



Will County is at the crossroads of global, national shipping

Elwood 'intermodal' transportation center, 2 planned rail-truck sites make it a fast-growing intermodal hub, where

By Karen Sorensen Special to the Tribune
September 25, 2009

Higher fuel costs, declining numbers of cross-country truck drivers, more goods from China and the push to go green have put [Joliet](#) and [Will County](#) at the epicenter of the country's fast-growing intermodal transportation system, officials say.

[Union Pacific Railroad](#) recently started work on a 785-acre intermodal facility in Joliet that will be the centerpiece of CenterPoint Properties' huge new 3,900-acre industrial park.

Officials say that while there's concern about wear and tear on roads from heavy-truck use, the new site will mean more county property taxes and possibly thousands of new jobs.

Trucks will pick up train containers from [California](#), [Texas](#) and the Pacific Rim to be moved to company warehouses and distribution centers in the Midwest, [Union Pacific](#) spokesman [Mark Davis](#) said.

Alone, it will be the largest intermodal facility in the country, CenterPoint Vice President Neil Doyle said. Combined with CenterPoint's 2,500-acre park only 2 miles away in Elwood, which is anchored by a Santa Fe Burlington Northern Railway intermodal facility, and no competitor is even close, he said.

A third intermodal facility proposed by CenterPoint for [Crete](#), which is still in the planning stages, will further cement Will County's role in the intermodal industry, said John Greuling, president and CEO of the Will County Center for Economic Development.

"By our estimation, given the scope of these projects, we will be the largest inland port in North America," Greuling said.

For Will County, Union Pacific's \$370 million Joliet facility coupled with the \$2 billion CenterPoint is investing into the industrial park means \$60 million in new property taxes annually and as many as 10,000 to 15,000 new jobs over the next 10 to 15 years, Greuling said. For Illinois, it's one of the few bright spots in a dismal economic period, said [Gov. Pat Quinn](#), who attended a Sept. 3 groundbreaking for the Joliet facility.

"It's a tremendous opportunity," Quinn said. "My No. 1 goal is to create jobs, and this will certainly do that."

Some jobs will be in the construction of the facility, which is set to open in June. But they also will come from the construction of the industrial park businesses that are expected to follow, the people hired to work at those businesses, the new employees needed to transport goods, and the laborers needed to build infrastructure improvements, Doyle said.

The Elwood facility employs 500 people, and Union Pacific will employ about 150 when it opens, he said.

Officials said roads pose the biggest problem, given that as many as 1,200 to 1,400 trucks will be making the daily trip to the Joliet site -- coupled with a similar number already using the Elwood facility. Greuling said a state capital spending plan promising \$1.3 billion for Will County is a godsend in that it will fund improvements to Interstate Highway 55, which is 7 miles away, and Interstate Highway 80, 5 miles away.

Union Pacific and CenterPoint will pay for some of the roadwork needed now, and company officials say they will fund them as future needs arise. But the county is toying with the idea of a per-container fee to generate money for future improvements, Greuling said.

From a green perspective, the replacement of trucks making cross-country hauls with more fuel-efficient trains means a big reduction in greenhouse emissions, said Federal Railroad Administration Administrator Joe Szabo, who also attended the Sept. 3 event, along with U.S. Sen. [Dick Durbin](#), D-Ill., and U.S. Rep. [Debbie Halvorson](#), D-Ill., who helped secure the project's easements.

Szabo said one train takes 300 trucks off the road. "If we shift 10 percent of our current freight to rail, we'll save 1 billion gallons of fuel a year," he said.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chicago/chi-trucks-trains-sw-zone-25sep25,0,7077073.story>