

Dallas Business Journal

OPINION

From the May 13, 2005 print edition

'Inland port' to boost S. Dallas

Last week, South Dallas proved its clout by drubbing the strong-mayor initiative.

This newspaper favored the ill-fated Proposition 1, but we can't help but admire the strength and unity of the city's long-neglected southern sector. It was a "we-have-arrived" statement as convincing as the most thunderous NBA dunk.

The southern sector is starting to arrive economically as well, and its most exciting developments may be just around the corner.

As we reported in last week's issue, the Port of Houston may locate an "inland port" in southern Dallas County.

Such a facility would handle ocean containers by rail and could bring billions of dollars in new freight traffic, construction and spin-off projects.

While it is early in the process, it's exciting to ponder the impact the project would have on our region. Simply put, it could be the biggest economic boost the southern sector has ever received.

Staff writer Margaret Allen reported that the port and its related developments could be located on the mostly undeveloped parcels around the intersection of interstates 20 and 45.

The sweep of the project's potential is breathtaking: While Dallas is providing leadership, Cedar Hill, Lancaster, DeSoto and others are involved as well.

New infrastructure, such as a rail intermodal route between Dallas and Houston, and even a new cargo airport, are on the table.

Over the next decade, Allen reported, container traffic in the Gulf of Mexico will grow as much as 23%.

Houston handles most of the traffic, and an inland port would unclog the system. Keeping its docks clear is the key to profiting from the increased trade, which is why putting an inland port in Dallas is not a far-fetched idea at all.

As we have long argued, North Texas' future in this post-Telecom-meltdown age lies first and foremost in the logistics industry.

Dallas-Fort Worth's ideal location in the middle of the country, combined with world-class transportation infrastructure and a leading edge in radio frequency identification technology, all adds up to a gold mine.

And this inland port idea could be a very large nugget indeed.

We'll keep reporting on this project as it develops. But we also encourage our readers to lend their moral support, if nothing more tangible, to those involved in trying to make it happen. That includes the Dallas City Council and other cities in southern Dallas County.

Other key players include the U.S. Maritime Administration, the Port of Houston and even the U.S. Congress, which may designate our stretch of Interstate 20 a "high-priority corridor," which would bring additional federal dollars to the table.

For decades, the world south of the Trinity River has been disparaged and ignored. Last week proved that southern Dallas is a force to be reckoned with politically.

It has potential for enormous economic muscle as well.