

## Diverging Truck Routes

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By Geraldine Knatz

Port truck pollution contributes to hundreds of premature deaths a year across Southern California. That's just one adverse byproduct of a trucking system that is operationally inefficient and lacks common-sense controls over some 16,000 independent truckers who operate at the bottom of Southern California's goods movement food chain.

Making as much as \$12 per hour less than other truck drivers, our paid-by-the-load port truckers are left to operate an aging fleet that congests the ports, threatens public health and jeopardizes community safety.

The San Pedro Bay ports will begin assessing a cargo fee this fall to raise nearly \$2 billion for the purchase of thousands of clean, modern trucks to bail out a system that lacks the financial resources to buy the newest and greenest equipment.

It would be easy to use these funds to buy new trucks for financially challenged individual truck owner-operators; and if properly maintained, the rigs may have clean emissions for a few years.

But then what? Do we spend billions of dollars in the future to once again subsidize a broken system? Absolutely not! There is a better way. The Port of Los Angeles wants port trucking to operate like the rest of the industry, where companies are well capitalized, and trucks are well-maintained frequently replaced assets.

Our Clean Truck Program goes far beyond replacing the current generation of dirty trucks. It's a bold, brave move to establish a sustainable foundation for cleaner air, safe and secure transport of goods, and improved community living.

It encourages private investment and provides incentives for companies to buy the cleanest trucks available. Our program will focus on providing truck financing and business support to licensed motor carriers --- the entities that have direct business relationships with shipping lines and cargo owners.

Through a system that's common in many major airports, our concessionaires will need to meet certain requirements. For example, they must have a place of business and appropriate off-street truck parking. They must also be responsible for maintaining their equipment and must make a commitment to transition to employee drivers over a gradual five-year timeline.

By directly connecting the employee drivers to the companies that move containerized freight to and from the docks, we will create a safer, more accountable port trucking system. This is critical because the current lack of scrutiny and control over port truck drivers is a threat to roadway safety and the security of the critical supply chain that runs through our region.

**Sustainable jobs** Because a number of the current drivers may not meet future federal security standards, our ports must be ready to face a driver shortage. By elevating the conditions of port trucking, L.A.'s truck program will attract outside drivers and other individuals seeking good, sustainable jobs.

We can create a stable driver pool - one large enough and with sufficient control to ensure that we meet cargo demand in a clean, efficient and secure fashion. A streamlined network of carrier concessionaires with responsibility and direct control over employee drivers will also ensure that carriers meet safety, driver training and parking guidelines. With well-

maintained fleets, carriers can operate one truck over multiple shifts, using fewer trucks to move more cargo.

Studies estimate that a cleaner, more efficient and accountable port trucking system will save \$500 million to \$1.7 billion a year in health-care and other costs that are currently being paid by the public. For its wealth of benefits, our program has gathered endorsements from dozens of environmental, public health, community and business leaders --- including the American Lung Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Coalition for Clean Air, Physicians for Social Responsibility and National Association of Women Business owners.

For the benefit of our communities, the safety of millions of motorists and the security of our country, the Port of Los Angeles is committed to curing the chronically ill port trucking system --- not just treating the symptoms. We will also work with the Port of

Long Beach to ensure that our respective truck programs are implemented successfully and with no disruption of cargo movement. We realize that the fundamental change we are pursuing will meet resistance from those who that wish to protect their self-interests.

Nevertheless, we are resolved to leave the "caveman economics" of the existing trucking system behind. It's not the easy thing to do, but it's the right thing to do.

Geraldine Knatz is executive director of the Port of Los Angeles.