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Intermodal site list has at least 6 properties

BY RT MORGAN • RTMORGAN@THETOWNTALK.COM • FEBRUARY 3, 2009

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Site selection for a proposed intermodal facility has dwindled to at least six properties.

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The list of prospective sites will be released late this month and contains no real surprises, according to Jim Clinton, executive director of Cenla Advantage Partnership. Clinton talked about the selection last week during a meeting of the North Rapides Business and Industry Alliance.

A reduction in shipping costs is the overall goal of an intermodal facility. The ideal area brings together all four travel options -- air, land, rail and water. Rail is considered the primary concentration due to its efficiency.

Two sites expected to appear on the shortened list are the Port of Alexandria and the England Airpark. Both sites were offered up as suggestion during a Sept. 18 meeting on the subject by project firm Genesis Consultant.

England Airpark's own consultants also remarked that intermodal would be a good fit for the property. The comments were made during the unveiling of England's master development plan on Jan 22.

Mark Sweeney of McCallum/Sweeney Consulting, a site-selection agency for companies, said intermodal is a valid option for the airpark due to its access to Interstate and rail. Sweeney added that many of his clients want this type of facility.

For John Marzullo, the port is "a prime site" for an intermodal facility. Of course, Marzullo, port executive director, said he is biased on the location. The port already incorporates land, rail and water with air -- England Airpark -- only a couple of miles down the road.

But instead of waiting for a determination, the port has begun some prep work toward developing an intermodal facility. Marzullo said this is in response to a nationwide trend of small ports increasing their transportation flexibility.

Project price for the facility is \$4.3 million. That includes the purchase of 80 acres, installation of 5,000 feet of rail and other project costs. Marzullo cited the project as limited liability due to the use of state and federal funds.

At its September meeting, Genesis put the price tag of an intermodal facility at \$13 million, based on 50 acres of land.

Marzullo added that the crux to any intermodal facility is volume. It needs to have a certain amount of containers going through it to be economically feasible. He's relying on companies like Procter & Gamble to aid in that volume.

Procter & Gamble has already voiced support for this type of facility, per previous Town Talk reports. Bonnie Lemoine, a Procter & Gamble spokeswoman, told The Town Talk in a Sept. 19 article that there was a 100 percent chance her company would use intermodal if it was locally available.

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It would reduce the company's overall shipping costs and give it a competitive advantage. Currently, Procter & Gamble transports its merchandise by truck to an intermodal facility in Dallas for shipment to the West Coast. That's about 300 miles the company could cut out.

As for Clinton, he explained an intermodal facility during the current economic downturn as "more important now than it ever was." Using a NASCAR metaphor, Clinton added that in economic development, there is no penalty for passing under a caution flag.

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