

October MFAC meeting focuses on southeastern Minnesota freight issues and innovations



Moving a wind turbine from Duluth, Minnesota, to Iowa

The Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee (MFAC) took its October 5, 2012, quarterly meeting on the road to Rochester, Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) occasionally holds the MFAC quarterly meeting outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area to gain a better understanding of the unique freight issues and innovations experienced by different areas of Minnesota. Shippers, carriers, facilities operators, and others from the freight community were invited to share the region's challenges and opportunities.

The meeting agenda included presentations and discussion about the [Minnesota State Highway Investment Plan \(MnSHIP\)](#), oversized loads, economic development and transportation, shipper challenges and innovations, and intermodal solutions. Following the morning meeting, participants toured the Mayo Clinic.

Patrick Weidemann, MnDOT transportation planning director, presented an overview of the MnDOT 20-year capital plan for state highway investments, also known as MnSHIP. The plan will guide MnDOT's investment decisions for the state highway system and communicate MnDOT's highway investment priorities for the next 20 years to citizens, businesses, elected officials, and transportation partners across the state. MnSHIP provides highway investment direction on both a statewide and individual district basis, 10-year project-specific highway investment plans (HIPs) at the district level, and legislative reporting for major highway projects. The plan incorporates investment-level risk assessment, a robust public involvement process, refined investment categories, early elements of MAP-21, and system-level planning with corridor-level planning.

During a presentation about the infrastructure challenges of oversized and overweight loads, Shelley Latham, a project manager with Perkins Specialized Transportation Consulting, described the challenge of moving large "super loads" throughout the United States. Specific rules in some states can make it necessary to bypass those states, which often increases travel times. David Redig, a supervisor with MnDOT District 6, offered specific examples from his district of changes needed to accommodate oversized and overweight loads.

Matt Shands, manager of the [Minnesota Transportation Economic Development \(TED\) Program](#), discussed opportunities at hand. The TED Program offers competitive grants to communities for highway improvement and public infrastructure projects that create jobs and support economic development. The program is a collaborative effort of MnDOT and the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED).

The City of Rochester was selected as a 2012 TED grantee. Terry Spaeth, Rochester senior administrative analyst, talked about improvements planned at Highway 14 and 40th Avenue SE to enable Reichel Foods, a food processing and distribution business, to expand operations in the area. The business employs 375 people and plans to add 50 jobs within two years. Total project cost for the transportation improvements is \$2.3 million.

Dave Christianson, MnDOT manager of freight planning and development, moderated a panel discussion about shipper challenges and innovations. Panelist John Butz, operations administrator for Mayo Collaborative Services, Inc., gave an overview of the company, which provides laboratory services for health care organizations. Panelist Shawn Steen, assistant vice president with North Star Container, discussed shipping challenges related to grain movement. Tom Rowekamp, owner of Rowekamp Trucking, and Steve Sturm, general manager of All-American Co-op, also participated in the panel.

During the final presentation, which focused on achieving a cost-competitive and efficient regional transportation network, Rich Mikrut, president and CEO of Seven Rivers Intermodal Terminals, and Kevin O'Reilly, president of Supply Chain Solutions, Inc., identified congestion as the top national transportation problem. According to Mikrut and O'Reilly, the costs associated with highway congestion, which total an estimated \$67.4 billion per year, have increased 400 percent since 1982. Mikrut and O'Reilly added that global cost-competitiveness is essential for the long-term viability of the region's economy.

Ron Have (president of Freightmasters, Inc.), Bill Gardner (director of the MnDOT Office of Freight, Rail, & Waterways), and Greg Paulson (MnDOT District 6 assistant engineer covering southeastern Minnesota), provided opening remarks.

The [Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee \(MFAC\)](#) is a partnership between government and business to exchange ideas and recommend policy and actions that promote safe, productive, and sustainable freight transportation in Minnesota. MFAC consists of representatives from Minnesota's shipper and carrier communities as well as a variety of other interested organizations, and provides advice to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and the Metropolitan Council regarding freight issues and investments.