

Star-Telegram

18 September 2006

Intermodal hub draws companies to Wilmer

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WILMER

Ever since Union Pacific opened its \$100 million intermodal hub off Interstate 45 south of Dallas, Wilmer has been on the global logistics map.

In coming weeks, a major landholder in the area, San Diego-based real-estate developer Allen Group, is expected to announce the development of a 6,000-acre logistics park. The company said the Dallas Logistics Hub has the potential for 60 million square feet of building not just in Wilmer, but nearby Dallas, Lancaster and Hutchins.

The company believes that the place is ripe for an intermodal hub because it's close to the rail facility and it's perfectly positioned to handle imports from the West Coast and Mexico.

Other companies are also seeing the opportunity for more business there. Duke Realty, Trammell Crow and Prologis are building giant speculative warehouses and distribution buildings nearby.

About 700 trucks come through the Union Pacific hub on any given day, dropping off containers and picking up full ones off rail cars at the 360-acre yard. The yard hits records every month, said Eric Anderson, superintendent of intermodal operations for Union Pacific. It's a far cry from UP's old yard in south Dallas, which was so overcrowded that rail containers were sometimes stacked four high.

Union Pacific hopes to make an even larger investment in Asian freight headed inland. The company is considering \$3.2 billion in infrastructure improvements this year. Much of that will be used to add a second set of track to the Sunset Route, which comes from Southern California ports to El Paso, and branches from there, said Paul Borseth, Union Pacific's assistant vice president of international intermodal operations.

The intermodal yard in Wilmer is a colorful place, with giant GPS-guided cranes lifting the 20- and 40-foot metal boxes on and off trains and boxes. But the colors also highlight the prevalence of Asian-based shipping companies at the yard. There are the red containers from Japan-based K Line, the forest-green containers from Taiwan-based Evergreen Marine, gray containers from China-based COSCO and the aqua blue containers from China-based China Shipping. Few are non-Asian-based companies.

The boxes almost always contain consumer goods.

"Go to a typical big-box retailer, and much of those items came from Asia," Borseth said. In recent years, trans-Pacific cargo has risen more than 7 percent a year, with the last couple of years rising as much as 15 percent over the previous year, he said.

Borseth said he believes that the trend will continue. He's not the only one.

Dan McAuliffe, vice president for the Allen Group, said his company, which has been acquiring land south of Dallas for eight years, originally planned a 2,500-acre facility. Now, the plans call for more than double that, thanks to shipments arriving from Mexico and the West Coast.

The Allen Group expects the hub to be built over the next two to three decades, eventually filling 60 million square feet of office, distribution and warehouse space and employing 30,000 people directly and 30,000 more in support jobs. McAuliffe said it's possible that the Lancaster airport will eventually handle shipments and that BNSF will open its own intermodal facility at the hub.

BNSF spokeswoman Suann Lundsberg said the company is in the early stages of evaluating the possibility. She said intermodal development would be in addition to Alliance.

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