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Engineers tout Maglev at ports CSULB researchers say trains could ease pollution and congestion.

By Kristopher Hanson, Staff writer

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LONG BEACH - With all the focus on reducing pollution, congestion and noise associated with freight moving into and out of local ports, a Maglev system seems like a natural fit.

Engineers working on a simulated Maglev rail line at the Port of Los Angeles gathered Thursday to tout their research this year, which they say proves the system is not only environmentally responsible but also economically feasible.

"This isn't some pie-in-the-sky dream or something out of a Buck Rogers TV show. This is real, it's clean and it's competitive," said Steven Hinds, a program administrator with the Center for the Commercial Development of Transportation Technologies at CSULB.

"It's one of the few times where you can actually have harmony between economy and ecology."

Maglev is a system that uses electromagnetic force to propel trains at high speed along elevated guideways. Powered by electricity, the trains float along the guideway without emitting emissions or engine noise.

The technology is currently being used for passenger transport in China, Japan and Germany.

On Thursday, Maglev researchers from CSULB's College of Engineering attended an annual maritime trade technology conference aboard the Queen Mary, where they discussed their research at the Port of Los Angeles.

At the port's direction, engineers studied the feasibility of a 4.7-mile line between Terminal Island and an envisioned rail switchyard along the Terminal Island (103) Freeway.

For about \$550 million, the system could carry at least 5,000 containers daily to local railyards for further transport inland, cutting 2 million short-haul truck trips annually, Hinds said.

For the study, engineers worked with San Diego-based General Atomics, which has created a working Maglev mover capable of whisking containers at speeds of 100 mph.

The local project includes electrical infrastructure and construction of a bridge, driving up the overall price. Costs for a longer route are estimated at about \$50 million per mile.

In comparison, freeway construction costs \$40 million or more per mile.

To date, the concept has stalled due to a lack of capital, resistance from competing freight transporters, safety concerns, weak political support and questions about reliability, officials said Thursday.

"We've found that this technology wouldn't replace those existing (transport) technologies, but would complement them," Hinds said. "The system we're using now is at or past capacity, and with future growth, won't be able to handle all the trade. This would have a great impact on the

ports' future."

Outside of the proposed 4.7-mile Terminal Island line, Maglev supporters envision two additional routes to move containers.

One is a 20-mile stretch roughly alongside the Long Beach (710) Freeway to East Los Angeles, possibly placed above the Los Angeles River. The other route is a 100-mile line between the ports and distribution centers in the Inland Empire.

Capital costs for those projects are estimated at \$2.4 billion and \$8.5 billion, respectively.

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Kristopher Hanson can be reached at kristopher.hanson@presstelegram.com or (562) 499-1466.
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