

[Print Page](#)

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Workers rush to complete transloading center for summer deliveries

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A major rail-based transloading center near Casper should begin handling tons of varied freight by mid-summer.

Developers of the 700-acre Bishop Industrial Rail Park are working against a July 14 deadline to begin taking wind-energy related products.

Rich Fairservis, president of W.N. McMurry Construction Co., said the transloading facility, located along the mainline of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe west of town, conceivably could handle 2,000 rail cars this year, a volume that could grow to over 12,000 annually.

Transloading means railroad freights cars will be off-loaded at the site and their contents distributed by trucks, or trucks will bring products to the center for shipment by rail.

Fairservis said the Burlington Northern wants to grow business and needs more relief points in order to do it.

"And that's where Bishop comes in," he said. "We'll be able to take several unit trains and disassemble them, reassemble them, get them ready for the rail to come by and grab them."

"We are the biggest point between Denver and Laurel, Mont., and we're out of the coal line," Fairservis added. "And coal is king as far as the railroads are concerned."

The idea for the Bishop rail park began with concerns about congestion at the Cole Creek Industrial Park east of Evansville, where long trains sometimes blocked the only access road to the Brookhurst subdivision, Fairservis said.

This will be the second such transloading facility in Wyoming to start up in recent months. The Upton Regional Industrial Park in northeastern Wyoming was officially dedicated in January.

Freight handled at the Bishop Industrial Rail Park might include wind turbine parts, petroleum products, bentonite, building materials, resins, pipes and finished manufactured products.

Fairservis said manufacturing activities and a facility to rebuild railroad cars, possibly using robotics, are also under consideration at the site.

Businesses not even envisioned at the moment may find uses for the rail park: "Plug and play, because if it's not here, they won't plan," he said.

Glenn Januska, manager of Casper/Natrona County International Airport, said location of the rail park adjacent to the airport could prove advantageous for some businesses.

For one thing, the foreign trade zone, coupled with the rail park, might open opportunities for certain types of international commerce. For example, storing off-loaded goods in the foreign trade zone might be valuable for some firms.

Trucks bound for the transloading site also might be able to use a major artery across the airport, he said.

Fairservis foresees the possibility of large freight volumes being flown into Casper for regional deliveries as officials strive to take pressure off already crowded major airports: "That puts you that much closer to your end user in the central part of the U.S."

Taking into account the airport, the foreign trade zone and the Bishop Industrial Rail Park, he said, "I think you could see a huge cargo point for the Midwest."

An 8,500-foot railroad siding will be owned by the county, for which a \$1.5 million Business Ready Community Grant was received from the state against a total cost of \$2.4 million. The rest will be paid by Bishop Industrial Rail Park, LLC.

The siding will be operated by Bishop Shortline Association, a not-for-profit county entity that will coordinate transloading activities with CTran, which is 50 percent owned by Bishop Industrial Rail Park, LLC and 50 percent by Bonneville Transloaders, Inc. (BTI). BTI also operates at the Upton Regional Industrial Park.

A switch engine will be operated by the Big Horn Divide & Wyoming Railroad. Cliff Root of Riverton is president of both BTI and the Bighorn Divide & Wyoming Railway. He and Fairservis are managing principals of CTran.

The land is owned by Bishop Industrial Rail Park, LLC. Fairservis said parcels will be available for sale or lease to large rail users who need transloading or switching services.

Total start-up costs for the CTran transloading operation is expected to be \$5.4 million, which will include 2.7 miles of additional siding and ladder track for the switch yard.

Bob West, group vice president/real estate for Granite Peak Development, LLC, said the 8,500-foot siding will accommodate Burlington Northern's long trains.

"The purpose of that is to get a unit train, which is approximately 6,000 feet, off of the main line and allow approximately 2,000 feet to be able to get off safely and efficiently," he said.

Once in the siding, the cars will be moved into shorter sections of track where freight can be handled. Cars then will be recombined into appropriate groups for pick up by Burlington Northern mainline trains.

"We're actually having a course in Railroad 101," West said. "It's a lot more complicated than one would think."

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