

[Indiana Harbor Belt going greener](#)

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Sun-Times Media

Last Modified: Jan 11, 2014 02:05AM

An area railroad is going greener.

The Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad will convert its 31 locomotives to run on natural gas instead of diesel.

"Between (natural gas) being readily available, meeting ever-increasing emission standards, we knew it was time to upgrade and bring them up to modern standards," said Mike Nicoletti, director of purchasing for the railroad. "It's important for us for the neighborhoods we're operating in and for the employees."

In December, the Indiana Harbor Belt was awarded \$34.25 million by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency on Planning. The agency distributed the funds, which originated with the federal Department of Transportation.

That money will pay for 65 percent of the cost of conversion. The railroad will pay the remaining \$20 million or so plus pay completely for a gas compressor station, Nicoletti said.

The railroad has 54 miles of mainline track that run between Hammond, where the company has its headquarters, and Franklin Park, Ill. Along the way it transfers freight between businesses and 16 larger railroads.

Beyond helping the railroad, the conversion will improve area quality throughout the Chicago area.

"Upgrading locomotive engines is a very effective way of reducing air pollution in the region," said Ross Patronskey, a senior planner at the metropolitan planning agency. "They currently have engines from 1965, about as polluting as you can get."

Collectively, those engines send 118 kilograms or 260 pounds of particulate matter into the air every day.

"It's terrible to breathe in," Patronskey said. "It aggravates asthma and can cause premature death."

Converting its locomotives, which will take place over the next four years, will reduce the emission of pollutants by 97 percent, Patronskey said.

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