

# **I don't think we're in Kansas anymore – BNSF Intermodal threatens the environment**

We in the Kansas City area are fortunate to have relatively clean air, but thanks to magical thinking by the “wizards” who run the BNSF Railroad and possible approval by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a decision may soon be made that will cause huge harm to our environment and health.

How did this come to be?

In December of 2006, the BNSF Railroad told the public they planned to develop one of the largest intermodal facilities in the world - a 1300 acre intermodal facility including railyard and 12 million square feet of warehouses and distribution facilities, near the small town of Gardner, Kansas, on the edge of the Kansas City metropolitan area.

The purpose of the facility? To transfer Chinese imports received through the Ports of Long Beach and LA from the train, and to ship them by truck up to 500 miles. The market area of the facility would be over 750,000 square miles. “It’s a major impact, not just for Kansas City, but globally”, said Skip Kalb, BNSF director of strategic development. See more [here](#).

Goods that used to be taken by train directly to their destination cities will now be taken by train only as far as Gardner, and then by truck to their destinations. The Oklahoma City intermodal Railyard has already been closed in anticipation of the construction of this facility.

The location? Just over a half mile from the Gardner High School and a residential neighborhood, near a hospital, schools, and downtown Gardner. See map [here](#).

The impact? In presentations to the public, BNSF projected an astonishing 60,000 truck and car trips per day within 20 years. See table here and graph [here](#).

And of course, the locomotive, heavy diesel truck, and car traffic would emit huge quantities of pollution, including deadly diesel exhaust Particulate Matter, which has been shown to cause cancer, trigger asthma, and reduce life spans – particularly for people living and working within a mile of Intermodal facilities and heavily used and polluted roadways.

Fast forward to 2009 - the company needs Federal permits because of the environmental impacts of the facility. And BNSF has changed its story. BNSF now claims that the warehouse portion of the facility is “separate and distinct”, so the Federal Environmental Assessment need cover less than 500 acres.

And they now claim there will be less than 3 million square feet of warehousing, not even a quarter of what they touted when the project was first unveiled to the public.

The Corps of Engineers charged with issuing a Federal Clean Water Act permit because the facility would destroy a waterway, goes along with BNSF's new claims, and issues a draft Environmental Assessment based on fictitious resizing of the project and faulty assumptions. Their conclusions:

- The facility will generate just 17,080 diesel truck and car trips per day, less than 1/3 of the original BNSF projection of 60,000 trips per day;
- Diesel Exhaust Particulate Matter pollution will be less than 1/3 of that from similar size intermodal railyards in California that have more mitigation measures than are proposed in Kansas;
- In spite of the fact that the purpose of the facility is to move goods from the train and ship them up to 500 miles by truck, the facility will cause a decrease in regional air pollution;
- And in a step that will allow the project to go forward if it is allowed to be built, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said on July 14 that the proposed intermodal facility "would not have a significant adverse effect on the quality of the human environment."

Local groups and individuals, with help from the NRDC, the Sierra Club, American Lung Association, THE Impact Project, and other organizations, have been fighting to ensure this facility is not built without appropriate analysis and mitigation of the impacts.

Melissa Lin Perrella, NRDC Staff Attorney, Southern California Air Project, Santa Monica, recently attended an intermodal impact workshop put on by local citizens, wrote [this blog article](#), sent [these comments](#) to the Corps, and issued this [Freedom of Information Act Request](#).

For more information on how the BNSF changed their story about the Intermodal to gain Federal approval. click [here](#).

For more on the Intermodal development, [click here](#).

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