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CSX, UP Add Greenery

Carriers buy cleaner-burning engines, with hefty public contributions to help foot the bill

BY JOHN D. BOYD

When CSX Transportation took delivery of its first low-emission "genset" yard locomotives last month near Detroit, it did so with public funds picking up 80 percent of the cost.

And when Union Pacific Railroad added some genset units to its rail yard at Roseville near Sacramento, it also had the public to thank for paying four-fifths of the bill.

The public sponsors - a federal purse in the case of CSX, California state funds for UP - call it "mitigation" investments to help curb diesel emissions from rail operations. Railroads call it "public-private partnerships."

In these examples, the public cost was more than \$1 million per vehicle; the private part was \$280,000 or less.

But public agencies in various parts of the country are eyeing such aid as one of the fastest ways to slash emissions in a small area, and spur rail lines to change out older locomotives years before they would otherwise need replacing.

Railroads have been experimenting with a range of alternative-power options to the traditional diesel engine, but increasingly look to genset locomotives.

Those replace the traditional large power core with a bank of generator-set truck engines, each of which can shut down when the locomotive does not need to run them all. Compared with traditional yard power in which the large engines run all day long, these can sharply reduce diesel pollution along with noise levels.

They are the brainchild of a UP official, and that carrier has been quick to introduce them in high-emission zones of California and Texas that don't meet federal pollution limits. BNSF Railway has also deployed them in those states, often with some level of public matching funds.

For its inaugural use of gensets, CSX paired with the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments to introduce the first two of four genset switchers coming to the railroad's Rougemere Yard in Dearborn.

The price tag to retrofit two existing yard units was \$2.8 million. MDOT and the regional council acted as sponsors to draw \$2.24 million of that from the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program, while CSX's tab is \$560,000.

They are the first low-emission locomotives to be deployed in Michigan, CSX said, as well as the first on CSX's 23-state rail system. The railroad and state are negotiating the purchase of two more gensets for Rougemere.

UP said it has received the first of four new next-generation gensets at the J.R. Davis yard in Roseville, about 30 miles northeast of Sacramento.

A UP spokeswoman said California's Carl Moyer fund, which is built through auto registration fees within the state, is covering 80 percent of the \$1.3 million cost of each unit, or about \$1.04 million. That would make UP's portion about \$260,000 per unit.

Yet these are just the latest in a series of equipment changes for that state.

"The emission reductions provided by locomotives can be extremely cost-effective and provide substantial health benefits," said Harold Holmes, engineering and evaluation manager for the state's Air Resources Board.

California signed agreements with UP and BNSF in 1998 to begin significant cuts in average fleet emissions there, he said, and UP deployed dozens of cleaner-burning locomotives under that pact without state aid.

Several state funding pools are now helping speed the effort for those big lines and smaller ones, focused on changing out old yard switchers for now.