

Waste-by-Rail

Since the late 1980s, the Sanitation Districts, in conjunction with other public agencies, have been studying means to address the projected shortfall in local solid waste disposal capacity. Currently, nearly all refuse in Los Angeles County is transported to disposal sites in the metropolitan area by truck. However, as public opposition to siting new or expanding existing disposal facilities near urban areas has grown, sites farther from the Los Angeles Basin have become more desirable, despite the costs associated with longer transport distances. For some sites, such as the Mesquite Regional Landfill in Imperial County, rail transport is an efficient means to transport refuse to remote disposal sites. Transitioning to remote disposal of refuse that involves rail transport requires that new infrastructure be developed. This concept of rail transport of refuse, which includes an integrated system of local and remote infrastructure, is herein called “waste-by-rail”. Specifically, a waste-by-rail system consists of the following components:

- Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs)/Transfer Stations
Refuse collection trucks would deliver their loads to MRFs/transfer stations where the waste would be processed for the recovery of recyclable materials and inspected for the presence of hazardous waste or other unacceptable materials. The residual waste would be loaded into rail-ready shipping or “intermodal” containers.
- Local Rail Yard (or “Local Intermodal Facility”)
The rail-ready shipping containers would be delivered to a local rail loading facility by truck where the containers would be loaded onto rail cars. Empty intermodal containers would be removed from the rail cars and loaded onto trucks to be transported back to the MRFs/Transfer Stations.
- Rail Transport
A train would transport the containerized waste on the rail cars to a remote landfill using existing rail lines.
- Remote Rail Yard (or “Remote Intermodal Facility”)
This facility would allow unloading of loaded containers from the train to trucks for transport to the landfill. In addition, empty containers would be placed onto the train for transport to the local rail yard. Ideally, the rail yards would be located at the remote landfill and be connected by a rail spur to the railroad mainline.
- Remote Landfill
The intermodal containers would be transported to the landfill where the waste would be unloaded and disposed.

The local components of the waste-by-rail system will be comprised of MRFs/transfer stations and intermodal rail yards. The Sanitation Districts own and operate the South Gate Transfer Station, Downey Area Recycling and Transfer (DART) Facility, and Puente Hills MRF. In June 2008, the Sanitation Districts received a land use permit to construct and operate the Puente Hills Intermodal Facility (PHIMF) in the City of Industry. This facility would be dedicated to waste-by-rail and capable of handling up to two trains per day, or approximately 8,000 tons per day. The PHIMF is



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designed to also accept waste from other public or private MRFs/transfer stations and intermodal yards.

The Mesquite Regional Landfill is located on 4,250 acres of land in Imperial County. The Mesquite Regional Landfill is fully permitted to accept residual solid waste transported from Southern California communities by rail. The approved landfill footprint of 2,290 acres will provide capacity for approximately 600 million tons of solid waste and 100 years of operation at a maximum of 20,000 tons per day (tpd). The Sanitation Districts completed the purchase of this facility in December 2002. The landfill infrastructure was built in 2008 and the remote rail yard and rail spur was completed in 2011.

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