

## Corpus Christi Port Terminal Railroad

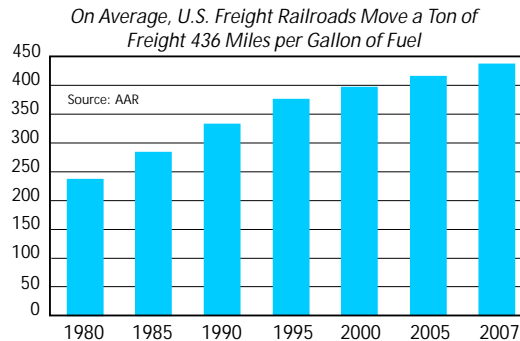
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operate. Larger railroads, in order to remain economically competitive, have dropped much of their short-haul operations in recent years. Now that gasoline and diesel prices have skyrocketed, the importance of these largely invisible railroads is becoming more apparent. Businesses that ship goods by truck are searching for cheaper alternatives.

The railroad industry touts its fuel efficiency as well as the environmental advantages trains have over trucks. The Association of American Railroads (AAR), a trade organization representing mostly large railroads, cites studies that show that freight railroads move a ton of freight an average of 423 miles for every gallon of fuel consumed, or 423 ton-miles/gallon. By comparison, a typical sport utility vehicle weighing three tons and getting 20 miles per gallon would yield 60 ton-miles/gallon.

Shifting from trucks to trains would reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by two-thirds, according to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). A shift of 1 percent of long-haul freight from trucks to train, the association says, would reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by more than 12 million tons.

Other benefits to shipping freight by rail, the industry argues, include reducing highway congestion which, in turn, saves fuel. The



Texas Transportation Institute estimates that the time the average commuter spends in traffic congestion has tripled in the past 20 years, and that 5.7 million gallons of fuel are wasted each year in traffic jams.

Railroads also reduce wear and tear on highways, say railroad industry advocates, adding that roads are much more expensive to build. A mile of track can be built for as little as 10 percent of the cost of building a mile of highway, and maintenance costs are lower. A shift to railroads could also result in a reduction in traffic deaths and injuries, railroad industry officials say.

With all those advantages, it's easy to see how the railroad industry and short line railroads will play an increasingly important role in moving freight throughout the United States.



## Rural Rail Transportation Districts

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Rural Rail Transportation District, Tom Ballou, chairman of the San Patricio Rural Rail Transportation District, and Ruben Bonilla, chairman of the Port of Corpus Christi, expresses the desire on the part of the three entities to plan and implement rail improvements on a collaborative basis.

The resolution calls on them to work together to "improve the economic vitality of the Nueces and San Patricio County region ... in a mutually supportive manner facilitated and assisted by the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Organization."

Rural rail transportation districts, authorized by the Texas Legislature in 1981, are intended to help counties preserve or improve service on existing rail lines. They're authorized to buy, build and operate new railroad and intermodal facilities, and they have the right of eminent domain and the ability to issue revenue bonds. In recent years, rural rail transportation districts have taken on an increasingly important role in enhancing local economic development and constructing new rail transportation facilities. Although they have the authority to issue revenue bonds, which are repaid through revenues raised by the project they fund, rural rail transportation districts do not have the authority to levy taxes.

That's where the MPO can be even more helpful. The MPO, as part of its mission, receives funding to hire experts to gather crucial data needed to make comprehensive planning decisions. The MPO evaluates a wide range of transportation issues on a regular basis, and in recent months commissioned a study on transporting area freight by truck. A study on the viability of transporting more area freight by rail would be an important addition to this data.

The MPO, the Port and the Nueces and San Patricio rural rail transportation districts have initiated an evaluation of the impact that La Quinta Trade Gateway and the Robstown Trade Processing and Inland Center will have on the area and how road and rail improvements

will benefit these freight centers.

Texas is a major player in the movement of freight. That's why the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is conducting a statewide freight rail study to determine how much it will cost to bring the state's rail infrastructure up to date. The study will include a look at the needs of the 10-county area that includes Nueces and San Patricio counties, so it's vital that the Coastal Bend let its needs be known.



Kansas City Southern GE locomotive KCS 4034 hauling three locomotives and freight cars to various destinations.

This area needs to let the state know, for instance, that improvements to the tracks between Sinton and Ingleside would reduce by half the time it takes to ship goods to Houston. It's also important that the Coastal Bend let it be known that it wants to ensure that a rail line KC Southern is improving between Houston and Laredo not bypass the area. Working together, the MPO, the Port and rural rail transportation districts in Nueces and San Patricio counties will ensure that the state understands the Coastal Bend's needs and that the area's rail infrastructure reaches its highest potential.