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Transportation News In Brief

by LADB Staff

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The Secretaria de Comunicaciones y Transportes (SCT) is moving forward with privatization of its third airport cluster, which will enhance passenger traffic and cargo shipments in northern Mexico. The SCT also reports that privatization of the rail lines has contributed to a surge in cargo traffic by rail in recent years. The government has also intervened to make cargo shipments by road a little safer in recent years, said the organization that represents Mexico's trucking industry.

Government opens privatization of center-north airport cluster

Five foreign airports are among 15 seeking to gain the government's concession to manage the center-north airport cluster, anchored by the Monterrey air terminal. The cluster also includes airports in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Reynosa, Torreon, Culiacan, Durango, Mazatlan, Zacatecas, Tampico, San Luis Potosi, Zihuatanejo, and Acapulco. The 15 airports handle a combined 10 million passengers each year. The SCT said the international airports from Houston, Zurich, Montreal, Vancouver, and Paris all submitted bids to manage the center-north cluster. The Vienna international airport was among the original bidders but later withdrew. The prominent Mexican companies or agencies that submitted bids by the March 1 deadline are engineering and construction firm Grupo ICA, Transportes Maritimos Mexicanos (TMM), and Regioempresas, a company headed by the former chairman of airline holding company Cintra. The foreign companies participating in the bid include US construction company Bechtel Enterprises and Spain's giant construction company FEC Construcciones. Under the rules of privatization, the foreign bidders must form partnerships with the Mexican-based companies. The Houston airport and Bechtel are expected to submit a bid in conjunction with one or two Mexican partners. SCT officials said the winning consortium, which will be announced sometime in May, will receive a 50-year concession and a 15% share in a holding company for the 15 airports. The other 85% will remain in the hands of the Mexican government, pending an initial public offering on the Mexican stock exchange (Bolsa Mexicana de Valores, BMV). After the privatization of the center-north cluster is completed, the only pending airport privatization will be the management unit for the Mexico City air terminal. Authorities have yet to formally designate the site for a new airport for the capital, although Tizayuca in Hidalgo state remains the favorite over an alternate location in Texcoco, Mexico state.

Cargo traffic increases significantly on rail lines

Cargo traffic has increased significantly on Mexican rail lines since 1997, when the state-run railroad Ferrocarriles Nacionales (FERRONALES) was sold to private investors. In an interview with the daily business newspaper El Financiero, SCT official Oscar Cruz Corzo said Mexican railroads carried about 80 million tons of cargo in 1999, a 50% increase from 1996. Cruz Corzo, the SCT's director of tariffs, railroads, and multimodal transportation, said private rail operators have invested about 7 billion pesos (US$748 million) to upgrade rail operations in recent years and are expected to spend another 5 billion pesos (US$534 million) during the next five years. The investments have resulted in more efficient transfer of cargo and a reduction in the number of robberies, he said. Cruz Corzo said he is pushing for the creation of an autonomous agency to regulate rail-
cargo transport. The new agency would replace the SCT. "The regulator must be able to make independent decisions and supervise services with greater technical expertise," he said. The SCT official said the new independent agency would benefit both the rail lines and shippers. "With increased private investment in the rail sector, we must strengthen relations between the railroads and the users and promote an integrated transportation system," said Cruz.

**Trucker robberies fall sharply**

The number of assaults on truckers has fallen sharply in the last three years because of tighter vigilance by state and federal authorities. In a report published in early February, the Camara Nacional del Autotransporte de Carga (CANACAR) said the Programa Nacional de Seguridad en Carreteras, also known as Serpico, brought the number of assaults on truckers down to 473 incidents last year. In comparison, assaults on truckers approached 800 incidents in 1997 and 1998 and 995 in 1996. CANACAR president Miguel Quintanilla Rebollar said the Serpico program has been especially effective on the highways that cover the central areas of the country, including the states of Hidalgo, Mexico, Morelos, Puebla, Queretaro, and Tlaxcala, as well as the Federal District. The CANACAR report said items stolen from trucks included furniture, electrical appliances, cloth, and groceries. Many items ended up in the informal economy, said Quintanilla Rebollar. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on March 15, reported at 9.35 pesos per US$1.00] (Sources: The Dallas Morning News, 01/13/00; El Universal, 01/21/00; El Economista, 01/12/00, 01/15/00, 02/07/00, 02/29/00; La Jornada, Excelsior, 03/01/00; El Financiero, 01/14/00, 02/07/00, 03/02/00)

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