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State's ports line up for new bond money

Port of Oakland plans to ask for at least \$600 million to improve existing rail yard

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Inside Bay Area

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OAKLAND — Unified in their quest to win voter approval of a \$20 billion transportation bond, the state's major ports will now battle each other in hopes of winning the funds they need.

From Long Beach to Oakland, the state's ports already have a slew projects lined up that they hope will qualify for funding.

Although the bond measure calls for the state to spend \$20 billion for transportation improvements, the money is earmarked for certain segments of the transportation sector from public transportation to security.

While port representatives say some of their projects might be able to qualify for funding from the different segments, only \$3.2 billion is earmarked directly for goods movement and air quality.

"We are going to have a big fight on our hands," said Randy Rentschler, legislative director for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. "It's going to be competitive, it is going to be tough but I'm grateful to have the problem."

Of the \$3.2 billion, the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles have said they will seek at least \$1.7 billion. The Port of Oakland believes it will ask for at least \$600 million, although representatives refused to state a firm number. Nevertheless, that leaves less than \$1 billion for the roughly 10 smaller ports that dot the California coast.

"We do think it will be stiff competition," said Libby Schaaf, director of public affairs for the Port of Oakland. "But we believe we have very compelling projects."

Oakland's most expensive project will be construction of a new rail yard on the former Oakland Army Base.

The project will encompass almost all of the roughly 162 acres the port now owns on the former Oakland Army Base. It will allow for the swift movement of containers from ship to rail and increase the port's rail capacity to 1.7 million containers a year from its current 640,000 containers.

In addition to building the yard, the port wants to electrify it. Instead of having diesel engines and yard equipment moving containers through the complex, the port wants everything to run by non-polluting electric motors.

Oakland will also seek funding to improve rail connections between the port and Martinez, replace and widen the 7th Street tunnel and create the California Interregional Rail Intermodal System.

The system would allow the port to run a rail shuttle between Oakland and the Central Valley, a location where many distribution centers are being constructed.

Funds for the system would be used to improve rail access and build rail yards.

The program is needed, port officials say, to help reduce traffic congestion in the Bay Area. Instead of having hundreds of trucks hauling containers full of fruit to the Port of Oakland and other materials back to the Central Valley, a train can pull hundreds of containers all at once.

Meanwhile, in Southern California, the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles have teamed up in hopes of ensuring they will get funding.

Like Oakland, most of their requests will be focused on rail.

The ports want to bring rail closer to the docks and eliminate some rail street crossings in and around the ports.

"(We) will trust that statewide, the most critical and important projects get the funding they deserve," said Theresa Adams-Lopez, spokesperson for the Port of Los Angeles. "It's hard to tell what will be funded at this point because we haven't seen the criteria and/or weighting yet."

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