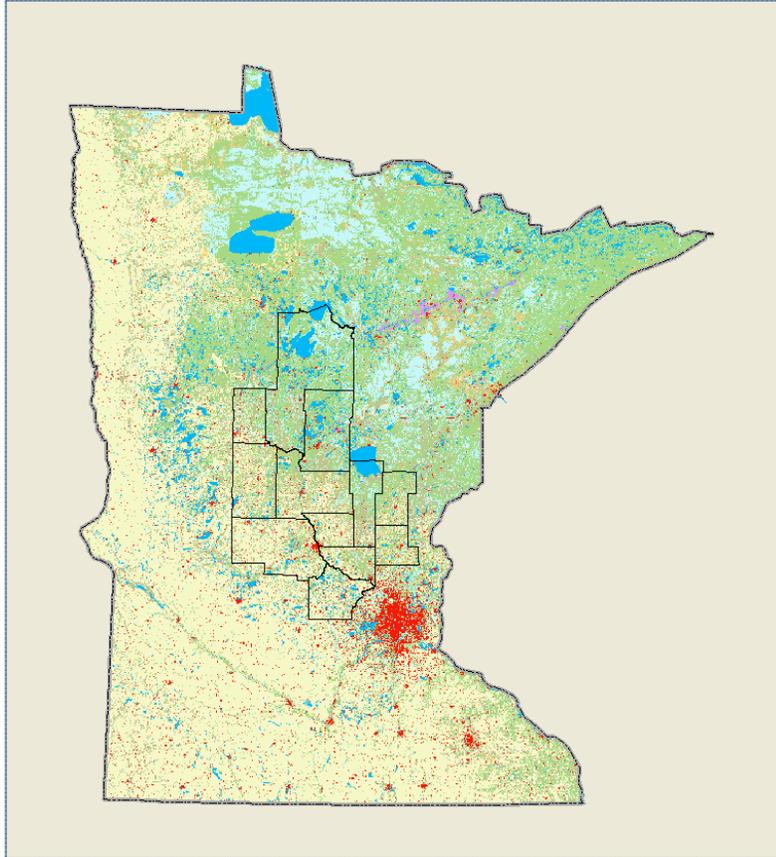


# Central Minnesota Regional Freight Plan



**Minnesota Department of Transportation**

**Task 1**

**January, 2010**

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## Steering Committee

Special thanks to the following individuals and organizations for providing valuable assistance to this planning effort:

<b>Steve Backowski</b>	<b>Morrison County Engineer</b>
<b>Bob Bollenbeck</b>	<b>East Central Regional Development Commission</b>
<b>Peter Dahlberg</b>	<b>Mn/DOT Freight Planning</b>
<b>Joan Danielson</b>	<b>Department of Employment and Economic Development</b>
<b>Brad DeWolf</b>	<b>Region 7W</b>
<b>Chris Etzler</b>	<b>Region 5 Development Commission</b>
<b>Henry Fischer</b>	<b>St. Cloud Area Economic Development Partnership</b>
<b>Ryan Gaug</b>	<b>Office of Investment Management</b>
<b>Cathryn Hanson</b>	<b>St. Cloud Area Planning Organization</b>
<b>Gene Hicks</b>	<b>Mn/DOT Transportation Data Analysis</b>
<b>Lee Miller</b>	<b>Region 5 Development Commission</b>
<b>Susan Moe</b>	<b>FHWA</b>
<b>Tom Moore</b>	<b>St. Cloud Area Economic Development Partnership</b>
<b>Matthew Pahs</b>	<b>Mn/DOT Freight Planning</b>
<b>Mary Safgren</b>	<b>Mn/DOT District 3</b>
<b>John Tompkins</b>	<b>Mn/DOT Freight Planning</b>
<b>Steve Voss</b>	<b>Mn/DOT District 3</b>
<b>Jordan Zeller</b>	<b>East Central Regional Development Commission</b>

## **Introduction**

The Central Minnesota Freight Plan is a multimodal transportation planning effort that includes highway (commercial vehicle operations), rail, waterway, air cargo, pipeline, and intermodal transportation. Developed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), this freight planning effort builds upon prior planning activities by the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Regional Development Commissions (RDCs), Area Transportation Partnerships (ATPs), Mn/DOT's District 3 Office, and Mn/DOT's Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations (OFCVO). This study is intended to increase the understanding of the demands from freight being placed on the regional transportation infrastructure and provide a framework to:

- Examine regional and local issues not captured in previous freight transportation study/planning attempts, including freight issues specific to the region. The primary focus will include but is not limited to agriculture, energy, bulk commodities, minerals, timber, manufacturing, global gateways including intermodal and oversize/overweight cargo movements (e.g., super routes), interregional truck routes, and last mile connections.
- Document the existing freight transportation system in the region, including facilities, service levels and current and projected commodity flows. Identify significant existing and projected needs, bottlenecks, infrastructure and regulatory issues, and other constraints in the region's freight transportation and their implications;
- Identify industry- and region-specific issues and trends as they relate to freight transportation and their solutions;
- Plan for improvements to freight movements specific to the regions, through a combination of operating and program efficiencies, infrastructure upgrades and investments, public/private initiatives and innovative funding, regulatory initiatives, and communications;
- Strengthen freight considerations in public project planning and investment decision-making.

## **Background**

In 2005, the Minnesota Department of Transportation completed its first ever Statewide Freight Plan, developing an overview of commodities movement across all industries and modes that began to define the importance of commercial goods movements to the economy and quality of life of the State of Minnesota and its residents. At a high level, it demonstrated the volumes and values of raw materials and finished goods entering and exiting Minnesota, as well as movements within and across the state, by road, rail, water, and air. This groundbreaking effort brought to light several performance-based recommendations to improve the efficiency of the freight systems and competitiveness of businesses operating in the state.

The Statewide Freight Plan identified three distinct freight sub regions within Minnesota based on the similarities of commodities produced and consumed, the modes used to transport freight, and inbound and outbound trading partners. The sub regional analysis recognized that Minnesota's diverse regions have unique assets, industries, and issues. Recognizing the need for better information to more completely identify freight issues, trends and needs in Minnesota, Mn/DOT began studying each sub region more closely with the development of regional freight studies and plans.

Key to the outcomes and information gathering were a series of targeted personal interviews with key transportation decision makers from small manufacturing firms to farmers to major processors and cooperatives. Regional studies develop detailed information on the transportation needs and operational workings of local businesses, and to document through reports, forecasts, and interviews how, where, and why freight transportation is delivered. Analysis and findings lead to recommendations served to drive a series of initiatives and ultimately investments in safety, major trunk highway improvements, and development plans for the local 10-ton road system.



The Southwest Minnesota Regional Freight Study identified the needs and trends of traditional regional industries including farming and manufacturing, as well as unveiling emerging trends in ethanol and DDGS, swine production, private farm-controlled heavy trucking operations, and the ongoing effects of improving crop genetics and farm management. This study was followed by the Western Minnesota Regional Freight Plan, which further analyzed agricultural issues and trends and focused on rural manufacturing. The Northern Minnesota and Northwestern Wisconsin Regional Freight Plan identified emerging issues in the energy sector (wind and oil sands) and the transportation needs of oversize/overweight routes. In addition, it emphasized the importance of the Duluth/Superior harbor as the hub of freight transportation for the region and beyond.

The Central Minnesota Regional Freight Plan is the next phase in studying the State at the regional level, which will be inputs into various planning efforts, including the district plan, St. Cloud APO plan, city/county plans, and the Mn/DOT Statewide Transportation Policy Plan. It is intended to be the region's

component of the Minnesota Statewide Freight Plan update. In addition, it is the intent to integrate findings and recommendations from this plan into planning efforts in the region of our planning partners.

## **Geographic Scope**

The study region includes the 12 counties of Mn/DOT ATP District 3 (Benton, Cass, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena and Wright). The region is unique in Minnesota in that it does not share borders with any other state or country. A map displaying the boundaries of the study region is presented in **Figure 1**.

Saint Cloud serves as the region's major population center (59,107) and the greatest concentration of economic activity and transportation infrastructure. Other major population centers include: Brainerd (13,178); Elk River (16,447); Monticello (11,414); and Buffalo (10,907). Smaller communities with significant population include: Saint Michael (9099); Little Falls (7719); Big Lake (6063); Cambridge (5520); Wadena (4294); Princeton (3933); Sauk Centre (3930); and Mora (3193).

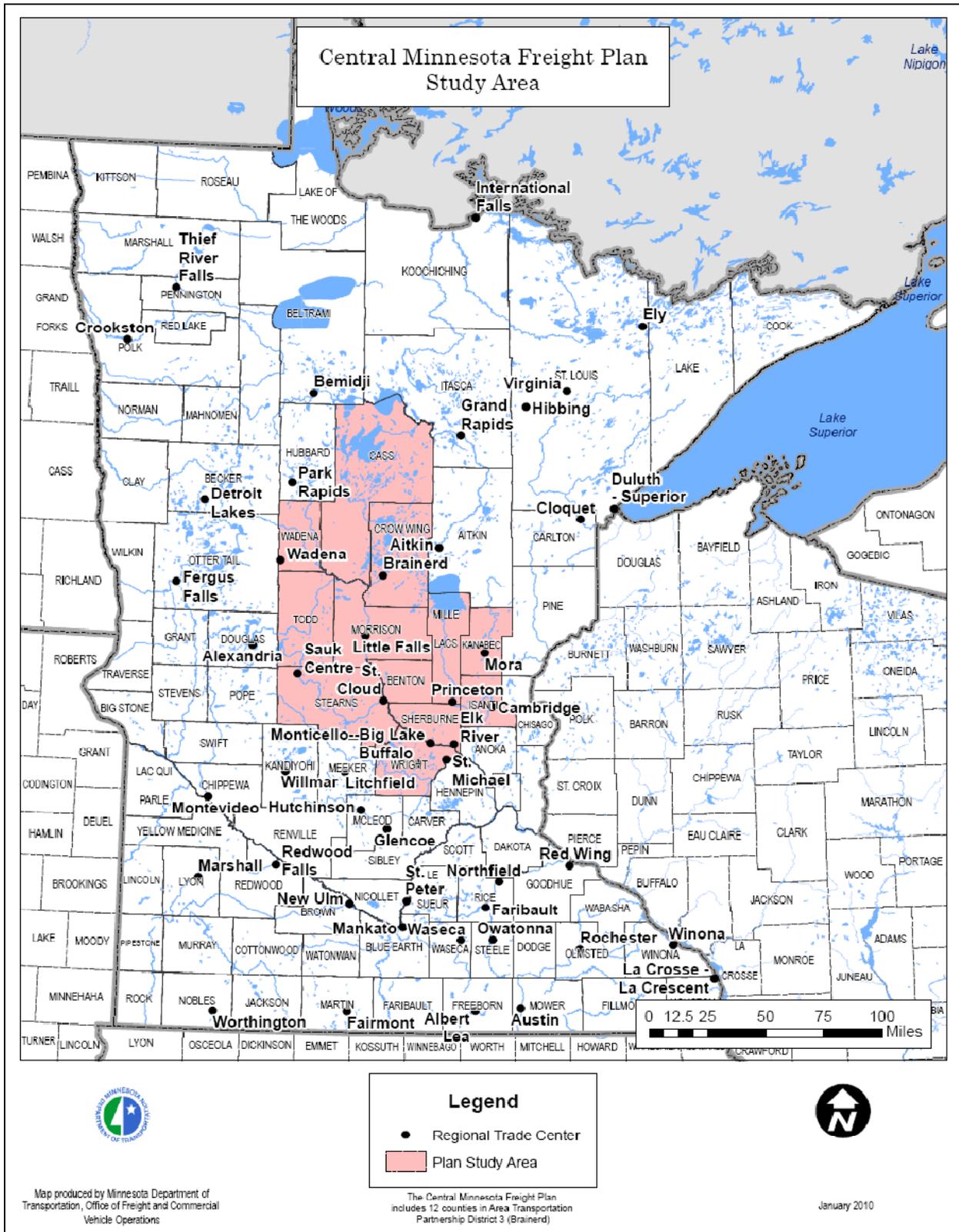
There are 5 Regional Development Commissions that represent portions of the region, including: East Central Regional Development Commission; Region 5 Development Commission; Region 7W. The St. Cloud Area Planning Organization is the only MPO in the region.

## **Regional Definition**

The region is unique in the mix of industries that are concentrated in its boundaries. These industries are partly a result of natural and environmental circumstance. For example, the coniferous and deciduous forests that dominate the landscape of the northern part of the region have led to the development of the timber and paper industries. As the forests were selectively replaced with farming, particularly in the central and southern portions of the study area, the agriculture industry developed. This was due to the nutritious soil conditions and relatively tolerant climate. Underneath the soils are glacial deposits of high-quality granites. These deposits have led to the development of granite quarrying and product manufacturing in the region.

Industries also developed in the region a result of geographic/spatial proximity. Because the southern portion of the region is relatively densely developed and within close proximity to the Twin Cities Metro Area, industries such as trucking, warehousing, and manufacturing have developed. These industries are now primary employment generators of the region.

Figure 1: Northern MN/Northwestern WI and Western MN Freight Study Regions



## Regional Freight Infrastructure

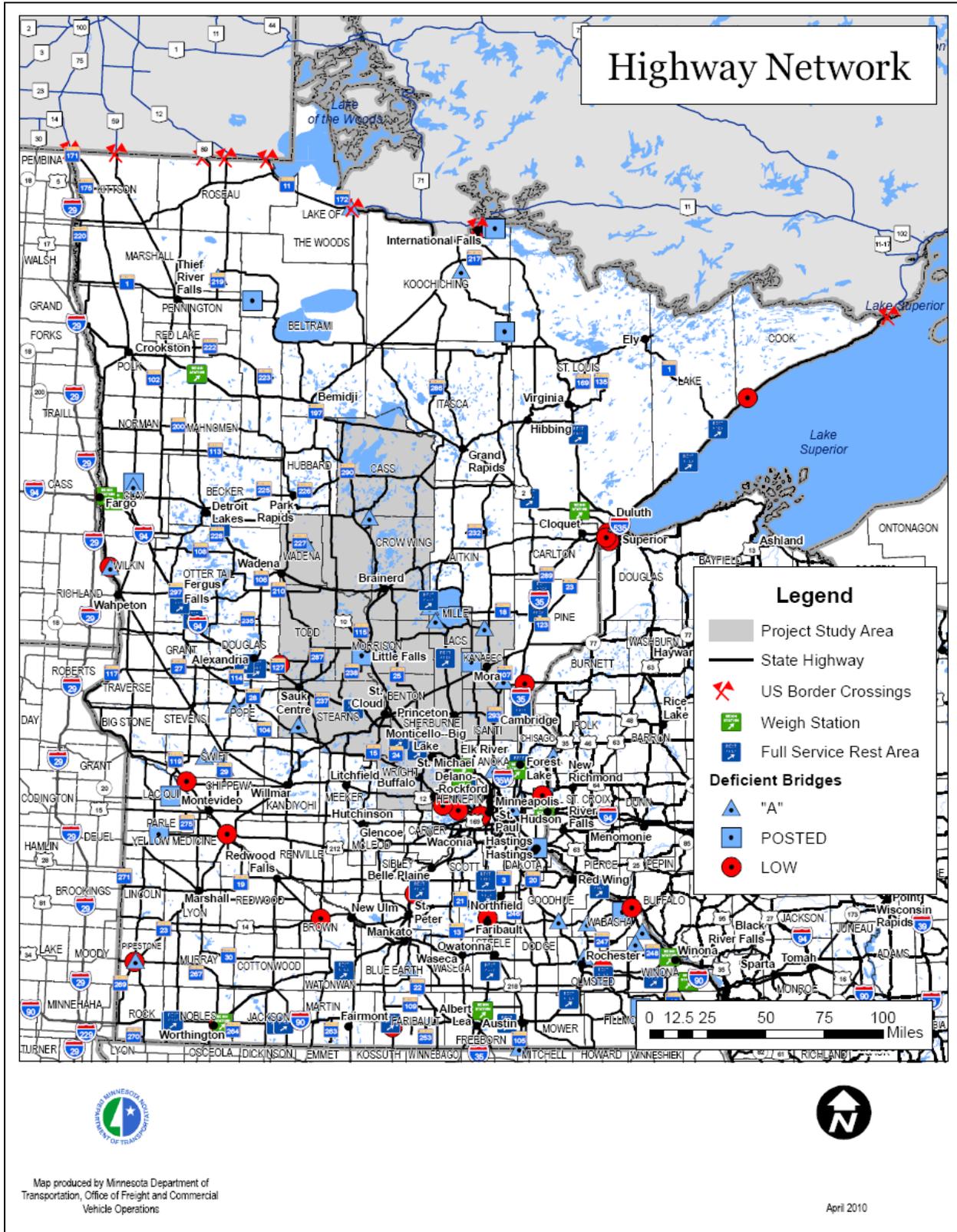
### Roadway Networks

Trucks are an essential transportation mode for moving high-value goods throughout Minnesota and the United States. Designated roadway networks play an integral part in helping move goods throughout the states as they permit trucks to access regions that other transportation modes could not. The roadway system is comprised of interstate, state, county, city and township roads that allow freight to be transferred effectively. The routes were selected because of their designation for existing truck use and for the specific purpose each serves in the overall transportation network. The networks include:

- Interstate/National Highway System/Strategic Highway Network
- National Network and Minnesota Twin Trailer Network
- Interregional Corridor (IRC) System
- 10-Ton Roadways
- Local Roadways (less than 10 tons)
- Minnesota Tiered Roadway Network (Designated State Trunk Network)

The roadway networks are shown in **Figure 2**. The following sections describe the components of the roadway system and the networks identified above.

Figure 2: Roadway Network



### **National Highway System/Strategic Highway Network**

The National Highway System (NHS) was developed by the United States Department of Transportation in cooperation with states, municipalities and metropolitan planning organizations. The NHS includes the Interstate Highway System and the Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET), which is a system of public highways that provides access, continuity and emergency capabilities for military personnel and equipment. Other principal arterials and connector routes are also part of the NHS. There is a total of 588 miles of NHS and STRAHNET system within the region. Routes in the region include Interstate 94, US 2, US 10, US 12, US 169, MN 23, MN 24 and MN 371.

### **National Network and Minnesota Twin Trailer Network**

The National Network (NN) consists of designated roadways throughout the United States that allow truck access including long combination vehicles (LCV), semi-trailer trucks with two trailers and single-trailer trucks with an extra-long trailer. In Minnesota, 4,904 miles of roadway are part of the NN. The NN is supplemented by Minnesota's Twin Trailer Network (TTN), a system of other trunk and local highways on which LCVs may also operate. These networks permit oversize and overweight movements, usually within specific routes and travel times defined by a permit. The region is well served by the NN and TTN, with a total of 820 miles. Routes in the region include Interstate 94, US 2, US 10, US 12, US 71, US 169, MN 23, MN 24, MN 55, MN 210 and MN 371.

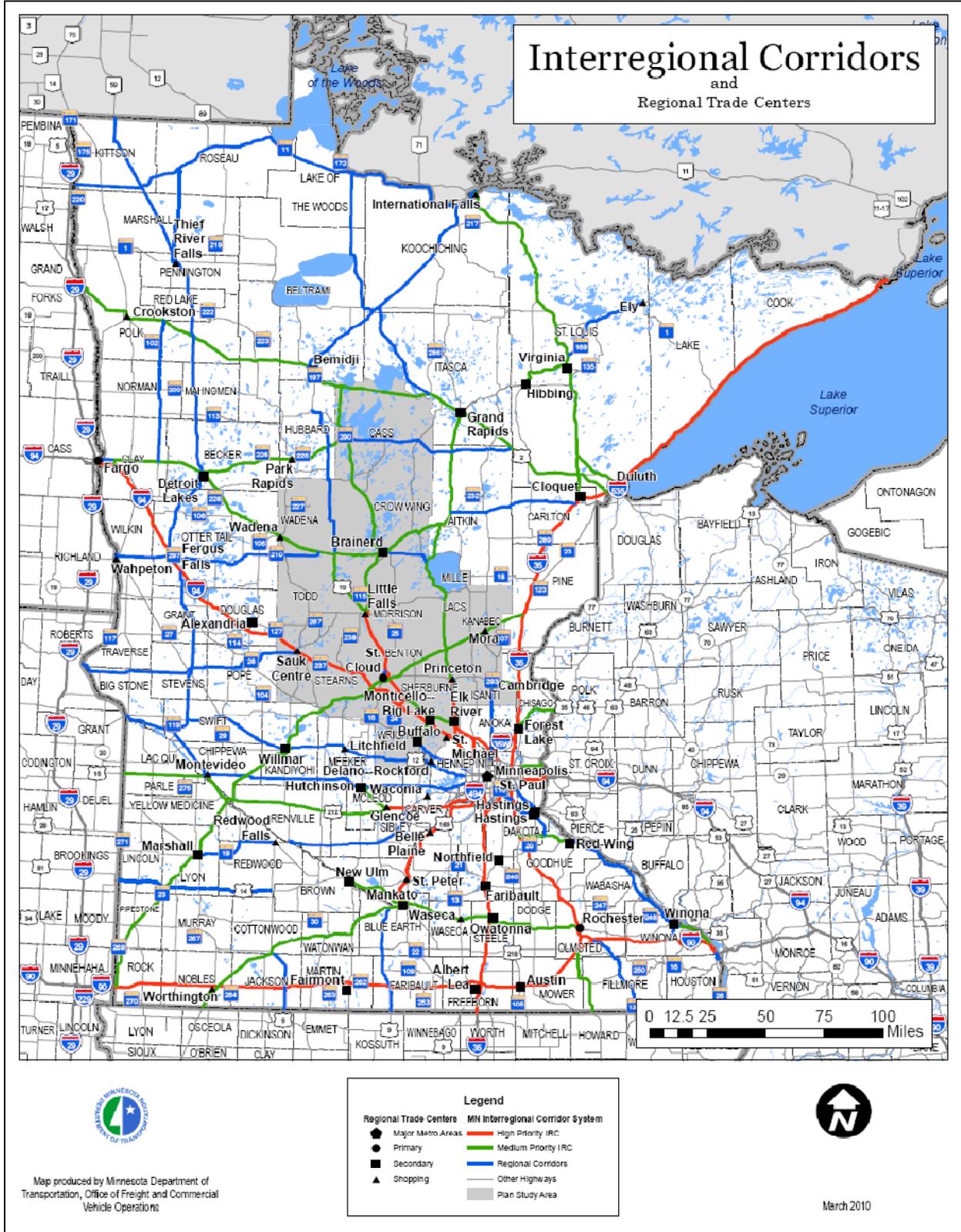
### **Interregional Corridor (IRC) System**

A statewide Interregional Corridor (IRC) system was first designated by Mn/DOT in 1999 to enhance the economic vitality of the state by providing safe, timely, and efficient movement of goods and people. The 2,939-mile IRC system is a subset of Minnesota's trunk highway system, consisting of the corridors of greatest significance for interregional travel. The system is grouped into two categories: high-priority and medium-priority interregional corridors.

High-priority IRCs connect the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area (TCMA) with primary Regional Trade Centers (RTCs) throughout the state, and medium-priority IRCs connect secondary RTCs to each other, to the TCMA, and to the primary RTCs. **Figure 3** displays the IRC system along with primary and secondary RTCs.

Saint Cloud is the only primary RTC located in the region. Secondary RTCs in this region include Brainerd, Buffalo, Elk River and Monticello-Big. High-priority IRCs within the region include I-94, US 10, US 169 and MN 24. Medium-priority IRCs in this area include US 2, US 53, US 169, MN 371, and MN 33. In general, the region is well served by the Interregional Corridor system.

Figure 3: Minnesota Interregional Corridor (IRC) System



## **Ten-Ton Roadways**

Ten-ton roadways provide important connections between intermodal freight facilities/major freight generators and the IRC system. These roadways generally include city and county routes that receive state aid funding, as well as trunk highways, interstates and some local roads. Year-round 10-ton roadways make up virtually all of state and federal trunk highways and major county and local paved arterials. These provide a predictable core freight roadway network. Although recent Minnesota legislation named all paved county roads as nominally 10-ton rated, bridge ratings remained unchanged, and local counties have the authority to down-post any roads they deem necessary. As a result, a significant percentage of local paved roadways and essentially all unpaved roads have axle load limitations below 10 tons, especially when factoring in seasonal load restrictions. Mn/DOT State Aid in partnership with the Minnesota County Engineers Association is currently identifying an approach to develop an upgraded statewide network of year-round local 10-ton roadways to improve freight movements throughout the state and to limit routes with load restrictions. **Figure 4** displays this conceptual upgraded 10-ton roadway system throughout Minnesota.

Mn/DOT has identified Tier 1 and Tier 2 routes within the conceptual 10-ton roadway system. Tier 1 roads are those that currently are 10-ton with minor gaps, light bridges, or deficiencies that can be improved with relatively limited investments. The Tier 2 routes represent roads that would essentially complete a comprehensive year-round local 10-ton network, but which will require a more significant and longer-term investment strategy.

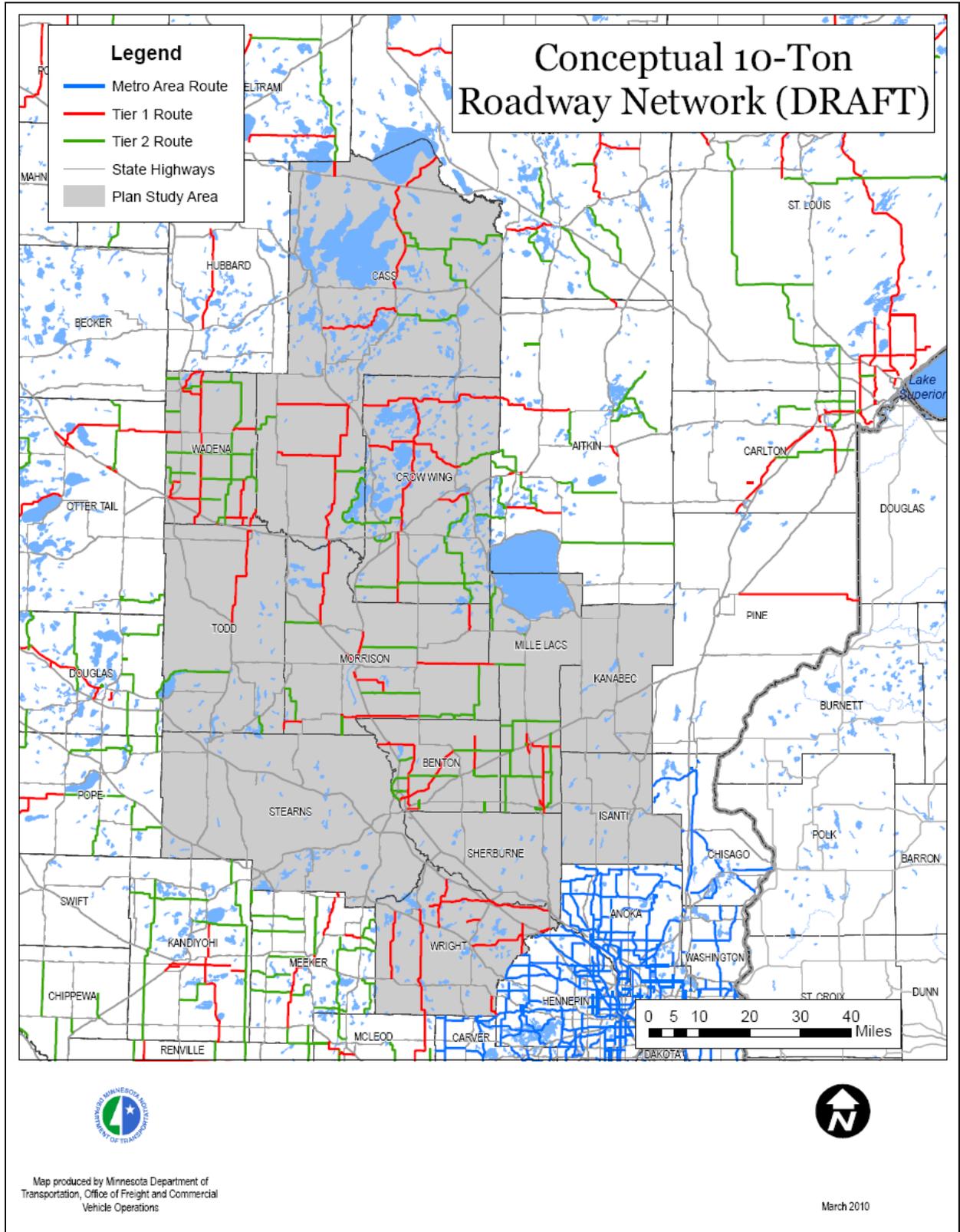
In general, central MN has a fair amount of local 10-ton roadways identified for these system upgrades. Tier 1 roadways are mostly concentrated in the northern counties of the region, whereas Tier 2 roadways are located throughout the region. The current 10-ton paved local roads in the study area do not consistently connect with one another, resulting in routing challenges, and these system discontinuities are significantly worsened by extended spring thaw restrictions in the north. An expanded year-round 10-ton system would better serve freight movements throughout the region and the state.

## **Local Roadway System (Less than 10-tons)**

Local roadways, such as unpaved county roads, township roads, and village and city streets, play an important role in freight movement, as a large volume of freight shipments either begins or ends on this local roadway system. Many local roads may have posted maximum axle load ranges from five to nine tons, based upon design capacity and materials, and are not intended to consistently handle 10-ton shipments. Mn/DOT and local jurisdiction authorities can impose temporary limitations on local roadways due to seasonal variations and special circumstances. Variations in actual weight capacity in roadbeds or road surfacing caused by ground thawing and water incursion can prohibit 10-ton freight, due to severe road damage or total failure that can result. However, local roadways with lower design strengths can function satisfactorily under heavy loads in periods of dry weather and with good substructure conditions.

The low weight capacity of these local roadways limits the ability to efficiently move freight across the region. Additionally, seasonal and other load limits have a notable impact on freight mobility. Expansion of the year-round 10-ton roadway network is widely recognized as a need to better serve freight movements, especially agriculture and forestry, within and between regions.

Figure 4: Ten-Ton Roadways



## Tiered Roadway Network

As described above, there are many different roadway networks, with differing levels of importance/significance to truck freight movement. Taken in combination, this roadway network proved too large to provide any specific and useful investment guidance. In May 2008, Mn/DOT began an analysis to identify trunk highways in Minnesota that are significant to the movement of freight. Developed as part of the 2008 Statewide Transportation Plan, this network was to be designated as a truck network that would supplement the Interregional Corridor (IRC) system. Therefore, Mn/DOT's Tiered Roadway Network identifies the roadways that are most important to truck traffic. The tiered approach combines truck traffic and roadway design characteristics to help identify the roadways essential to the efficient movement of freight. The Tiered Roadway Network is shown in **Figure 5**.

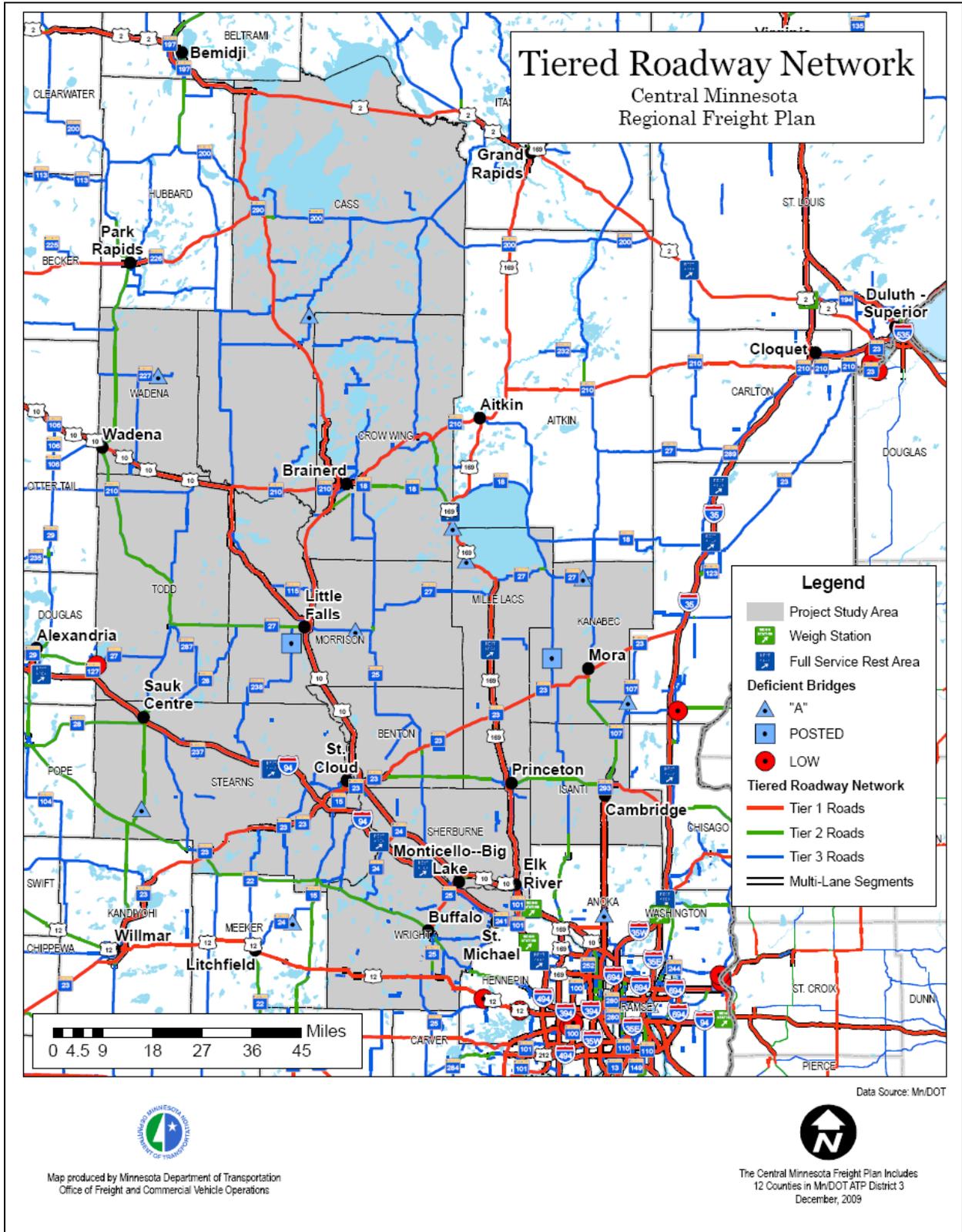
Heavy commercial annual average daily traffic (HCAADT) was used to validate the existence of elevated levels of HCAADT on the existing systems. HCAADT is an estimate of the total number of vehicles with at least two axles and six tires, using a specific segment of roadway on any given day of the year. Heavy Commercial vehicles include trucks only. Based on observed statewide data, tiers were classified based on breaks of 650 and 300, resulting in the following tiers:

- Tier 1: Roads on the network with HCAADT greater than 650
- Tier 2: Roads on the network with HCAADT between 301 and 650
- Tier 3: Roads on the network with HCAADT less than 300

The three tiers together form the State's Designated Truck Network. Roadway design characteristics were used to verify appropriate design for each tier and to identify network deficiencies. Multi-lane segments of roadways provide a safe route for a vehicle envelope of 14 feet tall, 14 feet wide and 67 feet long. Almost all segments of multi-lane roadways are on Tier 1. In addition, shoulders of at least 10 feet in width provide a similar safety benefit. Roadway segments with shoulder width less than 10 feet are sporadically distributed across the network.

Major truck corridors (e.g. Tier 1) in central Minnesota include I-94, US 10, US 169, MN 23, and MN 210. The Tier 1 network in northern MN supports adequate movements throughout the region as routes link major cities together allowing freight to be shipped in all directions.

Figure 5: Tiered Roadways



## Rail Network

The rail network is important for moving a variety of commodities, especially heavy bulk goods. In the United States, railroads are classified by size following a scheme developed by the Association of American Railroads (AAR). This scheme is based on a combination of revenues and carrier characteristics.

- Class I – The largest railroads with annual gross operating revenues exceeding \$346.8 million (2006 dollars).
- Class II – A non-Class I line-haul railroad operating 350 miles or more with operating revenues of at least \$40 million but less than \$319.3 million. Class II railroads are called regional railroads, though they are often classified with and referred to as short lines. Minnesota currently has no independent
- Class II railroads. Class III – The remaining railroads, also referred to as shortline or regional railroads, that have gross operating revenues of less than \$27.7 million (2006 dollars).
- Switching or Terminal – A railroad engaged primarily in switching and/or terminal services for other railroads (i.e., they are not typically involved in line-haul moves between two geographical locations). Switching and terminal railroads are often categorized with short line railroads due to their operational and revenue characteristics, except in cases where they are owned by one or more Class I carriers.

Statewide, Minnesota claims 4,481 miles of active railroad track in the state which ranks 8<sup>th</sup> in the nation. Two Class I railroads and one switching/terminal railroad operate 391 miles of railroad in the Central Minnesota Region. A map displaying the railroad networks is illustrated in **Figure 6**. Class I railroads in the study area include BNSF Railway (297 miles) and Canadian Pacific Railway (66 miles). Northern Lines Railway is the region's sole switching and terminal railroad operating 28 miles of track in the St. Cloud area. NLR interchanges with BNSF in St. Cloud.

BNSF's Staples Subdivision traverses the region from northwest to southeast, and is part of the company's Chicago-Seattle transcontinental mainline. This line also hosts Amtrak's Empire Builder service and the Northstar Commuter Line from Minneapolis to Big Lake. BNSF also operates the Hinckley Subdivision on the eastern end of the district. This line extends from Minneapolis to Duluth and is freight only, though it is currently being studied for passenger rail service. BNSF's Brainerd Subdivision extends from Staples to Duluth and is freight-only. BNSF's Lakes Subdivision clips the northern end of the region. This freight-only line runs between Grand Forks and Duluth. BNSF's Wayzata Subdivision clips the southern end of the region. This freight-only line runs between Minneapolis and Willmar, MN. BNSF's freight-only Monticello Subdivision operates a few miles of trackage in the region east of Monticello before it enters the metro district and continues to Minneapolis. BNSF also operates a small branch line from Little Falls to Camp Ripley.

Canadian Pacific, the other Class I railroad, operates the Paynesville Subdivision 66 miles through the southern end of the region. This line is part of CP's transcontinental mainline from Chicago to Calgary and Vancouver and carries freight only.

### **Rail Bank Corridors**

The Minnesota State Rail Bank Program is designed to acquire and preserve abandoned rail lines for a future transportation use. The Lake Wobegon Trail, located in the southern portion of the region, is the only Rail Bank property in the region. The trail runs 49.1 miles from St. Joseph in Stearns County to Osakis in Todd County. **Figure 7** shows Minnesota's Rail Bank Corridors.

### **Public Rail Crossings**

The purpose of the Minnesota Railroad Grade Crossing Safety Improvement Program is to enhance the safety of the traveling public by correcting, removing and improving unsafe conditions at railroad-highway grade crossings. There are currently 344 active public at-grade crossings in the region. **Figure 8** shows the active public crossings in the region.

Figure 6: Railroads

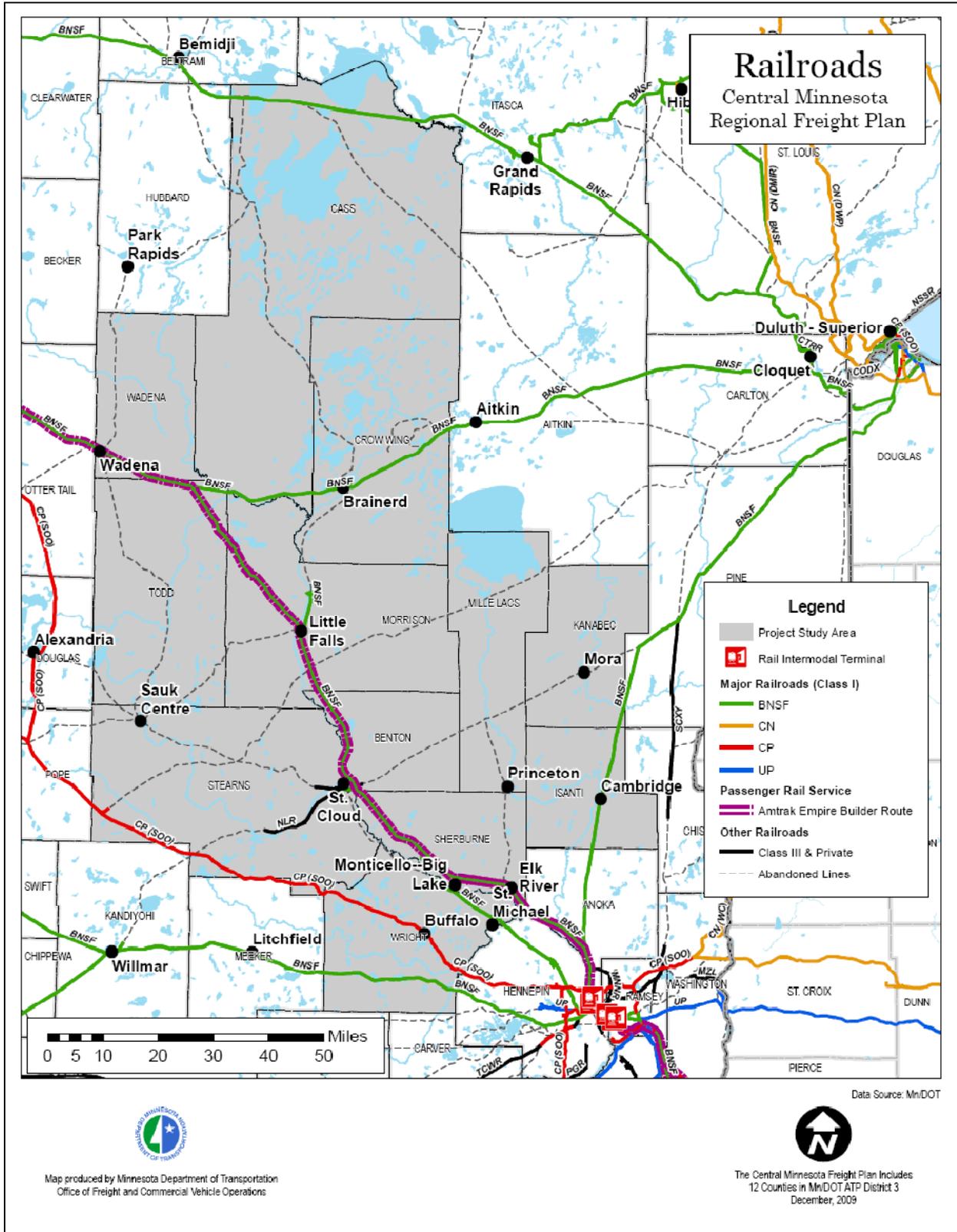


Figure 7: Minnesota Rail Bank Corridors

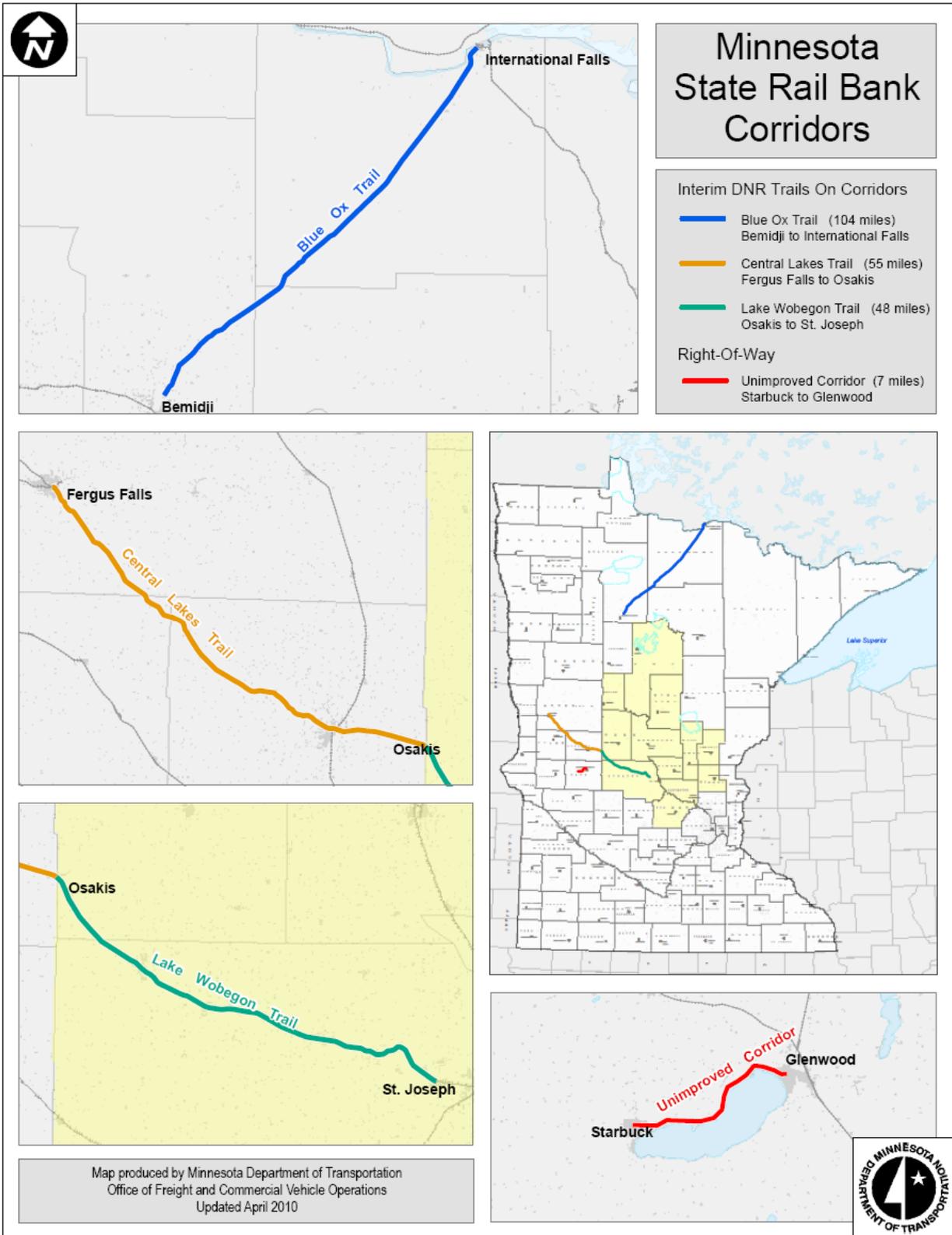
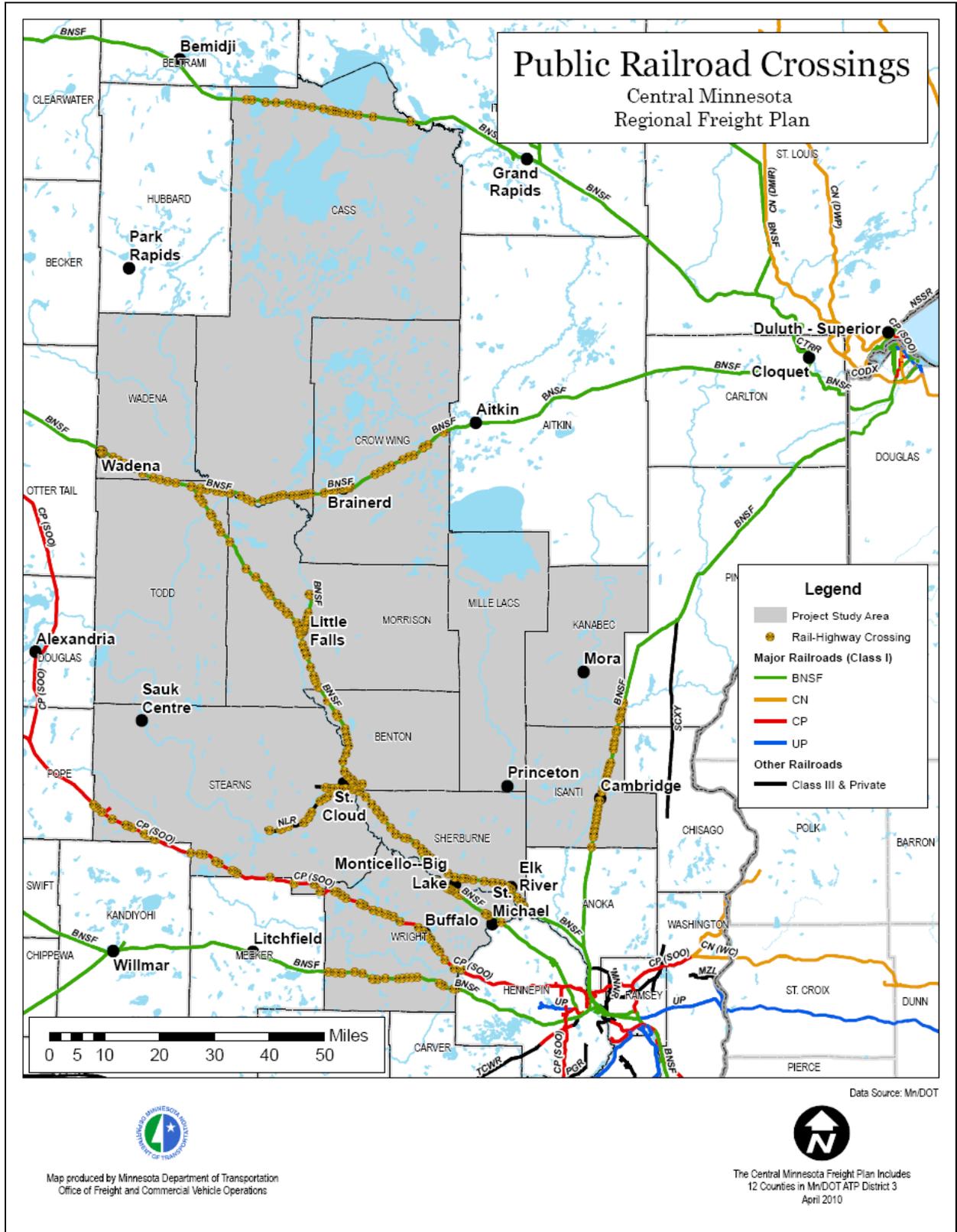


Figure 8: Public at-Grade Rail-Highway Crossings



## Waterways

There are no commercially navigable waterways in the study region. There are two commercially navigable waterways in Minnesota: the Lakes/Saint Lawrence Seaway and the Mississippi River system. Access to waterways that can carry freight vessels, e.g., barges and ships, is important to businesses in the region because of the affordability provided with waterborne freight.

Nearest access to the Great Lakes/Saint Lawrence Seaway is in Duluth/Superior. This 2,400 mile seaway comprised of the St. Lawrence River, St. Lawrence Seaway, and the Great Lakes connects over 41 ports with roadways and rail lines, allowing freight to be shipped worldwide. Duluth-Superior is by far the largest port on the Great Lakes, and the 21st largest total tonnage port in the United States.

Nearest access to the Mississippi River system is at the head of the navigation channel in the Twin Cities Metro Area. There, the river system includes the Minnesota River and the Mississippi River. Freight travels 1811 miles from the Twin Cities to the Port of New Orleans where it can be transloaded onto oceangoing vessels to reach global markets.

## Air Cargo

High-value and/or time-sensitive goods are shipped via the aviation system, especially when moving over long distances. Freight airports fall into three categories: major, local/regional and on-demand air cargo service airports. Major airports, such as Minneapolis-Saint Paul International (MSP), have scheduled air cargo service with jet aircraft that provide a time-efficient and direct link to global destinations. Due to the relative close proximity to MSP, air cargo facilities are limited in the region, particularly in the southern portion.

In general, a large share of international air cargo travels in the baggage compartment of passenger aircraft. Air cargo services are provided by several types of carriers that are differentiated by the services they offer for a wide range of customer demands. There are four basic industry segments in the air cargo industry: Integrated express operators; All-cargo carriers; Commercial service passenger airlines; and, On-demand cargo charter carriers.

Of the four airports in the region, only Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport provides primary scheduled air cargo activity. Mesaba Airlines, a Northwest/Delta Airlines partner, operates daily service at Brainerd. This airport serves as local market stations, serving their respective surrounding market areas.

Cambridge Municipal Airport and Maple Lake Municipal Airport provide scheduled feeder air cargo activity. These airports serve as consolidation points for feeder aircraft and trucks.

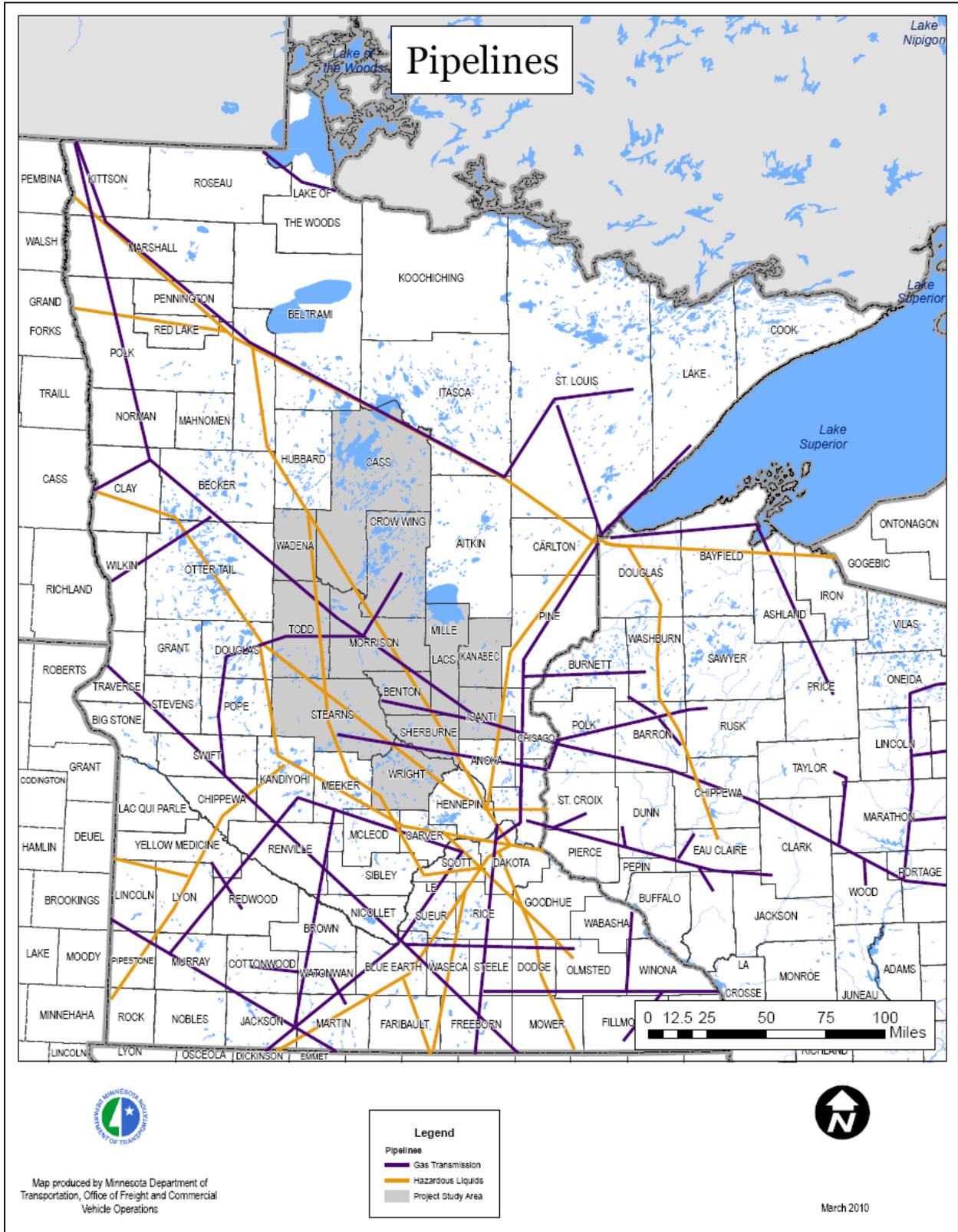
St. Cloud Regional Airport is an on-demand air cargo airport that provides belly-hold cargo activity. The airport has two runways and serves private, commercial, corporate, cargo and military operations. Approximately 100 aircraft are based at the field with over 200 aircraft operations averaged daily. Although this is the largest airport in the region and has two runways, it does not serve as a major freight airport due to its close proximity to MSP.

**Figure 9** shows the location of air cargo airports by service type in Minnesota. Each airport listed may provide multiple air cargo services.

## **Pipelines**

The pipeline system moves a significant tonnage of gas and hazardous liquids to and throughout the region, including the transportation of more than 75 different types of crude oil and natural gas. The end user receives the majority of this product ranging from power plants to private residences. Gas pipeline operators in the region include: CenterPoint Energy; Great Lakes Gas Transmission Company; Northern Natural Gas Company; Viking Gas Transmission Company; and Xcel Energy. Liquid pipeline operators, many of which carry crude oil to and from the two Twin Cities refineries, include: Enbridge Energy, Kanab Pipeline Company; and Koch Pipeline Company. **Figure 7** shows the pipeline network in the region.

Figure 9: Pipelines in Minnesota



## Intermodal Terminals

Intermodal terminals represent key nodes in the regional freight system, defined as locations where freight is transferred from one mode of transportation to another. Intermodal terminals include truck/rail, container (containers on flat cars, trailers on flat cars, bi-modal), pipeline terminals, air cargo terminals, grain shuttle terminals, and lake terminal/ports. **Figure 10** and **Table 1** identify the intermodal terminals in the region. Notably, there are no intermodal container terminals or waterway terminals within the study area. Nearest access to intermodal container service is at the CP Shoreham yard in Minneapolis and at the BNSF Railway Midway yard in Saint Paul. Nearest access to waterway terminals is located in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis, Saint Paul, Savage), and in Duluth/Superior.

Table 1: Intermodal Terminals in Central Minnesota

Company Name	Type	Location	Commodities
Becker Warehouse & Reload (UMI, Inc)	Truck/Rail Terminal	Becker	Steel, Lumber, Bulk Plastics
Maiers Transport	Truck/Rail Terminal	St. Cloud	Building Prod, Food, Paper, Other Manufactured Goods
Waite Park Transload	Truck/Rail Terminal	Waite Park	Lumber, Steel, Stone

Figure 10: Intermodal and Air Cargo Terminals

