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Pact links Dallas, Panama Canal

Group hopes to channel more trade through southern part of county

By Katherine Yung

The Dallas NAFTA Trade Corridor Coalition plans to sign an agreement today with the Panama Canal Authority in an effort to boost trade to southern Dallas County.

The deal calls for joint marketing efforts and the exchange of data and ideas between the coalition and the Panama Canal Authority, which operates the 50-mile canal in Central America.

The coalition, consisting of the city of Dallas, Dallas County and the city of Balch Springs, seeks to transform the southern sector into a trade hub, bringing jobs and development.

The agreement aims to capitalize on many shippers' growing interest in using the Panama Canal to bypass congested ports in Southern California when moving goods to the Midwest or East Coast from Asia.

Some of the cargo from the canal is unloaded at Houston's port, then transported by truck to distribution centers in North Texas for delivery to the rest of the country. The coalition wants to increase this traffic.

"We're seeing shifts in trade patterns, which is why we're doing this," said Leslie Jutzi, manager of the city of Dallas' intergovernmental services and project manager of the Dallas NAFTA Trade Corridor.

No money is exchanging hands with the deal.

Although North Texas isn't alone in vying for a role as an inland port, southern Dallas County already has several efforts under way to become more of an import destination.

In August, the Union Pacific railroad opened a \$100 million international intermodal terminal in Wilmer, joining a new Federal Express distribution center nearby.

And the Allen Group, a California real estate company, recently announced plans to open an industrial park surrounding the Union Pacific terminal.

The coalition's agreement with the Panama Canal Authority follows the recent signing of a similar pact with the Port of Topolobampo in northwest Mexico.

Additional agreements are also expected with the Ports of Lazaro Cardenas and Manzanillo in Mexico, Ms. Jutzi said.

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