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## Sen. Lowenthal Pushes Industry to Help Fund Mitigation of Port Pollution



Sen. Alan Lowenthal

As Long Beach's state senator, Alan Lowenthal has led the fight to make sure that global trade is not hazardous for the region's health.

*A veteran member of the California State Senate, Alan Lowenthal has fought tirelessly for his constituents in Long Beach. Prominent among their concerns is, and has always been, the twin ports of L.A. and Long Beach and their effect on not only traffic but also on public health. Sen. Lowenthal has promoted many legislative efforts, most recently SB 760, which would have imposed a fee on all shipping containers. Though SB 760 was recently suspended, MIR was pleased to speak with the senator about: November's bond measures, the challenges of port growth, and the need for environmental mitigation of pollution.*

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**The Coalition for Clean Air and NRDC just released a study that found that container fees would have little impact on trade volumes in California. Though SB 760, you have advocated container fees, which retailers and shippers resist. How does that study relate your agenda?**

I believe the released study validates what we've been saying for almost two years: a reasonable container fee is necessary, and it will not divert traffic if it is reasonable.

The study predicted a diversion of somewhere between 1.5 percent and 2.5 percent. At the same time, growth is expected to triple over the next 15 years. So, the amount of loss is negligible in terms of the tremendous amount of growth. These are the ports of choice, and it will not have an appreciable impact. Without a container fee we will not have the resources to do the infrastructure, port security, and air quality improvements that are necessary to build a world-class logistics center.

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### **What did SB 760, which has been suspended by the Appropriations Committee, seek to legislate?**

SB760 would have imposed a \$30 per container fee on all containers processed at the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. Money from the fee will improve the transportation infrastructure, fund programs to release pollution for port operations, and fund security programs.

### **Recent growth projections for the ports predict that cargo will triple by 2020, the population of the state will grow by 25 percent; truck travel will increase 50 percent; cargo carried on rail will grow by 110 percent, but that emissions will grow at a slower rate due to controls and efficiency improvements that you've been advocating for a long time. Are those statistics accurate?**

Yes.

### **How do your constituents in the harbor area grapple with the implications of those port growth projections?**

I think that already we've reached a crisis in terms of transportation gridlock. So, people are saying, "Unless there is improvement, no more." I think throughout Southern California awareness is growing that even though pollution would be improve without a major investment cleaning up the air, we are facing a public health crisis. We already have the worst air in the nation in terms of particulate matter and diesel particulates. And according to the recent report from the state Air Resources Board, the pollution from goods movement already causes 2,400 premature deaths annually, and the cost in health care between now and 2020 is going to be \$200 billion.

To say that pollution will grow only at a slower rate does not address the problem. I think SB760 could have been part of the solution, to say that we can have increased traffic but we also have to we reduce congestion on our roads and rail, improve the air quality, and also ensure that we increase port security at the same time.

### **What is the significance of the infrastructure bond measures on the state ballot in November?**

The bond measure is crucial. The infrastructure bond, which is polling the highest of all the bonds, identifies goods movement as a specific area, plus there are other parts of the bond that also impact goods movement. \$2 billion is dedicated just for goods movement infrastructure, with additional monies for freeways that are also related to goods movement. \$1 billion is dedicated to air quality improvements related to goods movement. And

hundreds of millions of dollars will go to port security.

The major parts—the air quality improvements and the infrastructure—are tied to a procedure by which the money will be allocated. It is not a Christmas tree; it does not actually have the projects, but it does have the process by which either the Air Resources Board or the California Transportation Commission will make recommendations on which projects will go forward.

Both the air quality improvements and the infrastructure improvements, projects require a match. They need at least a one-to-one match; those that have the highest match will have the highest priority to move forward. If we want the money to stay in the areas that are the most impacted—Los Angeles and Long Beach, where we have 40 percent of the nation's cargo—the private sector also has to help us with part of that match. We need a public-private partnership if we're to make the kind of impact and improve the system like needs to be done.

### **How well is the goods movement sector addressing environmental impacts?**

The Air Resources Board's Emission Reduction Plan, which came out of the governor's work when he convened the EPA and BTH to come up with a plan, estimated, in terms of goods movement, the cost to reduce pollution to meet federal air quality standards in the state of California. And they identified a cost of between \$6 billion and \$10 billion to bring California down to the level. Some of those will be done by the ports themselves. But the ports have allocated only \$400 million in their plan. So, we are still short billions of dollars. The ports will provide their share, which is a very small percentage, and the bond will provide some, but we're also going to need help from the federal government and the private sector—who benefits the most.

Then we'll have system that works and will bring us into the 21st century, and will allow us to build community support. Unless we can demonstrate to the community—and I am talking about all of Southern California; this is not just around the ports; the pollution and the congestion really affects the five Southern California counties—we need to have not only a plan, which we now have, but also the resources to carry it out. Once we do that the next step is getting our congressional delegation to help us get the match from the federal government, which I would hope matches all the monies that both the private and the public and the state are putting up.

**MIR began interviewing you years ago when you had bills AB 2041, 42, 43. We've been interviewing the LAEDC people on the Green Freight Initiative. Give us a sense of the challenge that you undertook here and**

**where we are in achieving the goal.**

When I first started, when I first ran for Long Beach City Council in 1992, I knocked on doors, I knew nothing about these issues, but I talked about why I wanted to run. I was hoping to represent the port area of Long Beach. People kept saying: “that’s wonderful why you’re running, Alan, but what’s this black soot on my windowsill and my patio furniture? I can’t get it out of my clothing or my car.” That led me to work with the Air Quality Management District in 1992–93 about open petroleum coke piles that were in the ports. There were over a million tons of open petroleum coke piles. It was difficult to make the port community understand that environmental improvements needed to be done not at the back end but at the front end—I’ve been working on that now for 15 years.

When I first came to the Legislature I introduced legislation to deal with the petroleum coke piles. It still wasn’t completed by 1998. I also began to address with truck idling and reducing the idling in the ports. So, this has been a sea change. When I first started, I was a lone voice; now I think everyone understands the importance of these issues.

**We do this interview at a time when it appears that reform of term limits is all but dead in this session of the Legislature. Isn’t the account that you just made a testimonial to the inefficacy of term limits?**

Term limits need to be corrected, and I think that future legislatures will come to grips with that issue. But I don’t think that redistricting in and of itself is dead this year. We will be voting on that; I think it is very close to passing out of the Senate—at issue to put an independent commission on the ballot. There are tremendous forces on both sides of that issue, but I think we’re not ready to concede on that issue yet this year.

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