
BNSF all aboard on 'clean' diesel locomotives

By Bob Cox
McClatchy-Tribune News Service

April 22, 2007

New technology is cleaning up the familiar puffs of smoke emitted by diesel locomotives and, more important, dramatically reducing emissions of invisible pollutants.

Officials of BNSF Railway are investing heavily in a new generation of low-emissions locomotives that will be used for switching trains in Dallas-Ft. Worth, Houston and San Antonio, three areas fighting air-quality problems.

"Reducing emissions from locomotives is good for everybody. Improving air quality is good for everybody," said Mark Stehly, assistant vice president of environment and research development for the Ft. Worth-based railroad.

Railroads' diesel/electric locomotives are the most fuel-efficient overland method for hauling freight long distances. But to meet federal and state emissions requirements, railroads are spending big bucks to upgrade and replace many older locomotives.

At the top of the BNSF's shopping list is a new fleet of switching locomotives that will be assigned to the railroad yards. With the aid of state grants, BNSF has purchased 14 \$1.5 million N-ViroMotive "ultra low emissions locomotives" built by National Railway Equipment.

The first two have been delivered and will be assigned to BNSF's rail yard in Houston. A dozen more will be ready by June, and BNSF is preparing to order 50 more.

Compared with their predecessors, the new locomotives:

*Use 15 percent less fuel.

*Emit 80 percent less nitrous oxide, the major pollutant that contributes to the formation of ozone.

*Emit less of other pollutants.

Stehly said because of the state funding, the new locomotives will not leave Texas. The railroad is also spending heavily to upgrade older long-haul locomotives and adding about 200 new units each year to replace its oldest equipment.

To meet EPA standards for nitrous oxide and particulate emissions, BNSF has upgraded more than 2,000 locomotives. About 100 to 150 more are upgraded each year, at a cost of \$40,000 each, when they undergo engine overhauls. BNSF is also buying about 200 new long-haul locomotives a year at a cost of about \$2 million each.

The 12-cylinder locomotives built by General Electric use less fuel and cut nitrous-oxide emissions by an additional 33 percent.

"We haven't had a new engine [technology] like this in decades in the railroad industry," Stehly said. "It's very fuel efficient, and it's also very clean."

The railroad receives no state funding for the upgrades and purchases of long-haul locomotives.

Copyright (c) 2007, Chicago Tribune