

Officials Extend “Clean Trucks” Talk

By Kurt Helin

Editor

The sweeping and controversial “Clean Trucks Plan” for the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles will get at least another couple months of study.

After a closed-door meeting last week that included union and other shipping industry officials, representatives from both ports said more time was needed. One of the things that will be done in the next couple of months is an economic impact study, officials said.

“In the interests of fairness to those who offered their input, we need time to evaluate their suggestions,” said Richard Steinke, executive director of the Port of Long Beach. “We remain committed to aggressively improving air quality with a Clean Trucks Program, and our aim is to get this right.”

The sweeping “clean truck” plan would both improve air quality and dramatically transform the trucking industry at the ports.

Currently, most of the truck drivers are independent contractors who maintain their own rigs. That has led to an older — and heavily polluting — fleet of trucks making an average of 30,000 trips a day in and out of the ports.

Under the proposed plan, companies would be awarded “trucking franchises” to haul containers in and out of the ports without having to pay a truck impact gate fee. As part of that contract, over time the companies would have to supply the drivers with newer, less polluting trucks.

Trucks built in 2007 are 90% less polluting than the older trucks currently working in the ports. Port officials say that, once fully in place, the plan would reduce the diesel pollution from the ports by 80%.

The clean truck plan got the backing of both environmental groups and unions. Also, about 50 truckers were part of a rally outside the Port of Long Beach last Wednesday urging passage of the plan.

However, there has been opposition to the plan from some within the shipping industry, specifically retailers who ship goods through the port. The reason is the trucking companies would be required to make the drivers employees, allowing them to join the union, and likely driving up the costs from the current fleet of independents.

That opposition has led to threats of a lawsuit if the clean truck plan is passed.

“Many business stakeholders in particular wanted more economic data, and this extended timeline will enable us to study the economic implications of the plan,” said Geraldine Knatz, executive director at the Port of Los Angeles. “The extra time and analysis will make for a stronger program.”

While there will be a couple more months of study, port officials said they still have the goal of getting the clean truck program up and running by the first of next year.