



Intermodal tsunami coming to North American transportation



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The North American intermodal freight system is being transformed. The Class 1 railways are in the process of making significant investments that will reshape and revitalize this important mode of transport.

These changes are designed to achieve a set of important objectives:

- Speed up cross-country transit times by bypassing the congested Chicago container sorting facilities for significant blocks of traffic;
- Improve the functioning of Chicago's intermodal operations, one of the most important rail hubs in the world;
- Evolve rail networks so they can ultimately handle double-stacked containers across their entire systems;
- Take market share from truckers by offering shippers a greener option that reduces emissions, reduces highway congestion and cuts shipping costs; and
- Enhance the ability of the North American intermodal network to move international ocean cargo arriving via East and West Coast ports.

Here is an update on current developments.

The CSX National Gateway

CSX has plans to open a 185-acre facility in North Baltimore, Ohio in early 2011. This terminal will become the "nerve centre" for stacktrains coming from the West Coast so they can bypass Chicago. Their Columbus, Ohio terminal is being expanded to become a major consumer and freight centre. A planned terminal in Pittsburgh will link this heavy manufacturing area with the interstate highways that traverse it. As CSX raises clearances, the Chambersburg, Penn. terminal will become the eastern terminus for double-stack traffic. From there, the loads can move by truck to the major centres in eastern Pennsylvania, Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and the New York/New Jersey region. A new terminal in Baltimore, Md. will process north-south and east-west trains to/from the seaport. The Charlotte, N.C. facility will be expanded to increase container traffic.

The Norfolk Southern Heartland Corridor

The Heartland Corridor project is a three-year engineering effort to increase intermodal freight capacity by raising vertical clearances in 28 tunnels on a Norfolk Southern rail line between the port of Hampton Roads, Va., and Chicago. To be completed in September, containerized freight moving in double-stack trains will be able to shave about 200 miles and up to a day's transit time between the East Coast and the Midwest.

Previously, double-stack trains had to take longer routes by way of Harrisburg, Pa., or Knoxville, Tenn.

The Heartland Corridor goes across Virginia, through southern West Virginia and north through Columbus, Ohio. For the past three years, work crews have been raising the roofs on tunnels in West Virginia, Virginia and Kentucky, enabling them to handle the 20-ft, 3-inch-high container trains that have had to go around the mountains, through Pennsylvania and Tennessee, because the tunnels were too small. The tunnels, built around 1905, have stood at 19.5 feet from track to ceiling. They needed to be an average of 1.5 feet taller, including a 9-inch cushion, to accommodate the double-stack trains.

The Norfolk Southern Crescent Corridor

The Crescent Corridor is a railroad corridor expansion program that will run from the Mississippi Delta, up Interstate 81 through Virginia and eventually into New York and will be a major intermodal corridor linking Louisiana and the northeast. NS is planning new terminal facilities for Charlotte, N.C., Memphis, Tenn., Birmingham, Ala., and Greencastle, Penn. Upgrades are planned for terminals in Harrisburg and Bethlehem, Penn.

Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program (CREATE)

CREATE is a first-of-its-kind partnership between the US Department of Transportation, the State of Illinois, the City of Chicago, Metra, Amtrak, and America's freight railroads. CREATE will invest \$1.5 billion in critically needed capital improvements to increase the efficiency of the region's rail infrastructure by focusing rail traffic on five rail corridors. The work includes:

- 25 new roadway overpasses or underpasses at locations where auto and pedestrian traffic currently crosses railroad tracks at grade level;
- Six new rail overpasses or underpasses to separate passenger and freight train tracks;
- Viaduct improvements;
- Grade crossing safety enhancements; and
- Extensive upgrades of tracks, switches and signal systems.

It should be noted that this program has not been fully funded. To see the full list of the rail improvement projects and the current status of each project, visit the CREATE Web site (www.createprogram.org/index.html) for monthly project status updates. CT&L