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Quickie: Long Beach Approves \$750 Million Middle Harbor Project EIR

04/13/2009

After 51 speakers, two hours of public testimony, an hour and 20 minutes of board and staff discussion, and then another two hours of discussion and clarification, Port of Long Beach Harbor Commissioners voted unanimously this afternoon to approve the final Environmental Impact Report for the Middle Harbor Redevelopment Project.

The project would combine and reconfigure the 170-acre California United Terminal on Pier D and E and the 101-acre Long Beach Container Terminal on Pier F into one large, more efficient 315-acre terminal with ondock rail. Plans call for the redevelopment to take place in phases over a 10-year period. Open water between the two terminals would be filled in.

Of the 51 speakers, 30 were clearly in favor of the project and 21 were against certification of the EIR, although some of those speakers merely asked for more time or raised legal questions.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District wanted language in the EIR that would provide for accelerating clean ship standards advanced by the International Maritime Organization. The Coalition for Clean Air said more mitigation was needed for the project and urged the ports to postpone approval until more "roll up the sleeves" discussions could take place between stakeholders.

Representatives of business groups - including the presidents of both the Los Angeles and Long Beach chambers of commerce - spoke in favor of the project as did the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and building trades and construction unions.

A number of speakers complained that they had not had time to evaluate the project - saying they only had 10 days from the time the final EIR was released until the hearing. Some community members delivered their testimony in Spanish with the aid of a translator, all of them in opposition.

The board noted that the draft EIR delivered last year provided 75 days for public comment. The final EIR is much the same as the draft, except for responses to issues raised in the earlier hearing and minor changes made because of those comments.

A representative from the City of Riverside, which has filed suit against the Port of Los Angeles approval of its China Shipping project for not considering the increase in train traffic in Riverside, also testified against approval of the Middle Harbor Project EIR.

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The lease calls for a technology review every five years so see if there are new technologies available at that time that could ease pollution levels at the terminal.

Harbor Commissioners noted that the project is expected to generate 14,000 permanent jobs in the region, 1,000 temporary construction jobs a year for ten years, allow twice as much cargo throughput and reduce air pollution by 50 percent. Not moving forward would deliver negative messages to port customers and to other ports that may be considering similar environmental programs.

Commission President Jim Hankla conceded, however, that approval of the project may be appealed to the City Council or end up in court.

The federal part of the document - the Environmental Impact Statement - must still be approved by the Army Corps of Engineers.

[EIR and Fact Sheet](#)

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