

New engines make tracks

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OmniTRAX is spending \$3.5 million to upgrade its locomotive fleet on the Hudson Bay Railroad in northern Manitoba.

On Monday, the company will unveil the first of 10 new reconditioned late-model Electro Motive SD50M locomotives at a noon-hour ceremony in The Pas. The rest of the units will be put into service over the next month.

"These are higher horsepower, more fuel efficient, better operating for our employees (and) have greater tractive power," Mike Ogborn, OmniTRAX's managing director, said.

"Over time, when we get them all in place, it means the ability to handle more tonnage, more efficiently," he said.

OmniTRAX owns and operates the Port of Churchill and the 1,300-kilometre rail line leading to it from The Pas.

The new locomotives represent the second significant investment by the company in the past year to its northern rail service.

Last October, OmniTRAX, along with the federal and provincial governments, pledged to invest \$60 million in rail line upgrades and \$8 million in port infrastructure improvements over five years. Each party is picking up one third of the cost.

The new more environmentally friendly locomotives will replace ancient Alco engines originally owned by CP Rail that were at least 30 years old, Ogborn said.

"These 10 will be the cornerstone of our fleet," he said.

The purchase brings the company's locomotive fleet to 32. It had been leasing locomotive power as it waited for the new engines.

Ogborn said all 10 new bright green locomotives will be named, with the first to be called 'Nanuk,' in recognition of the significance of the polar bear to northerners.

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