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## OPINION: Editorials

### In Shipping Shape How to Make the Most of our Inland Ports

The Dallas-Fort Worth area has grown into an economic behemoth because of location - and because of regional cooperation.

At the center of the country's booming southern tier, North Texas is the largest U.S. metro area without a port on water. But that doesn't leave the region portless. If plans continue to develop, we will have two bustling inland ports that create a central shipping hub for rail and trucks.

To take full advantage of that flow of goods, some smart anticipating is in order. Location is one important ingredient for success. Coordination is another.

#### Traffic torrent ahead

The border crossing at Laredo - the nation's sixth-largest foreign-trade gateway - sends more than 1.5 million containers and trucks north each year, many of them to Dallas. The growing flood of import containers into Long Beach, Calif., reaches North Texas as well.

In a few years, an expanded Panama Canal will mean a shorter route to the Port of Houston for bulkier Asian container ships, sending even more cargo to North Texas for trans-shipment via rail or truck. The same goes for eastbound cargo unloaded at planned deepwater ports on Mexico's Pacific coast.

North Texas has to be ready. It's vital to the economic and environmental health of the region to prepare the way for the blossoming trans-shipment

hub sprawling across southern Dallas, Lancaster, Wilmer and Hutchins. The direct jobs and support activity will have spillover benefits for all of North Texas. But for the Dallas Logistics Hub to reach its potential, trains and trucks need to get in and out without burning up time and fuel in traffic jams.

#### Keeping it moving

North Texas represents a wasteful gantlet for shippers. Everyday people may not know it, but they, too, suffer the effects of cargo that gets bollixed up here. Slow-moving or stalled trains needlessly tie up vehicular traffic and trucks without a Dallas bypass clog central arteries. Both scenarios represent exhaust fumes needlessly spewed into the air.

The fixes are technically and politically complicated but necessary. They include:

-Eliminating the rail yard bottleneck in central Fort Worth. East-west and north-south trains now must stop for one another - for as long as 90 minutes at peak times. It's the worst such rail congestion in the nation and affects cargo headed for the Dallas hub. A costly overpass or underpass needs to be built, perhaps through a combination of tax breaks, public dollars and money attracted in a public-private partnership.

-Rail relocation. Moving freight tracks from city centers to less congested areas improves vehicle traffic and provides new right of way for passenger rail. A 2-year-old rail-relocation plan needs proper

funding by the Legislature to effectively separate cars from trains.

-Highway reliever routes. Overburdened intercity highways will only see more congestion and punishment as traffic outpaces construction. New turnpikes, including the developing Trans-Texas Corridor, are key to expediting truck freight and have promise for accommodating new, faster rail routes.

-D-FW outer loop. Trucks loaded at the Dallas shipping hub need convenient highway access to be on their way to markets along interstates. A proposed Dallas-Fort Worth outer loop would tie into new intercity turnpikes to speed outbound cargo. It also would route through trucking around core cities, easing traffic congestion and improving safety.

#### Regional cooperation

The Dallas shipping hub and its rival, Fort Worth's growing Alliance Airport, could end up in a

counterproductive shooting match for supremacy. While healthy competition should help attract business through sweetened deals for shipping clients, depot developers must respect the fact that success in obtaining critical public dollars depends on coordinated effort.

Preparation for Panama Canal cargo in the Houston area will span different cities and port facilities, from Houston to Texas City to Galveston. In the same way, Dallas and Fort Worth need to jointly gird for the business.

The inspiration should be the cities' combined effort to build and develop Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. Thirty-three years after the airport opened, it ranks as one of the world's busiest, with direct and spin-off jobs estimated at more than 300,000.