regions take care of their own commerce. We have to take care of everyone else's—in an area that is hugely congested on its own. The international trade really exacerbates our traffic situation and our air quality situation, in part because a lot of the equipment used to move this trade is diesel. And diesel particulate matter that is particularly harmful to humans.

1,200 premature deaths

It is estimated that 1,200 premature deaths occur because of the air pollution caused from goods movement. Many hundreds of thousands more people suffer from by asthma and emphysema as a result. Which is one reason why we have been raising this issue for the last six years.

We raised the issue to the point that when the state came up with the bond issue, it included \$2 billion directly for infrastructure improvement for goods movement. Now, everybody else in the state is looking at that pot of money and saying, "Hey, we want our share of that money too," even though they don't have the same situation we have. The problem is the state, in its effort to give everybody money out of the bond issue, really is not allowing the money to go where the need is the greatest. The need is clearly here.

Metro will not get any of the Trade Corridor Improvement Fund money directly, but our partners at both ports, our neighboring counties, the Alameda Corridor East, the Alameda Corridor and Caltrans would. They use the money to facilitate this freight getting through our region much faster with less disruption.

100 trains each day

We have places along the Alameda Corridor East where 100 trains go through a day. They can be up to 8,000 feet long, and they can block traffic for 20, 30 minutes. That causes a lot of delay, a lot of idling vehicles and barriers for emergency vehicles. For our bus operators, all that freight on trains and trucks really complicates trying to make schedules. If we can separate out the freight trains and trucks from normal traffic, that will make life a lot easier for our operators and our mechanics.

It's really easy to say, "We wish this freight would go to other ports and spread the problem around." That would be nice from a pollution and congestion standpoint. That's not going to happen any time soon. And, like it or not, that freight is a huge economic engine for the Los Angeles region, our five county partners and the state of California.

We're going to push hard for the state to realize that the problem is here and should be funded properly. In the meantime, we've got a start of \$1.5 billion, a lot of money, money that can go toward starting projects quickly. But the simple fact is we need a lot more, both from the bond issue and what other funding we can get.

I know our operators will be under a little bit more strain and extra pressure because of the traffic and the craziness of the season. Still, I hope you make the best out of this joyous season and enjoy the fact that you are helping a lot of people do things that make their holidays brighter and cheerier. I hope each of you enjoys this holiday season.

November 30, 2007

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