

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp. said Tuesday it would invest more than \$75 million to buy cleaner-burning trucks for hauling cargo containers from the nation's largest port complex to a proposed rail transfer hub.

The Fort Worth, Texas-based railroad operator has been trying to generate community support in favor of building the facility, dubbed the Southern California International Gateway.

Some residents have raised concerns over the potential for pollution and noise from truck traffic moving between the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and the proposed facility, north of Terminal Island and about four miles from the adjacent ports.

To help ease those concerns, the company said it was prepared to purchase a fleet of new trucks to reduce fuel emissions. The trucks would be limited to travel on nonresidential routes, the company said.

"We anticipate needing about 400 trucks," said Lena Kent, a Burlington Northern Santa Fe spokeswoman.

A clean air initiative approved last year by the ports includes a measure to replace diesel trucks at the port terminals with clean-fuel vehicles within five years.

Other measures proposed by the company include giving local residents priority for new jobs at the facility; building a wall to reduce the impact of noise from freeway traffic; and installing landscaping to improve air quality and aesthetics.

Martin Schlageter, spokesman for the Coalition for Clean Air, said the move by Burlington Northern Santa Fe represents a significant commitment on the part of the company but added that it shows there are problems with the project.

"We've got grave concerns about the location of this facility and the pollution that it's going to bring to a neighborhood that's already overwhelmed with port-related pollution," Schlageter said.

The company said the proposed facility is needed to help accommodate the volume of cargo container traffic from the Far East, which is expected to at least double during the next 15 to 20 years, by some estimates. The port complex handles 44 percent of all U.S. import cargo containers.

Rail capacity at the ports is nearing full capacity. Cargo that cannot be loaded on rail cars at the ports is trucked to downtown Los Angeles to another facility for transport.

The rail-transfer hub would connect directly to the Alameda Corridor, a stretch of railway separated from street traffic that carries cargo from the Los Angeles ports to destinations across the U.S.

The company estimates the gateway facility would divert at least a million truck trips annually from Interstate 710.

An environmental impact report on the project has yet to be completed. The ports' harbor commissioners are expected to vote on whether to approve the project early next year, Kent said.

On the Net:

Southern California International Gateway: <http://www.communitiesmatter.com>