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Beyond the Port: Goods Movement Depends on Vast Network of Workers, Industries, Services in Cities like Carson



■ Trade and Transportation

By Thomas O'Brien

Any discussion of goods movement in Southern California starts with Los Angeles and Long Beach. When we talk about global gateways, we talk first and foremost about the San Pedro Bay Ports and LAX. They dominate the discussion given their size and scope of operations. We shouldn't forget however that global gateways are just that – portals that lead to a vast network of people, places and services that make the region a center for trade and logistics. This includes manufacturing locations, warehouses, and distribution centers.

Carson is one of the places, sometimes forgotten in the discussion, which contributes to the vitality of the international trade sector in the region. It is also emblematic of cities which are along major trade corridors and which seek a balance between participation in the global supply chain and quality of life. This is particularly the case in times of economic uncertainty like we're experiencing now.

Carson's economic profile is largely defined by manufacturing and trade-related services. Top employers include the City's largest employer, BP, which operates a refinery within the city; and manufacturing, processing, and packaging facilities run by companies as diverse as Golden Wheel Auto Parts and Accessories, Leiner Health Products, Sees Candies, Lakeshore Learning, Pepsi Bottling, Yoplait, and Alcoa Fasteners. Carson is also home to third party logistics providers which service these and other businesses.

While the presence of manufacturing, refining, processing, packaging and shipping activity suggests a supply chain in harmony, there are underlying land use tensions which play themselves out at the local level. Warehousing and other commercial uses can take up valuable space in a city with little available land for new development. This can drive up prices and drive out other uses including industrial and heavy manufacturing, shifting the balance of economic activity.

Manufacturing and logistics still offer opportunities for economic development, but planners and other city officials at the local level have to actively plan for and balance competing interests. Businesses are likely to be first attracted to Carson because of its proximity to the ports, Alameda Corridor, freeways and supply chain-related facilities; but they rely in part upon local government to make continued growth possible. The City's General Plan, zoning ordinance and development standards outline what uses are allowed in any given part of the City and help determine whether its land use profile is predominantly one of heavy

manufacturing, light manufacturing or trade-related logistics services. The City must also attempt to respond to community concerns and mitigate the negative impacts of trade by establishing, for example, limitations on truck size and routing, and determining how and where businesses operate so that conflicts with residents and other businesses are minimized.

The City also plays a role in developing incentive programs for trade-related industries, such as helping to identify gap financing for the clean-up of brownfields. This helps to open-up previously contaminated land for new economic use.

Carson also finds itself playing a new and important role in preparing the local workforce for employment in trade-related industries. The challenge is how to make sure that its population of 100,000 is well positioned to take advantage of technology-based, higher paying job opportunities in manufacturing and logistics. More and more often these jobs require a skills set not being developed in our schools. Students who leave school before obtaining a high school diploma will find themselves at an even greater disadvantage.

Barry Waite, Carson's Business Development Manager, says the City is actively involved in helping companies recruit and retain good employees, which is a problem even in a struggling economy. The City runs a drop-in center which helps people find jobs and helps find people for open positions. The Center provides resources in resume development and other job search skills, runs a jobs program as well as a summer program for youth. Five hundred different individuals were served last year; and Waite says that educational institutions, including Community Colleges, are necessary partners in preparing the community for job placement by teaching computer skills, written communication and basic math.

All of this is a reminder that the supply chain depends upon other chains and networks involving government and educators to remain competitive. Cities like Carson are on the front line of the battles over economic restructuring and the future of urban development. When residents or businesses have cause to complain about the climate for economic growth or increasing truck volumes on city streets, it's local elected officials who hear about it first and are expected to act. It appears that all politics is indeed local, even when the global supply chain is involved.

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