

PORT GROWTH

The I-710 freeway was originally designed as a route for the ports, beginning at the Long Beach/San Pedro complex and ending at the SR-134 and I-210 interchange. This route was intended to be a bypass for the downtown Los Angeles area.¹ Over time, the addition of other freeways surrounding Downtown, soon fulfilled this role, and the completed portion of I-710 was used as a connector to those freeways. The unfinished “gap”, became no longer necessary.

Today, the motivation behind the expansion and extension of the 710 freeway comes directly from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. These two ports have grown significantly since the 1940s and are now responsible for 40% of all import shipments to the United States. The rest of the containers come through other ports on the east and west coasts but this will likely change in the future. However, it is estimated that 70% of the shipments that do arrive in Los Angeles are primarily transported by truck to destinations outside of the city.² These trucks are crowding our freeways and clogging our surface streets, and it will only get worse.

By the year 2030, the Ports are expected to increase their daily cargo container shipments to over 92,000, a triple increase from 2005 figures.³ As a result, shipping interests have applied enormous pressure⁴ to widen the southern end of the I-710 and to extend the freeway northward to serve their needs as a major goods-movement corridor. In 2007, a Financial Planning Charrette by the USC Keston Institute reported, “Traffic estimates indicate that the tunnel would immediately attract significant traffic between the port area and Los Angeles heading toward major national distribution centers in San Bernardino County.”⁵

The plans put forth by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro) and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to handle the expected port growth in the next few decades, still relies on goods movement by truck and diesel trains. The first stage involves widening the southern portion of the 710 to fourteen lanes. The second step is to add the five-mile tunnel, likely along the Meridian route, and narrow the lanes down to six. Both of these plans are in the environmental stages and are fully supported by the Ports themselves and by some city jurisdictions not directly impacted by the increased traffic the 710 will carry. The growing concern by area residents has now turned to outrage as Metro and Caltrans continue to move toward a solution that is irresponsible and cruel. The high level of air pollution that is currently being produced by diesel fuels, tires on pavement and brake systems⁶ will only worsen through increased truck traffic in the area. Per a government report,⁷ cargo trucks cause more road damage than cars. “Road damage from one 18-wheeler is equivalent to 9,600 cars.”

There is a direct connection between the health of people in the surrounding communities and port operation pollution. In 2007, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) released a Health Risk Assessment⁸ that showed that “the residents of the Ayers-Leonis and nearby Bandini neighborhoods (near the BNSF Hobart rail yard in the city of Commerce) face a cancer risk that is 70 percent to 140 percent greater than normal.” This was tied directly to the statement that “trucks going into the yards, locomotives, and cargo-handling equipment are the major sources.”⁹

In addition, the Los Angeles Times recently reported that 40 Wilmington schools will be outfitted with air filters due to a 2008 settlement negotiated by the National Resources Defense Council and the City of Los Angeles. The action was a result of state and federal studies, linking port pollution to an increase in asthma rates in children. “In five communities around the ports, 21.9% of children suffer from asthma, compared with 15.6% in the Los Angeles region and 14.2% nationally.”¹⁰ Environmental groups supported the installation of the filters but noted that the move did not protect children on the playground or when they are not at school. It is critical that pollution be addressed at its source.

Pressure on our freeway systems needs to be relieved, not intensified. To paraphrase Albert Einstein: “The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”¹¹ More polluting cargo trucks are not the answer. We need to design an intelligent infrastructure comprised of multiple solutions that as a whole speeds up not only cargo movement but also frees up the existing freeway systems for cars.

One aspect of a Multi-Mode solution that addresses the cargo movement problem includes a better sorting system located directly at the ports and a zero emission grade separated transportation system to get the cargo out to an “inland” port, also known as an intermodal logistics complex. An example of such an intelligent system to sort and store containers has been proposed by SkyStorage Systems, a company who also has plans for a grade separated electric rail as well as concepts to green the entire urban landscape. Another company, CargoWay, has an efficient and pollution-free grade separated cargo moving tram system that can move freely around the ports on compressed natural gas (CNG) and then speed out to the inland port on a raised guideway. Both of these systems can make use of the already existing Alameda Corridor and improve its ability to handle the flow of cargo from the ports.

The ultimate goal to streamline transportation and reduce pollution will be to remove sorting yards located in the inner city and make use of intermodal facilities located elsewhere, possibly in the Antelope Valley, Victorville or San Bernardino/Devore areas. There the cargo can be transferred to its final destination by other modes of transportation. Combining the use of better sorting and moving technology will not only go a long way to solve the ports problems but will also lessen the impacts that cargo transportation currently inflicts on the communities it travels through.

Compiled by Residents of South Pasadena and La Canada. Updated 2-27-11

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