

January 23, 2018

California Has a New Trucking Sustainability Plan



A newly enacted freight sustainability initiative in California could change the face of the state's transportation industry and perhaps create a blueprint for other states to follow.

The plan's goal of reducing congestion and increasing efficiency in the state's busy freight corridors may also yield financial benefits for trucking companies in California and beyond.

What's the initiative?

The initiative is the outcome of the [California Sustainable Freight Action Plan](#), formed when Gov. Jerry Brown signed Executive Order B-32-15 in 2015. It's a set of guidelines — not regulations — designed to help the state "transition to a less-polluting, more efficient, modern freight transport system," according to the plan's executive summary.

What does it require?

It is tough to predict how widely these guidelines will be adopted since the plan does not require companies to adhere to any specific regulations. But it encourages stakeholders such as motor

carrier associations, port authorities, truck manufacturers and intermodal operators to follow the guidelines to "improve operational efficiencies, stimulate business and help create a cleaner environment," said Vanessa Wiseman, public information officer for the [California Department of Transportation](#).

What are its goals?

The plan has two primary goals:

1. Use partnerships to move freight in California on a modern, safe, integrated and resilient system that supports the economy, jobs and healthy livable communities.
2. Make progress in improving freight-system efficiency, reducing pollution and growing California's economy through partnerships as well as coordinated state efforts and resources.

To support these goals, the plan outlines specific steps, including:

- Transitioning the movement of domestic and international freight in California to zero or near-zero emissions. This could create a significant impact on pollution reduction, since the state boasts the nation's two busiest ports, Los Angeles and Long Beach.
- Improving freight system efficiency based on measuring "the ratio of the value of goods and services produced from the freight sector, relative to the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that the freight sector produces by 2030," Wiseman said. "The hope is that it will improve operational efficiencies, stimulate business and help create a cleaner environment."

What is the plan's impact?

The plan's impact will ultimately depend on how thoroughly the state's trucking industry chooses to follow the guidelines. If many companies decide to meet the goal of reducing congestion, a substantial number of trucks would spend less time idling at ports and on highways. That would improve fleet efficiency and, therefore, profitability.

Mike Tunnell, director of energy and environmental affairs for [The American Trucking Associations](#), said the initiative may spark greater interest in electric vehicles. But he also noted the complications involved in that transition, including development of infrastructure, grid integration and power production.

"The targets rely on a number of variables that may or may not materialize," Tunnell said. "Predicting the advancement of technology and infrastructure over the next 12-plus years is extremely difficult. So, while the targets have been established, important work in monitoring and understanding the advancement of the technologies and infrastructure envisioned in the plan is only beginning."

Leading the Way

Greening the transportation industry, first in California and then in other markets, is a lofty ambition. But it's a worthy one, according to the stakeholders who crafted the guidelines, including Caltrans, the ATA and other freight and trade-related businesses and organizations.

"It is our goal that California will be a leader in the effort to improve system efficiency, create a healthier environment and a more prosperous future," Wiseman said.

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