

Press-Telegram

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Long Beach, California

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2007

25c

L.B. voters favor port truck plan

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LONG BEACH — A new poll of Long Beach-area voters shows overwhelming support for a plan requiring trucking companies and retailers to pay for the replacement of "dirty" diesel trucks serving local seaports.

The survey of 503 registered voters showed 83 percent favored having "trucking companies and their retail clients" pay for the turnover of an estimated 16,000 diesel trucks which haul goods to and from the Long Beach-Los Angeles port complex each day.

Five percent favored having truckers pay for the fleet, 4 percent wanted taxpayers to foot the bill and 1 percent didn't support truck turnover at all.

The study, conducted in August by polling firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, reveals strong support across political lines, with 85 percent of Democrats and 79 percent of Republicans favoring the approach.

The poll has a margin of error of +/-4.4 percent.

Health studies link diesel pollution from maritime ships, cargo trains and trucks serving local ports — the nation's busiest — to higher cancer, asthma and respiratory disease rates in local communities.

Earlier this year, port authorities in Long Beach and Los Angeles unveiled a plan to replace or upgrade the harbor truck fleet by offering concessions to motor carriers with the cleanest fleets.

The plan also stipulates that concessionaires hire employee drivers — and not independent contractors — in an effort to shift vehicle purchase and maintenance to businesses and not drivers.

Economic studies show harbor drayage drivers, more than 90 percent of whom are independent contractors, earn an average wage of about \$12 an hour.

The employee-driver aspect of the program is being fiercely opposed by the trucking industry, who say it violates federal law. Motor carriers indicate they will sue if it's enacted.

Another question in the poll asked voters if they support the employee-driver stipulation. Of respondents, 74 percent indicated they "strongly" or "somewhat" support the plan, with 17 percent "strongly" or "somewhat" opposed.

The survey was funded by the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports, an organization representing several labor, environmental and community groups.